



TENNESSEE
WORLD
AFFAIRS
COUNCIL

The Implications and Consequences of Russia's War in Ukraine

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

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

Original Broadcast: March 16, 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")

Steve Sokol [00:00:24] Good afternoon to our viewers in Germany and good morning to our viewers in the United States. I'm Steve Sokol and I am the president of the American Council on Germany. I am absolutely delighted to welcome you to today's discussion with Ambassador John Kornblum. Sessions with him have become a regular feature for the ACG and the Tennessee World Affairs Council.

So on behalf of Pat Ryan and the team at the Tennessee World Affairs Council and the ACG, I'm particularly pleased to have so many people join us today. Many of the people who are tuning in today are watching from John Kornblum's U.S. home in Nashville, but we also have viewers from across the U.S. and in Germany. John Kornblum was a career foreign service officer who steadily rose up the ranks. He served as U.S. ambassador to Germany from 1997 to 2001 and is based in Berlin. John, thank you so much for joining us again today.

John Kornblum [00:01:27] My great pleasure.

Steve Sokol [00:01:29] So, John, we last spoke about a month ago, and a lot has changed since then when it comes to the situation in Ukraine. There's a lot to talk about. As you know, I have a ton of questions for you, but I thought that we could start with something that actually happened today. Earlier today, the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky, spoke to US lawmakers in a live video address from Kiev, which was subjected to more Russian shelling overnight.

This was one of a series of speeches that he's made in recent days. He's addressed the Canadian parliament, the UK's House of Commons and the European Parliament. Many of the refrains in those speeches have been similar, but today's speech felt a little different to me. He reminded his audience of Pearl Harbor and the 9/11 attacks and said that the developments in Ukraine have been the worst since World War Two, thereby trying to evoke a moment of unity with Washington. John, what stood out as you listened to President Zelensky speech before Congress today?

John Kornblum [00:02:44] Well, I think what stood out in the very first instance was something that we're unfortunately not so accustomed to these days in the United States. And that was the great consensus and joint support of all members of Congress. The president received quite a long-standing ovation when his picture showed up on the screen and there was an equally strong response when he was finished. That is in itself an important fact, as all of us know, and it's something which I think is we can hopefully build upon to return things to a peaceful situation.

The second thing which struck me, of course, was the urgency of President Zelensky's words. In addition, of course, to the Soviet invasion, the Russian invasion, I think the biggest factor which we're dealing with right here now has been the ability and the determination of the Ukrainian government, the Ukrainian military and ultimately the Ukrainian people who to defend themselves against the Russian onslaught and doing it actually quite successfully. Part of this seems to be the, shall we say, lack of full confidence of the Russian forces, by the way, but it's also simply the fact that the Ukrainians know that their country is being is in danger of being literally obliterated and there is a great spirit involved. This is something that I think the Russians and Putin himself didn't expect.

Some people say that he actually believed that Russian speakers would go to his side. But so it's the determination of the Ukrainian people, which was pretty well described by Zelensky. And then finally, one quick point finally, of course, the urgency of the situation. You spend a very considerable amount of time talking about that and ended with a very emotional but accurate picture of what's going on in Ukraine, which anybody could leave without feeling quite a high emotion against what's going on.

Steve Sokol [00:05:01] And of course, I mean, I thought it was interesting he he delivered his speech in Ukrainian. Then there was the very, very clear video of exactly what's going on in in Ukraine. And then the president made his closing comments in English to make sure that that he really hammered his points home. And so it was, I think, you know, he really connected with with his audience. But in terms of also some of the the content of what he talked about, he did ask that the US consider a no fly zone to stop what he termed Russian terrorism.

I think knowing that this is a point of contention with the Biden administration, he moved quickly on and said, you know, if that's not possible, that he was asking for sophisticated air defense systems and combat aircraft and even talked about the need for more

sanctions and stronger sanctions if this drags on and and drags out in terms of the things that he was asking for. Do you think that those were reasonable requests and how do you think Washington might respond?

John Kornblum [00:06:25] Well, I certainly think they're reasonable requests and that the film that they showed demonstrated how severe the damage has been to several Ukrainian cities which have been under attack by the Russians. And so they certainly have a need for weapons to fend off these attacks. The real question is whether they need a no-fly zone or not. A no-fly zone is exactly what it sounds like. It is a country or a group of countries who patrol the airspace over a specific place, a country or a region or whatever, and shoot anybody down who comes in there.

I mean, it's a declaration of war, basically, and not that the Russians in this case deserve to be shot down. But of course, being that Russia is the most powerful nuclear nation on Earth, they have more weapons than the United States does, and they have a much more variety of weapons than the United States does, by the way. It's not a simple decision to enter into combat with Russian airplanes. If that might lead to an atomic exchange. So I understand the differences here, and it's not just the United States who is against this, but in fact, the NATO alliance secretary general has come out several times, saying it's not doable.

Now, some of the things that I have read suggest that a no-fly zone is not the most important goal that Ukrainians need to have for two reasons. Partially because for reasons that aren't really clear to anybody in the West right now, the Russians haven't used their air force that much. They have, but not really that much. And secondly, that most of the damage being done to Ukrainian cities is being done by ground launched missiles or artillery. And so it would be OK to have a no fly zone, but it's apparently not the real problem. I'm not obviously an expert, but I'm drawing on what I have read about this. And so that's why Zelensky shifted gears fairly rapidly after making the expected the request for a no-fly zone. And he said if you for some reason can't do that, give us the weapons with which to defend ourselves. And there's a whole array of missiles which could be given to or sold or given to Ukraine.

Many of them have been given already, but there are others which are more sophisticated than the ones that they have now, which could also be supplied to them. So this is obviously going to be a big discussion over the other very urgent conditions, after all, over the next week or so. And it raises then - maybe I'll make this point here - it raises then the big issue really for the Western countries. That is our entire philosophy, our entire structure for it, not just for Europe, but really for the western world after 1945 and also after 1990 was a system of relations among nations based on recognition of sovereignty, human rights and nonintervention in the internal affairs and not use of force. And so if the Russians were to succeed in conquering and keeping Ukraine as part of their territory that would in no way undermine the entire philosophical and political basis of the Western world since 1945. So this is no small point.

After 1990, we took a step to include a considerable number of new countries into NATO. That's been successful. And we should be grateful that countries like the Baltic states and Poland and Romania are now in NATO, otherwise they certainly would be also open to attack from Russia. But Ukraine is a very large country, it's the largest country in Europe as far as land area is concerned, leaving aside Russia. And it has 45 million people, this is not a small country, this is a very large country. And so if we were to stand by and let Russia simply, not simply try and influence Ukraine, but me to obliterate its sovereignty

after, by the way, several of us signed the declaration in 1994, saying that we would defend its sovereignty. This would be a major, major loss for the West. It would undermine our entire approach to the world that we wish to see. And, of course, would also damage the lives and the interests of many millions of people in Europe. So this is not a small thing. This is what this is, I think is the final collapse of the Russian Empire. It is Putin coming out one last time to try and defend what he is worried it's going to decline.

And it is very much in our not only interest, but it's in our existential requirement that we not allow the very strong democratic foundations that we have built since 1945 actually to be undermined by a country which is in the last throes of its existence.

Steve Sokol [00:11:46] John, thank you for outlining that, because I think if nothing else, the takeaway is that there is a tremendous amount at stake. This is not just about Ukraine, it's about much more than that. You know, thinking back to our last conversation a month ago before the fighting started.

We talked about whether there was a way to de-escalate, whether there was an exit ramp for Putin. And it seems almost as if each time an off ramp was offered, he just accelerated past it and escalated things further. So in light of what you were just saying about how much is that at stake, can we talk a little bit about how this might end and whether there is an exit ramp at all at this stage and what the possible scenarios are for how this ends, obviously. And you and I talked about this a little bit before we went live.

The most important thing is to stop the war and stop all of these, these innocent lives being lost. But at the end, what are what are we left with? And earlier this morning, I heard an interview with Secretary of State Blinken, and he was saying, you know, whatever this scenario is, it needs to be irreversible so that even if the Russians were to pull back now and draw down now that this would not be something that could ever be repeated again. So I guess my question for you is do you have different scenarios for how this could, this could evolve further?

John Kornblum [00:13:35] Well, of course, there are lots of scenarios. And they range from a change in government in Russia, for example. That's not totally out of the realm of the possibility down to a collapse of Ukraine. I mean, there's a wide range of scenarios. I think that now after two weeks or so of this war, we can see that Russia is not ever going to be able to achieve its goals of simply marching in the Ukraine and turning it into another reading of the Russian Federation. That's not going to happen. At the same time, they are pretty dug in in some very important parts of Ukraine, not just the eastern provinces, but the Baltic and the Black Sea coast rather and also around the area of Kharkiv and the area north of Kiev.

So it's going to be not just a question of stopping the fighting, but as you suggested, Steve, it's a question also of moving the Russians out of the territories that they have occupied, and that's going to be very difficult. I think there's another issue which we should inject right here, and that is the question of sanctions. Sanctions, as we know, usually economic pressure against a country who is violating international law or violating its commitments, whatever. Russia, this time has been hit with the heaviest sanctions I think have ever been used in modern history, at least, and it has been I think probably Putin has been surprised at the unanimity with which the Western countries, United States and Canada, but also Western Europe, have, these sanctions.

And so we have another issue here, which is the ability of Russia, the Russian Federation, to withstand the economic and technological pressure which is being put upon them by the West. That's part of the situation. The Russians and Ukrainians are talking to each other. Just today, there was another statement which both of them in that very sort of guarded way said, well, it's not all bad. We're making some kind of at least definition of the problem.

So maybe there is some kind of thinking there which would work. But I think the major problem that the West is going to have to deal with at some point is even when the shooting stops, hopefully that'll be soon, Russia will be sitting on 10 percent or whatever it is of Ukrainian territory, including some very big cities. And that's not simply not acceptable. And so we're going to have to keep pressuring Russia to get out of Ukraine. If we can assume that that might happen, let's hope it does, then the question is, what are we left with?

Are we left with a more unified west, by the way, a more unified NATO, a more unified European Union, a reinvigorated America with the reinvigorated sense of leadership? It's all happened so far. Thanks Putin. And what do we do with that, is it going to be then this reinvigorated West standing on the frontier against an angry, bitter and ultimately stagnating and even maybe collapsing Russia? It's not a good scenario. And so that's why I'm giving them my own view. My own view is that we would fairly soon thereafter need to start engaging the Russians in trying to define what the world is going to look like from our point of view, if we can do that. There is a precedent for this, which I took part in. And it's in the summer of 1968 that the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia. Destroyed whatever sovereignty it had, put its government in jail, and turned it into a very dictatorial communist state again. Everybody thought - I remember actually I was in the State Department at that time and we had a visit from ... who came in with dark circles under his eyes and a very depressed demeanor saying all of our efforts to make progress and peace in Europe have now been destroyed.

This was in the fall of 1968. At the fall of 1971, three years later, we are not yet - I was fortunate enough to be part of the delegation of the negotiations to the four-power agreement that led. We signed an agreement with the Soviet Union, which in fact solved, at least ameliorated one of the issues which had been considered a tinderbox of war, the situation in Berlin up until that point in only three years, so things can change, and we can assume that the Russia of Putin today is going to be the Russia forever. And the reason that the Russians in those days agreed to these bargains, into these deals, which included the Helsinki Final Act, which is still the best definition of civil society that we have was because they knew that they were on the defensive and they needed to shore up their situation. A future Russian government might also know that. And if that's the case, then there would be something to talk about.

But right now it's I think our goals have to be to stop the war. Stop the killing. Help the Ukrainians restore their lives and then ultimately to get Russia out of Ukraine. Those are very big jobs in themselves.

Steve Sokol [00:19:23] They are, indeed. I have a couple of viewer questions I think that tie in here that I'd like to pose to you. One of them, one of our viewers writes some political scientists like Francis Fukuyama have suggested that Russia could be heading toward complete defeat, partly because of the resistance the Russian people have to the Ukrainian war, but also, of course, because of how poorly the Russian military is faring.

Do you think it's a legitimate possibility that we could see an utter defeat of Russia?

John Kornblum [00:20:00] Well, my own view for some time, ten years, shall we say, has been that Russia as it now exists was stagnating and declining and maybe even coming apart. I continue to believe that. I think, and I have by arguments where I wrote articles about this saying that our problem was not to engage the Russians in a positive discussion in order to build common structures, which is what, as you know, many Europeans, especially the Swiss, do, but our real problem was how to deal with a declining and maybe even collapsing Russia. And I continue to have this view. Statistics show it clearly, in fact.

And if that's the case, then dealing with this, Russia is going to be very careful. It's going to require a very careful strategy over a longer term. And we all of a sudden this has become dramatized for the West. And at the same time, I'm far from an expert on China, so I'm not going to say anything too dramatic here, but China is not also as strong as we think it is. So we may find ourselves for the next 20 years and so dealing with a - you want to call it a confrontation. I don't think that the word Cold War is the right word, but a confrontation between the authoritarian centers of Moscow and Beijing and the Democratic community, which the West has built, really, which goes from the Baltic states all the way around to the tip of Alaska, which is only - I looked this up one time, if I may put it that way - 1.6 kilometers is all that divides the United States from Russia in the Bering Strait. Wow. So we we go all the way from the Estonian border, shall we say, all the way to the Bering Strait with a democratic community of nearly a billion people. This is a very important point for us, and it is also a democratic community which controls most of the technological and economic power in the world. So the scenarios for the future, Steve, are very complicated, but they are anything but pessimistic. I think the West is not in a bad situation here.

Steve Sokol [00:22:26] So let me let me sort of revert back to the conversation we were having about the no-fly zone. Because Tom Schwartz in Nashville just submitted the following question he writes, If you say it is virtually, if you say it is vitally important to prevent a Russian victory in Ukraine, why not employ a no fly zone, particularly in western Ukraine? Is there really a significant moral difference between shooting down Russian jets with NATO's fighters and shooting down Russian jets with stingers and anti-aircraft missiles?

John Kornblum [00:23:04] Oh, very good question. I suppose if NATO's secretary general were here or Secretary Blinken or Secretary Austin, where he would say, well, the stakeholders are being shot off by Ukrainian soldiers and not by American or German or British pilots, that's almost a splitting of hairs, I would say. No, I don't think there is any difference. And I think that that the discussion of the no-fly zone will go on. It is, however, true, that for an American F-35 to shoot down a Russian plane is a more dramatic thing than a hand-held stinger to shoot down. It's talking here about nuances and about impressions, not about reality. And so the no fly zone is something that is considered to be a last resort, shall we say. We should forget that President Obama refused to institute a no-fly zone when he had his own Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, everybody else which can do it over Syria in 2011-12. And so it seems to be a very dramatic thing. And I say this without having any insight or any responsibility, but it seems to be a very dramatic thing that people take maybe more seriously than they should. But take very seriously.

Steve Sokol [00:24:40] So I have a couple of viewer questions and one of my own that have to do with finances. One of our members here in New York just wrote in. It's expensive to attack and occupy large parts of a neighbor country. Can Russia afford to

occupy large parts of Ukraine given the destruction it's caused and would be responsible for remediating? Look at Grozny and also the effect of the sanctions.

John Kornblum [00:25:11] Yeah, that's the strong tool that the West has. Maybe some of your viewers who are finance experts can describe this better than I can. The Russians have been building up what some people consider to be a war chest over the past five years in, shall we say. And supposedly they have something like six hundred and fifty billion dollars in reserves except three hundred and seventy-five or so of those reserves are in the West and have now been frozen. And it is perfectly possible that Russia will have to default on its debt within the next week or so, which is, you know, it's almost an symbolic effect, but it means that they're there, that their creditors can't be paid, it means they can't pay the interest on their bonds. It means financial ruin, basically. And so when the question of can Russia afford to do this - there is, on the one hand, the fact that they are earning something like six or seven hundred million, I think it is dollars a day on the oil that they're selling the Western Europe, that's another big issue which is coming up. So there is, in fact, money still coming into them. But the second point is not so much whether they have bank deposits in order to pay for the gas for their fighters or whatever, but whether they have the financial foundation to continue to operate their economy. And the answer is no. The automobile industry has already shut down. Aeroflot has more or less shut down, except for internal flights. They cannot get raw materials, they cannot get computer microchips. And so they are going to be at a very difficult situation. And it's already a country which has not kept up with world technological development as it's turned itself in essentially to a natural resources producer. So this is really a very difficult future for Russia. And that's why some people think that in fact, even the Russian Federation, which is not the strongest federation in the world may not be able to hold together because of this. Will there be some, shall we say, some far out provinces where most of the people don't even speak Russian, which will decide that they could be better off becoming a friend of Uzbekistan or something like that? So there are many imponderables, you know, that's the way to conclude this. Many imponderables and the finances and the economics side of it is one of the major imponderables.

Steve Sokol [00:28:01] Yeah. I mean, I was going to ask you about the fact that it looks as though Russia is about to default on its debts. I think a payment is due today of over \$100 million in interest on two-dollar denominated bonds. And that, you know, obviously Russia is in no position to be able to pay that off. And what sort of an impact do you think that has? But it sounds as if that's moving Russia even a step closer to bankruptcy. And so related to that, one of our viewers is curious when sanctions will bring Russia to its knees and wonders what might happen to Putin then.

John Kornblum [00:28:49] Well, we can be sure that the sanctions will bring Russia to its knees. Russia is a country which has lived with lots of deprivation for many decades, centuries, even at the same time. One of the reasons that Putin has stayed in office and stayed popular, so to speak, is because he has quite skillfully fed money into the middle classes and upper middle class. And so there is now a relatively large group in Russia who lives more or less, maybe not as much, but almost the same as a western standard of living. And this western standard of living depends on credit cards, depends on travel. Depends on McDonald's hamburgers. And all of this is disappearing. So that's quite one that may in fact be a factor. Maybe it won't be. But the real story is going to be the same. Is that what happened in 1998 when Putin, when Yeltsin decided that he had to leave and Putin took over? Is that the economy sort of grinds to a halt, and you can't even meet basic needs that you can't keep industrial production going. This is the if you believe what you read by the people who support the sanctions. This is the direction in which Russia is

going to be going and add to that the fact that the Chinese just yesterday, day before more or less made clear that they didn't think this war was the right thing to do, and they didn't say that they wouldn't support Russia. They didn't also didn't condemn Russia. But at the same time, they made quite clear that they're not going to get themselves tied up in whatever consequences happen this war. So Russians hope Putin's hope that he would have a strong ally and China is at least not as strong as he thought it was.

Steve Sokol [00:30:46] So maybe as an immediate dovetail to that, because I did want to ask you about China in the course of our conversation today, but I got a wonderful question from one of our viewers. She writes The U.S. has strongly suggested in recent days that Russia has asked China for military and economic assistance for the invasion of Ukraine and that China is inclined to help Russia. China has denied this, and there's increasing risk of the US threatening or actually leveling sanctions against China. And here's the question - how do you see this US-China tension complicating any Ukraine peace negotiations? And I guess as a footnote to that, one of the questions I have for you is whether Beijing could possibly serve as an intermediary to help facilitate some negotiations because that's something that has also been discussed. Do you see a role for China in all of this?

John Kornblum [00:31:48] Well, to start with that question first, I would myself be skeptical that China could play such a role. Mostly because it doesn't really have the credibility with the Western countries, not just the United States, but also the Europeans. A mediator has to be either, it has to be respected by all sides. And I don't think that we would consider China to be an unbiased mediator. China is clearly whatever China does, whatever help it gives Russia, China and Russia are, shall we say, forming an authoritarian bloc right now. And I don't think that the Chinese would have enough credibility to do that. At the same time, whether the Chinese can do and it seems to me that that's what they're doing. It sort of is, as we would say, in American English, a slow, slow rolling the Russians, that is, they're not condemning them. They're not saying that they're bad, but the same time they're not doing a whole lot for them either. And their rhetoric is shall we say exquisitely, finely tuned. For example, they abstained in a vote in the U.N. rather than vote for or against Russia. They came out yesterday or the day before, with everyone saying that they didn't think - they came out with a strong statement, saying they believe that the sovereignty of states and the inviolability of frontiers, et cetera, et cetera. That's something that the Chinese themselves have practiced in the past. But leave that aside, this is for now. So they're being very unclear about where they stand. I don't know if anybody knows how much oil they're buying from Russia and how much money Russia is getting from China for this oil, but it's a very important factor for the Russians. And so it's the answer to your question is nobody really knows what's going to happen and probably the Chinese themselves don't actually know how to deal with this.

Steve Sokol [00:33:57] And as one of our viewers just pointed out in a message, China, of course, is very focused on a spike in COVID cases at the moment, so it has significant domestic concerns that it's honing in on. I have I have two viewer questions for you that that focus on Putin. And then I'd like to shift gears a little bit, and it's not so much focusing on Putin as much as the domestic situation in Russia. One of our viewers writes one or more oligarchs have stated that the invasion of Ukraine will ultimately be the end of the Putin regime. Can and will the oligarchs move to put an end to the Putin regime? And another viewer writes, are there any political coalitions in Russia who might initiate a coup against Putin and whether or not this is a realistic expectation?

John Kornblum [00:34:53] First, as far as the oligarchs are concerned, I personally doubt - I think most experts would agree that the oligarchs could muster enough political muscle support, whatever it is to oust Putin. Partially, he has emasculated them over the past 20 years, beginning with Mr. Khodorkovsky and with a number of others who even died because of their possessions, and they have been allowed to build the world's biggest yachts, to have more real estate in London than anybody else on the planet. As long as they kept their mouths shut did in fact build up a political constituency that seems to be the case. One of the big secrets there, or at least unknowns to many people, is this group who are around Putin called the siloviki, who are the security people. They if anybody, they would be the people - these are terms that don't have that much accuracy, but they are in some ways the functional equivalent of the Politburo that used to run the Soviet Union. They have important positions there in the intelligence services, the head of the military, et cetera, et cetera. And some people think that they might decide at some point to deal with Putin. I have no idea if that's true. Again, I'm quite skeptical. I think he has built up an authoritarian power that can't really be beaten at the same time, we should think back and again, maybe this is not relevant, but now, almost 60 years ago, after the Cuban Missile Crisis, which Nikita Khrushchev more or less agreed handled pretty poorly. He stayed in office for two more years and then he was out. It was out in a peaceful palace coup, so to speak. The Politburo just told him his time was over and he was out. He was able to survive retirement for several years thereafter. So these things do happen, but I personally think that Putin has built up such a coterie of supporters and such a has emasculated his that his the opposition, but people who could be in a position to ask him to step aside that unless things get a lot worse, which they may, by the way, his position is probably fairly stable right now.

Steve Sokol [00:37:36] So when thinking about Putin's future, one of our viewers is eager to ask you the following question. He writes The Senate has unanimously passed a resolution condemning Putin as a war criminal and encouraging the International Criminal Court in The Hague to put Putin, to target Putin and Russia. But given that neither Russia nor Ukraine have agreed to the ICC jurisdiction by treaty, is this even a realistic possibility?

John Kornblum [00:38:09] Well, by the way, neither has the United States. So it's very interesting to see the U.S. Senate now being pushing the National Criminal Court. This came up during my time as the head of the European Bureau, and we had reasons that we didn't want to join that either. But had we had we changed our minds that U.S. Congress would have told us not to do it? So these things, you know, these things go, have their ups and downs. This goes back to your question of what the solution to all this would be. I took part in another very dramatic episode, which was until this war started the worst war that had taken place in Europe since 1944. That was the Balkan wars in 1990s. And what we did then, by the way, with the support of the Russians, we established a special tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. And that tribunal, I think, just ended its work a year or so ago, it sent many of the leaders of Serbia, of Republika Srpska, but also of Croatia to prison for their role in these wars. And so the idea of a special tribunal is not only not unusual, but it's used very recently. I personally think that at some point the crimes that Putin has and his group have now committed have been so unacceptable, so drastic that there needs to be some kind of reckoning. But this again, it's much too early to talk about it because first we have to get the fighting stopped and then to see what kind of world we're dealing with after that happens. But there are precedents. I don't think the International Criminal Court will work for reasons that you mentioned, that I mentioned. But I do think that a special tribunal could be set up if there was a lot of public support for it. And if there were support in Russia, the reason that the special tribunal for former Yugoslavia worked is because there

was support for it inside former Yugoslavia. It was not imposed upon them. They wanted it to happen. So it would have to be Russia that also agreed that it did participate in it.

Steve Sokol [00:40:30] Thank you, John. I'd like to switch gears a little bit. You're in Berlin and obviously this is an event that's co-hosted by the American Council on Germany. And so I'd like to get your sense of how what the mood is in Germany when it comes to this war on Europe's doorstep and what the German response has been like.

John Kornblum [00:40:57] Well, there are two answers to the question. The first is the immediate German response has been strong, active, committed and to the extent that can be. Defined, successful, especially in the humanitarian side, but also in the political side, also in the military side. That's the immediate answer. The longer term answer is the reason why Chancellor Schulz's speech in the Bundestag of about two weeks ago was considered to be such a sea change in German policy. Was that not just Germany, but Germany was the strongest proponent. Much of Western Europe decided after 1990 that there that there was no longer any military threat to their existence. That they were a civil power whose job was, in fact, to build a structure which removed all of the tensions which led the war in Europe so much, so often in the 19th and 20th centuries. And that they essentially neglected the military security, but also the strategic security, the political security aspect of their existence and farmed it out to the United States. And they farmed it out here, I'm going to be very blunt about it, they found it out while at the same time reserving the right to criticize us continuously for what we did. Now the United States did not have a successful first two decades of the 20th century as far as military security was concerned. Starting with 9/11, of course, but the Iraq war, the Afghanistan war, et cetera, et cetera. So there was some reason to criticize the United States, but the Europeans simply gave up on the issue of military security beginning in 1996. They even gave up on mutual efforts with the United States to come up with common military security goals. They instead founded a European security process in which they defined mostly as as building peace. There were times when the German government, for example, even wanted to have the foreign assistance budget as part of the defense budget. So the United States and Europe drifted very, very far apart on these issues. And we had come to the point where we didn't think if you think of some of the statements made by former secretaries of defense during the 90s, during the 2000s, 2010s, you can see the frustration that the American point of view the same thing happened, by the way, in the area of trade. US Treasury secretaries made a habit of going to Germany and going home totally frustrated because the Germans wouldn't change their focus on exports and the stability of exports and wouldn't join in co-financing many things which we all considered important. So there wasn't there was 20 years or 30 years, if you will, from 1990 until 2020, in which the Western Europeans and especially the Germans, believed that they that history had in fact come to an end and that they could live on the basis of their own peace orientation and leave whatever mopping up needed to be done to the United States. That is a fact which we cannot deny. Now, this has changed very dramatically with the change in the behavior of Russia, the German belief that Russia could be talked into a peaceful evolution simply didn't work. So now we'll see what happens. I don't know, I'm actually quite skeptical. I do not believe there has been a sea change in German mood. I believe that there has been a dramatic short-term reaction, which is a positive one, but that the strong emphasis on try to deal with security questions on the basis of consultation and discussion, etc. will continue, so we are in the midst of a very major redefinition of what Western security interests are

Steve Sokol [00:45:31] Sticking with Germany for just a second, what do you make of the former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's involvement as a go-between? Of course, Gerhard Schroeder is, I think, known to many as somebody who's very close to Putin and close to

Moscow, sits on the boards of Gazprom and Rosneft, and he in the recent days has been serving as a bit of an intermediary between Ukraine and Russia. What's your take on that?

John Kornblum [00:46:04] Well, first he was a self-defined intermediary. The German government disowned them completely. The Russians have never ever acknowledged his role, as far as I know. I think I've been following it - as far as I know they never acknowledged he did have a meeting with Putin. He was picked up in an official government car and taken to Putin so that they at least accept that. But of course, he works for Putin. So it would be not unusual that Putin would talk to him. But on the German side, there has been a almost complete rejection of China's role. Now, being an intermediary is a very difficult task, and it only pays off if it pays off. In other words, were he able to stop the fighting? Then all of a sudden, people would say, oh, he was a great intermediary. If he cannot do anything that he will just be considered an opportunist or somebody who was trying to save his reputation, that's basically what the German press has been writing about it. So he is - I think he understands that he has sullied his reputation rather badly in the past 10 years or so. And he saw an opportunity here to maybe win some of it back. But again, it's all in Putin's hands, if Putin wants to make him a success, he can. If Putin doesn't want to make him a success, he won't. So we'll wait and see.

Steve Sokol [00:47:34] So one more question on Germany before we move on to another subject. One of our viewers just submitted a question asking whether you think Schulz realized that he needed to announce a new defense and security policy? Or was he pushed into it? And if he was pushed, who do you think pushed him toward that?

John Kornblum [00:47:59] I don't think anybody would tell you the truth, I think Schultz is a very intelligent person, a very good politician. He has, if you look at his career, he has navigated all kinds of rapids and difficult situations etc. in this time. He has an extremely skillful chief of staff, Wolfgang Schmidt, who is really somebody I admire very strongly. I think that this was one of those moments when a politician - it happens in sports, sometimes it happens in corporations, sometimes when somebody wakes up and says, I've got to do this. And like Tom Brady retiring, except that he changed his mind. And so I think that that Charles and his staff said, you know, we got no option here but to do this. And he did it quite skillfully. He really caught it on, he's talked about 200 billion more expenses for security and everything. But what he can't do, of course, is change the culture. So we said that all of a sudden there has been a sea change in Germany's view of itself, of military defense, of security or even of Russia, because these are very deep seated things which have gone on for many, many decades, centuries sometimes. And you don't change people overnight. That's not to take away from the importance of the steps, by the way. I would never do that. This very important thing that the chancellor did, but to say that all of a sudden there's a new Germany here is simply not the question. I was - I may be an example. I was the person in charge of Ostpolitik at the American embassy abroad during all the years and while he was chancellor. And now everybody acts as if it was so obvious that Ostpolitik was going to be Germany's future, but the fact is Germany came almost to a domestic civil war, a political civil war over Ostpolitik and ... In the vote of no confidence in April 1972, Ostpolitik would have disappeared. So it's not so easy to change as we're seeing in our own country right now. It's not so easy to change people's moods or their orientation. So we should be grateful to the Germans for what they are doing. We should be happy that Chancellor Schulz wants to go in a direction that most of his allies consider to be positive. But we should start saying, well, the world has changed completely. This is in Germany. It's going to be a whole situation that I would argue quite strongly is not the case.

Steve Sokol [00:51:04] So as we start to run out of time, I have one question that sort of looks back and I have some questions that that, again, look to the future. One of our viewers wrote the following. John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago seems to be sticking with his 2014 assertion that the West is to blame for the war because of NATO's expansion. Can you comment on that? And do you agree?

John Kornblum [00:51:32] Well, I certainly can. I was the person in charge of NATO's expansion in the State Department for a number of years. And I'm very proud of it because I think that we did something really very important in expanding democracy into the central and eastern parts of Europe. Because NATO's expansion was not simply a desire to have a stronger alliance and more military members. NATO expansion was part of an integrated strategy that the United States put forward, which included also the enlargement of the European Union and included the strengthening of the Helsinki process, whose name in fact was changed from the Conference on Security to the Organization on Security and we negotiated - I was one of the negotiators myself with the so-called settlement that we reached with Russia after the end of the Cold War. This was in 1996-97. I can tell you that we bent over backwards to give Russia the feeling of joining our community. We didn't offer them NATO's membership, right, merely because they didn't want it, but secondly, because there were several of our allies who were not totally happy about this. I think that the United States had its way. Jim Baker said - this is in a book that was written about him by Peter Baker of New York Times that he would have been in favor of this. I was also. I tried to push for it, but it just didn't work. But leave that aside, the most interesting part of this issue. Mearsheimer - I'm sorry, I won't use the words I usually reserved for him because I don't really respect his writing or his ideas, but I won't use the vocabulary that I use. The proof in the pudding, if we may put it that way, has been Putin himself. This phase of tensions that we're in began with his arguments that Ukraine had been built up into a NATO base, that it was going to join NATO, it was going to threaten Russia. That lasted for about two months. Then there was the second issue, which was he was doing it to protect the Russian speakers in Ukraine who themselves don't want any protection. One of the - probably one of the biggest disappointments to him has been the fact that all the Russian speakers are out there shooting at his soldiers. He gave that up fairly fast. And now he is left with the old bugaboo, which is always used in Europe. If you don't have anything else to say, that is, Ukraine, with its Jewish president, is a fascist state, and he has to protect Russians there from the neo fascist who are running their country. In other words, he abandoned the NATO description or the NATO excuse way at the beginning of the process after he saw that it had no traction. What did we do when we expanded NATO? We extended the protection of democracy all the way to the Russian border. That's true. But I used to argue when I was doing this to these people, to the Russians, that they should be happy that we had done this because it removed any danger of instability on their border. I didn't realize that they themselves were interested in creating instability, but that's another story. We have helped expand, we the Western community has helped expand the economic integration, the democratic protections, the social welfare of the European Union all the way to the Russian border. And these are countries to which we owed something. Let's not forget this Mr. Mearsheimer. We owed these people. They were the ones who were consigned to the Russians. We read a lot about this by President Roosevelt at the Yalta meeting. They suffered for 45 years under Russian communism even though the Russians, we told the Russians that they had promised that there would be democratic elections and everything. But Stalin didn't care. He had gotten the the approval in Yalta that this was going to be his sphere of influence. And so he could have cared less what we said. So we owed these people, we owed them an awful lot. They stood up. And the fact is, most people who know about it in Germany will agree right

now that the first spark which led to German reunification was not in East Germany, but it was in Danzig in Poland in 1980, 82, when Solidarnosc started its democratic. And by the by the end of the 1980s, Poland was no longer a communist country. It was still in the Warsaw Pact, but it wasn't the communist country. So these people did immense services to the cause for democracy, and we really owed it to them to take them and protect them. So I don't buy this kind of argument attention at all. But even if even if one could argue that some points, the most important part of it said is that Putin himself, as has abandoned this argumentation because he sees it as going nowhere.

Steve Sokol [00:56:55] Thank you, John. As we wrap up here and perhaps these questions are a little premature given the uncertainty that we're experiencing at the moment. I think there's a lot of curiosity about what we might take away from this moment and what the prospects for the future are. One of our viewers asks when, when we look back at this period, what will we learn from this? And another one asks what kind of long-term solution can be offered to the more moderate forces in Russia with respect to its security, and goes on to say wouldn't it be most appropriate in the long term for the security of Europe and the world to once again offer Russia a membership in some sort of a reformed NATO, as was discussed between 1990 and 2010 and certainly with conditions and restrictions? So I guess as we sort of wrap up here and obviously we'll have an opportunity to talk more about this in the months ahead. But what do you think sort of the initial lessons are from this current crisis? And do you see any prospect of NATO's membership following a war in in Ukraine?

John Kornblum [00:58:27] Well, I think the first answer I would give you is a very simple one that is history is never over. We - I think that the members of the European Union in particular acted as if history was over, that it didn't need to worry about these tensions, which had been part of the European situation, or if they did worry about them, they could deal with them with civil society measures and not with military strategy and defense. I think that those illusions have now been dashed, hopefully forever. But the second, however, the second point is, however, that that Europe up to the Russian border, and most of these nations are now members of the European Union, but not all of them. Europe, up to the Russian border is a community of 500 million people about, take a few million here there of the most educated, also most prosperous and most democratic, democratized people in the world. And if you add this 500 million with the, how much would it be, maybe 400 billion in North America, including Canada, Mexico and the United States. You have a community of almost a billion people. And this community is now being integrated in dramatically new ways by modern technology. The digital revolution. But also by threats, namely climate and pandemic. And so we fact it is now 30 years, I have to admit this to myself sometimes - it's now 30 years since the post-Cold War solution was agreed and it's now totally out of date. That's my - that's the real issue here. It's totally out of date. This means that the role of NATO is out of date. It means, however, that also the philosophy of the European Union as defined in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 is out of date. And in particular, it means the condition of the globe is a much different world than it was 30 years ago. So we really do need a total rethink of the whole business. And of course, as part of this rethink we have to also deal with the territories which at the moment make up the Russian Federation, I say at the moment because we can't be sure what the future of the Russian Federation is. If there were a democratic vote held throughout Russia about did you want to stay in Russia or not probably a number of places would say they didn't want to. The North Caucasus, for example. Some of the republics out in Central Asia. Kazan and places like that. Who knows what they would decide to do. So we're in - and then of course, further to the East, we have China. So we have an awful lot of things to worry about right now. And the most important thing again is stop the war. No question

about it. But quite soon thereafter, we need to be thinking about how this world is going to fit together. We haven't even mentioned the word India yet, but India has more people than China does. It also has a population which is much younger than the Chinese population. But it also has a government at least which does not want to be part of the Western definition of society. It wants to be India. So, but at the same time, it is one of the centers of the new digital revolution, so we have lots and lots of homework to do here. Immense amounts of homework and it's not going to be done overnight. Politics tends to go by evolution rather than revolution. Not going to be done overnight, but it is - we have to start by understanding that we need to figure out what the right questions are. And most of the questions that we've been asking in the past 10 years or so have not been correct.

Steve Sokol [01:02:48] Well, much as the events of 1989 in 1990 posed as a tectonic shift for geopolitics, we are experiencing another moment like that right now. It's a very different shift and I think you're absolutely right in terms of needing to rethink some of the structures and paradigms that have governed foreign policy, security policy, defense policy over the last 30 years. And undoubtedly, as we emerge from this crisis, we will find ourselves in a in a new era, not just the post COVID era, but the post war in Ukraine era

John Kornblum [01:03:36] And the post post era. Let's call it that. We have been living in the post era. Now we're going to be in the post post era and it's going to be a very difficult one.

Steve Sokol [01:03:44] Yes, and it's going to be a very different world. And so, John, I just really want to thank you again on behalf of both the Tennessee World Affairs Council and the American Council on Germany for once again joining us today. It is always very insightful to talk with you. I certainly learn a lot. I hope that our viewers have learned a lot. As far as our viewers are concerned, thank you to all of you for tuning in today. Thank you for your questions. And certainly, you can find out more about the activities of the Tennessee World Affairs Council and the American Council on Germany on our websites. So please get involved. Stay engaged. But John, really my big thanks go to you for joining us today and for having this conversation.

John Kornblum [01:04:33] My great pleasure. It's always great to be with you. And these are issues which are so central to our lives that it's - I'm very grateful for the chance to discuss them.

Steve Sokol [01:04:44] Absolutely. I'm sure we will be talking again in the not-too-distant future. And until then, stay well. And to our viewers, stay well as well.

John Kornblum [01:04:55] Thank you very much.

<end>

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