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The War in Ukraine: How Will It End?

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

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Patrick Ryan [00:00:25] Welcome. On behalf of the Tennessee World Affairs Council, I'm Patrick Ryan, I'm delighted to be a partner with the American Council on Germany and Dr. Steve Sokol for what has evolved as a series of very important conversations with Ambassador John Kornblum and today with Dr. Liana Fix. We are very excited to continue this series of programs on this important conversation that needs to continue as long as the situation in Ukraine continues at the crisis that it has become. The Tennessee World Affairs Council has partnered with the ACG a number of times and we are very pleased again to be working with Steve and his folks at ACG. We look forward to an in-person event here in Nashville when Ambassador Kornblum returns to his residence here. He's a member of the Tennessee World Affairs Council Advisory Board and part time resident here in Nashville. So we're looking forward to him coming back and in mid-May, we'll be putting on the calendar an in-person event with him here. Just a quick note. The

Tennessee World Affairs Council is part of the World Affairs Councils of America network, but we're an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan educational association, a unique institution here in Nashville and in Tennessee. We promote an understanding of international events and world affairs, and we work with high schools and college students to increase their understanding of important issues in the world. So we look forward to you visiting our website TNWAC.org to find out more about our council, perhaps become a member or to make a contribution to our efforts, and also to find the series of conversations that we've had since January in cooperation with the American Council on Germany. Dr. Sokol, thank you for including us in the broadcast today, and we look forward to working more with you in the future.

Steve Sokol [00:02:28] Thanks, Patrick. Patrick, the ACG is always happy to partner with the Tennessee World Affairs Council, and I think that this series of events has been just a great testimonial of how solid that partnership has been and how important the partnership has been. So a huge thanks to you and your colleagues at the Tennessee World Affairs Council for joining forces with us for this series of events, but also for other activities.

Patrick Ryan [00:02:55] Our pleasure.

Steve Sokol [00:02:58] I'm also very happy to welcome our viewers in Europe and in the United States, and particularly those who are part of the World Affairs Council network. I'm Steve So-call, the president of the American Council on Germany, and I'm honored to lead today's discussion. I'm delighted to welcome back Ambassador John Kornblum and Dr. Liana Fix. Sessions with Ambassador Kornblum have become a regular feature for the ACG and the Tennessee World Affairs Council, and this is the second time that Liana Fix has joined us as well. Welcome to both of you, and I'm very much looking forward to our conversation today. Before we get into the the war in Ukraine, which I think we we have to talk about, I really think we have to start by talking about what's going on in Germany right now. Dominating the headlines these days is the the reaction to a proposed visit or a planned visit by Frank-Walter Steinmeier to Ukraine. President Zelensky of Ukraine said that he did not want Steinmeier to visit because of his previous ties to Russia. That seems to have blown up in the press. But at the same time, the German coalition government and Germany as a NATO member and as an EU member is really under growing pressure regarding two major issues. First, there's a massive debate in Germany about energy dependance on Russia and whether or not Germany should stop all energy imports from Russia. But second, measured against its size and economic power, Germany is doing less than other countries, including Great Britain, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and even Lithuania, to help Ukraine and to supply it with military hardware so that it can defend itself. Germany appears in some ways to really be struggling to make good on its promise to deliver arms to Ukraine. And I guess one of the big questions I have is why is Germany so hesitant? John, can we start with you and get your take on what I'm starting to call the German conundrum?

John Kornblum [00:05:37] Well, first, thank you, everybody for the invitation, and it's a great pleasure to be together with both of you, Patrick and Steven. And I cherish my residence in Nashville very much, and so I'm looking forward to being there quite soon. As might have been expected, almost every issue, almost every crisis, which takes place in Europe ends up revolving around Germany. That's because Germany is not only the largest, most productive and ultimately most powerful country in Europe, but it's also right at the center and also has a history of involvement in many, many different kinds of issues, both positive and negative in Europe. And so when something as dramatic as the Russian

invasion of Ukraine comes, people look automatically to Europe and to Germany. And this has been a quite a debate that has been going on in parallel. It hasn't been in the press as much, in the western press, as much as it might have been, but it is now breaking out very rapidly. Probably mostly because of the quite aggressive attitude of the Ukrainian government itself. The Ukrainian ambassador in Berlin has spared no words in criticizing Germany for what he believes to be its lack of support. But yesterday, the President of Ukraine dropped what one might call a bombshell when he reacted to a proposal that President Steinmeier, Frank-Walter Steinmeier and the president of Poland in a joint visit to Kiev. And he said that a visit by Steinmeier was not desired. This has caused major public explosions in Germany. Major debate, some anger, but also some finger pointing. Why is this happening to us? And so as we, many people argued a few weeks ago when the Russians started their their tactics, there's nothing which can be separated from anything else in Europe. It's a very closely woven net of interests, of peoples, of history, of friendships, of anger, and the Russian effort whatever it is, to restore the Czarist empire, whatever that effort is, is turning out to be a major, major upheaval for all of Europe, economically, politically, culturally and as we can see also in the internal politics of some of the major countries. We shouldn't forget that there is a presidential election going on in France right now where President Macron, who by all normal measures of analysis should be cut quite comfortably ahead, is in fact not very comfortably ahead. He is probably because of the French system going to be reelected, but it's going to be a pretty heavy and difficult task that he has to deal with the right wing parties who are showing themselves to have even more strength than they have in the past.

Steve Sokol [00:08:56] And so how do you - let me just just ask a quick follow up - how do you explain the the fact that Zelensky does not want Frank-Walter Steinmeier to visit? Does it have to do with Steinmeier himself and and his sort of previous ties to to Russia? Or does it have to do with with kind of a general disappointment that both he and the Ukrainian ambassador in Berlin have been very outspoken about that there is a sense in Ukraine that Germany just has not done enough to support the Ukrainians?

John Kornblum [00:09:39] Well, I think we should start from the point that Ukraine is really, really under pressure. Things have lightened up a bit. It looks like the Russians have pulled away from Kiev, which is a major victory for Ukraine as far as I'm concerned. But they seem to be doubling down on the southeast of Ukraine and the Black Sea coast, which is extremely important for Ukraine, for its exports, for example, including its very strategic food exports. And so I think part of it is I won't use the word desperation - that may be too strong a word - but certainly a feeling that while Ukraine has been grateful for all of the support it's received, including from Germany, that it feels that it has to even get more now if it's going to survive this next phase. And however you want to put it, as you also mentioned, Steve. Germany has been the weak link. It has had a strong internal debate. The coalition is torn about it. The SPD itself is torn inside even more. There is still a strong peace faction throughout the country. There have have been some pro-Russian demonstrations, although not very many. And one can ask whether they were perhaps organized by the Russians themselves. But the fact is that the population has more or less carried the the support for Ukraine. But we're now reaching a very critical point where Germany's economic health and economic growth could be affected by a refusal to import any more Russian oil, by further closing off the Russian market, et cetera, et cetera. And this is not showing up as being very popular in the polls. I've been reading polls this morning. Anywhere between 60 and 80 percent of the people believe that that Germany should not have a oil boycott of Russia, that Germany should continue economic relations with Russia. And also, you know, some German industry are speaking out rather loudly about this subject. So I think you go back to President Zelensky. I think he felt that it was -

this is a point where he needed to dramatize and he certainly succeeded. And in fact, disinviting Steinmeier, he really created a big controversy. It's on every paper this morning. Every newscast, every discussion that's going on, it's more or less about is Steinmeier welcome in Ukraine or not.

Steve Sokol [00:12:13] Thank you, John. Liana, you've been pretty outspoken about your views on an oil and gas embargo and also on the need for Germany to do more when it comes to supporting Ukraine. And so I'd like to sort of get your take on on the same question of of, how do you sort of explain this, this dead end that Germany has gotten into? There was a great deal of almost euphoria at the end of February, when Olaf Scholz announced a major policy pivot in foreign security policy, but also an energy policy. There were some real hopes of fundamental change. Obviously, some of that change cannot happen overnight and takes time. But I think many people certainly had a sense that Germany would really step up. And at the moment, it seems that in the two critical areas of of energy and providing military support, Germany is is not doing as much as many people had hoped.

Liana Fix [00:13:29] Thank you. And let me try to put this a little bit sort of into context, where this anger from the Ukrainian side comes from. I would not frame it as aggressiveness, I would frame it as anger to Germany's role that Germany has played for many years in Russia policy and Steinmeier's role in particular. This doesn't say, doesn't mean that the decision was wise to disinvite them, especially on such short notice. He was meant to come with the presidents of Poland and the Baltic states and he was already in Warsaw. But it helps to explain a little bit why, to some extent, waking Germans up from their sort of position of moral righteousness to some extent is perhaps not the worst idea. At the beginning of the outbreak of the war there was a perception which was put forward by some, supported by some German politicians, that the war is some sort of catastrophe that is happening and that Putin had saved German politicians and there were quite some observers of Russia who argued, well, this was not the case. Putin deceived in 2014, but we could have known and there was a lot of intelligence coming from the United States, credible intelligence that this war will break out. So this this naivete to some extent before the outbreak of the war has has to some extent prevented a critical assessment of Germany's role and especially of ... So the argument is that it's not enough just to say, well, Nord Stream 2, but it's actually worth it to look back and to consider how was it at all possible that Nord Stream 2 could have remained on the table as an option for such a long time. And Steinmeier, after having received some criticism from the Ukrainian ambassador in Berlin, he went on TV saying that not he himself personally, but that we in a very general way argued that that some of the policies were not, were not conducive to and were not intelligent policies against the backdrop of Russia's increasing aggressiveness. So it is certainly not a smart move by Zelensky, but it does trigger a debate in Germany, which is not unnecessarily about Germany's role in the past. And it also helps a little bit to understand that this is not about Ukraine being grateful to us for our support. This is not altruism that Germany has to towards Ukraine, but it is a duty for for Germany, and it is also Germany's own interests and its own security interest that Ukraine keeps fighting and does not lose this war. So I think as unfortunate as the whole episode is and as positive as it will be viewed in Moscow, it is triggering a much needed debate in Germany about its past Russia policy. And Steinmeier obviously has been famous for the Steinmeier formula, which was perceived as sort of breaking down the Minsk agreement to detail and predicted process, which was seen very critical in Kiev. And this obviously adds up to the other point that you mentioned, the criticism towards Germany's reluctance to send heavier weapons. Germany's would not want to get into an oil and gas embargo lot faster than it has done so far. And sort of the pattern that we see that is the same pattern that we saw from the

beginning of the war. So in January, there already was a big backlash on Germany's policy. Then there was two step Germany went two step ahead. But then again, one step back without detailing how these policies will be followed up. So to some extent, the dilemmas of the problems that Germany is where Germany is right now are self-created at the energy and energy dilemma is certainly self-created. It is a tough decision to make for Europe to move quickly out of Washington oil and gas. But at the moment, the question in Berlin is that there's not enough done to think creatively about how we can speed up the process, but rather that there's a lot of resistance to the demands and selves. And this is something which is which, which doesn't create the impression that Germany is actually trying everything to help Ukraine and to move forward on these issues. But it's why the. Blocking some some of the necessary decisions.

Steve Sokol [00:18:32] Liana, maybe a quick follow up. You know, since both you and John Kornblum talked about the Steinmeier visit, do you have any thoughts on whether a visit by Chancellor Olaf Scholz would be received the same way by Zelensky? Or any thoughts on whether or not Schulz should go to Kiev? I certainly saw on social media and a little bit in the German press that there was kind of a reaction when Boris Johnson was recently there and sort of a sense that all options should show support in the same way. But I've heard nothing to indicate that that Olaf Scholz is even thinking about a visit.

Liana Fix [00:19:19] I think that that that is true. And if we think from a position, what would be desirable, it would be desirable that every week the European leader and head of state of government travels to Kiev to show support and to justify their presence. And obviously, this is only happening now now that Kiev is not such a danger with so many more, but it would be desirable to see this kind of this kind of troubles. But so far, there are no plans made for. Also, there are no plans as far as I know. Wait for my call, which could indicate that the limited powers see their position in sort of a continuous sort of radiation position or position that they held also during the Normandy format in the negotiations. And that is obviously viewed critical from Ukraine's perspective. Certainly, Schulz would not be disinvited, but perhaps Kiev would have appreciated a visit by the chancellor, who has actually some policy making power more than a visit of a representative of Steinmeier, the highest representative of the state, obviously. But he has no decision-making powers. So I think at some point and certainly traveled to Kiev, but it is not at the moment planned.

Steve Sokol [00:20:47] So I'd like to maybe turn four for both of you to how this is kind of playing out in in German politics and in the coalition government on the periphery of the foreign ministers meeting in Luxembourg on Monday. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock called for more creative and pragmatic solutions in terms of trying to provide military equipment to Ukraine. I've more recently seen reports that Michele whored from the Social Democrats was the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee and also the designated FDP secretary general. Bijan, dear sir, I have supported the initiatives of the Green Foreign Minister Baerbock. And yet Schulz has been hesitating as we've been talking about John. Let's start with you. What can you tell us about the tensions that are sort of playing out within the governing coalition?

John Kornblum [00:21:49] Well, it is a complex coalition to begin with. Three parties who really don't have that much in common. But who have been able so far to harmonize pretty well and even on the Ukraine issue have been relatively close together. The problem is that this is really a major eruption and which is going to needs to cause a major change in the way Germany sees itself in the world. Now I was I had the good fortune, you might call it that although it was a long time ago, I would rather not have been so old a long time ago, but I was the person in the American embassy who was responsible for US policy in the

years 1971 72 73, when US politique was springy on the world. And it was the same kind of atmosphere that we have now at this time. It was a change between Germany's approach of never recognizing Russian occupation, as they would call it, of Eastern Europe. If you watched the evening TV news in 1972 and watched the weather report, you would have seen a map which included everything including East Prussia in Zawiya and Pomerania and everything which had been lost decades ago at Yalta. So it was Germany coming to terms with the end of the war. That's what I was with. I was about. Four, through a number of skillful maneuvers, but also a major confrontation. Including a vote of no confidence in April 1972, which I have to say this very bluntly at this point. Brat won only because the East Germans bribed two City U. Deputies to vote for him. Their names are well-known. The amounts are well known. So it was even more of a clash that's going on right now. And I think the point here is that and this is why I've been less positive about the so-called changes, the so-called side that Mr Schulz started because we're talking here about deep, deep-seated feelings, deep fears and deep hopes of this society. And so it's going to take them a while to digest them. It's not going to happen overnight. And that was the same thing as politic. Now seems to be some kind of holy script, which was handed down. In fact, it was fought very bitterly through most of the 1970s until it finally became interestingly enough, under and what call the real sort of foreign policy of the lad. And that's going to happen this time, too. It's not going to be easy. And that's why American leadership is so important. The reason that the. Normandy formula was so weak, and the reason one of the reasons that. Mr. Steinmeier may be entered into some formulations on Ukraine that he shouldn't have is because the United States was absent. And the Obama administration wanted to have nothing to do with Crimea or with the negotiations with the Russians or anything else. And the other lesson we have here is that in today's Europe, United States can and now is in the past, never be absent. Doesn't mean we have to be there with all guns blazing. Doesn't mean we have to have weapons being shot off, but we have to show some moderate. Positive and confident leadership, and we weren't doing that the first three administrations of this millennium have not shown any leadership in Europe, and so part of this, I don't want to overdo this because it's Putin's fault, not anybody else's. But part of this is, in fact, the absence of the United States from the playing field for really the last 20 years.

Steve Sokol [00:25:52] Thanks. Thanks, John. Leon, I think it was clear when this government formed that one of the big challenges for all of this was going to be keeping this, as John described complex coalition together, keeping the three parties aligned, but also making sure that there were not divisions within the parties, both particularly within his own Social Democratic Party, but also within the Green Party. In both parties, there are different factions, sort of the bylaws and the fundies on on each side. How do you see these tensions playing out within the governing coalition? Because we are hearing different voices from particularly the Greens and the Social Democrats, some who are more supportive of a more aggressive approach and others who are more reluctant.

Liana Fix [00:26:56] That's a very good point. And we see that the potential risks that were there from the beginning of the Coalition and that were already there in coalition agreement discussions now play out in real time and war time. So we made a Baerbock statement has made very clear yesterday that the Greens are not entirely happy with the position of the chancellor. They want heavier weapons being sent to Ukraine, and they don't want to risk the coalition to create an impression of divides and balloons. This would certainly not help anyone, not Kiev, and will certainly play into the hands of Moscow. But there are disagreements on how to how to proceed and whether the coalition is doing enough for Ukraine. And this is to some extent the first Test for this coalition. It was clear from the beginning that energy and security policy will be the dividing lines. Some of the

most difficult issues. It was actually Russia that was helpful, putting those out of the way. So that's going to be pretty off the table. Then also, the question of weapon deliveries is obviously one which is difficult for the Swedes with the pacifist traditions. But the atrocities that we are seeing right now in Ukraine also lead to two to the green bases, adopting a position that supports heavy weapons, the boys. So the dividing lines of the coalition were there from the beginning, and we now see for the first time that the Greens both Jobbik and tried to put on pressure on the chancellor to move faster and hopefully the outcome will not be public. Yeah, a public disagreement within the coalition because again, this would be not helpful. But it shows that the international perception that they have Baerbock, he adds, from her process and from Ukraine and what we see as a feedback from his policies, it's not positive and leads them to put pressure on the coalition partners. Hmm.

Steve Sokol [00:29:11] Thank you. Thanks very much. I'd like to fold in two to viewer questions at this point. We have one question from Nashville. Do you think that the current German government would accept a cease fire agreement in Ukraine that ceded the entirety of the Donbas region, as well as the southern coast to Russia? I don't know who wants to

John Kornblum [00:29:41] Go first, all right.

Liana Fix [00:29:44] I can give you the quick take. I think the question is sort of we should all sort of think about the question in terms of that whatever agreement is found in Ukraine. And I think it is important that we keep the options open and Zelensky does it for a negotiated outcome. It is a decision for Ukraine to accept. So the first, this is not an agreement that will be imposed on Ukraine by Western powers. And at the same time, Western powers should also not push Ukraine towards accepting an agreement, which is not in Ukraine's interest. So the question is whether can Lenski accept an agreement which sort of leaves that used to come to Russia and the atrocities that we now have seen by the Russian side and butchered and other religious make this so much more complicated because obviously the question of territorial concessions or freezing of territory, it's almost impossible. It's the basic assumption has to be that war crimes could happen on these territories. And then again, Western demands about Ukraine and demilitarization can lead to renewed Russian attack within a short period of time. So at the moment, there's no agreement which seems acceptable to Kiev and would which would sort of keep Ukraine alive and not only put it on a slow path towards a prolonged death. And again, Germany and the West would have to accept what Ukraine finds acceptable.

Steve Sokol [00:31:19] John, do you have anything to add to that?

John Kornblum [00:31:23] Well, I think two short points, first, of course, Germany would not be in the position, as it said of making a unilateral decision that might have been maybe some debate in Germany, but in the end, whatever happens as this crisis continues, it's not going to be any single country, including the United States, which defines what the directions or the end point are. It'll be first Ukraine, as we said. But secondly, it will be NATO and the European Union. The two in there, each in their own special way, decide how to react to what is going on there. And so the big question which is coming up, I think. First, there's the question of the oil embargo right now, that's the biggest issue. And there's a lot of support, a lot of rejection of an idea of an oil embargo in Germany. But let's just say that there is some kind of moderation of the conflict. The big question which is going to come up very fast is the question of the sanctions. Is whether we keep the Russians under the most stringent sanctions that have ever been applied,

and that is the way to make sure that they store Ukraine to its rightful existence. Or will there be people and you already hear them? And this is what Germany is going to be one of the leaders, but also Italy, by the way. You hear people in Germany, the head of the SS, the head of BMW, or people like that have come out already saying that the sanctions are going to create a major recession in Germany and that we need to think very carefully what's going on. So as we said at the beginning, everything is connected to everything else here, and I think we made the major important. The most important thing for listeners in the United States right now is to note that there isn't any pickiness crisis apart and taking things which, when things are easier, are better. This is in fact now a major crisis of the global world order, if you want to call it that. And there is going to be no escaping from what's going on. Luckily, I think President Biden is following a very positive and very good track, but it's going to be difficult for him to as the fall elections come to make sure that he's keeping it as much in line with his own political interests as possible.

Steve Sokol [00:33:44] And, John, certainly the last time you and I spoke, which was about a month ago, you made that point as well about this really being a challenge for the global world order, not just the security order, but also the economic order. That's right. And we there would be lasting implications. But what you just said also provides a really good segue way to the second viewer question. I wanted to fold in here, which comes from somebody in New York. And she writes, apart from a cease fire agreement, which both sides seem to be far from what nonmilitary measures by Europe, the United States and other allies can really bring an end to this war would further sanctions on Russian energy and the resultant economic consequences for Russia be enough to make Putin reconsider an expensive, continued Russian military campaign in Ukraine?

John Kornblum [00:34:48] Well, I'll take the first step, but I think that sanctions are, in fact, the most workable tool. That the West give aside now, Ukraine itself, that the West has in and try to suppress the Russian attack. Military aid to Ukraine, of course, is the essential element of keeping Ukraine alive and fighting. But if we're trying to look ahead to what a peace so-called peace might look like, I think the sanctions will remain the most important thing. And a oil boycott dropping use of Russian oil would be something which would hurt Russia quite badly as far as I understand it. And I think this is probably going to be the next issue which is coming up in the next two weeks because there are many voices in Germany who are against it in other parts of Europe, too, by the way. But many other voices in Germany and in other parts of Europe, which are for it so that you have the makings of a very controversial discussion.

Liana Fix [00:35:59] Just to add to that. So if you look at this from sort of where exactly does the money go? The oil and gas payments, they are not of the needed as financial means to finance the immediate war so Russia can continue the war that is taking place right now with the means it has available right now. But if we look so, if we look in a longer-term perspective, the Russian state budget consists to almost half of its state budget of revenues from oil, gas and coal. So in the world, it does not directly finance the war right now. And then obviously it does in the mid and long term, provide the Russia with the financial means to keep the country wanting to keep wages being paid, social benefits being paid. So if we want to increase pressure on Russia to move towards a negotiated outcome, which is not entirely to be against Ukraine's interest, then this move would be certainly important. And it would be even more important for Europeans themselves because with the money that Russia now receives on oil and gas and coal revenues, which I can obviously also fund in the future the the military, the military posture that it could use to threaten Europe. So both in our own security interests, but also in the interests of Ukraine, which is all own security interest. Putting pressure on Moscow to have

to reshuffle the state budget is certainly something which is and would be an effective means to not end the war immediately, but perhaps to shorten the war and to prevent that it continues for many years.

Steve Sokol [00:37:59] Thank you, Leon, a little earlier in our conversation, you mentioned the atrocities in in Butcher. And I wanted to ask you about how the coverage of that and as the Russian military withdraws or pulls back, we're hearing more and more reports about atrocities in areas that the Russians had held. How is that influencing public opinion in Germany? Do you see reporting on these atrocities in places like Butcher? And is that having any impact on on public sentiment?

Liana Fix [00:38:43] Yes, it has. I mean, that's why it's but there was widespread reporting on it, and to some extent, this also an effort by the media. More or less successful not to repeat the mistakes of MH 17. So not to repeat Russian lies about those atrocities as just one side of the other side of the story. So to say Ukrainians are saying Russia is responsible. What I say acquaintances responsible because there is a lot of evidence available which proves that Russia is responsible for this. So not catering into Russia's disinformation campaigns on which is this an important lesson to be drawn from MH 17 from the downing of the Malaysian airliner in 2014? And then also, obviously, the FSB creates a moral outrage. But the problem is that to some extent, the debate then evolves into a juxtaposition of Will this our heart? But this also our mind, which prevents us to take steps like an oil and gas embargo, even if sort of emotionally we would like to. And I think this is a framing, which is difficult because those potential war crimes are not only about emotions, they affect knowing that an actor is willing to conduct war in such a way as to what interests our heart, though we have interests. So again, this is not only a question of moral of emotions, but this is a question of defense and of understanding the Russian calculus and also, to some extent, accepting that what Russia has done in Syria might in Ukraine be even worse because they have troops on the ground, which they have to such a large extent in Ukraine and also accepting that Russia is willing to use any methods to conduct this war. And there's no no limitations because Ukraine is a neighboring country and has been brought to the country to to Russia, and this tells us a lot about the nature of the Russian regime.

Steve Sokol [00:40:56] Mm-Hmm. So I'd like to turn to the conflict itself in recent days. Satellite images appear to show Russian troops massing for a new offensive, and there have been mounting concerns about a major offensive in the East. At the same time, Ukrainian officials said earlier this week that they had ordered a Russian cyber attack on Ukraine's power grid that could have knocked out power to over two million people. And more recently, I guess it was yesterday. The US government said it remains concerned about Russia's possible use of chemical weapons. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the US has quote credible information and quote that Russia may use chemical agents in Mariupol. John, let's let's start with you. How do you think the war will unfold in the coming days and weeks? And what's the likelihood that we'll see more cyber attacks and possibly even the use of chemical weapons like we saw in Syria?

John Kornblum [00:42:07] Well, I would I'd like to start with one point, which we sort of touched upon, but I'd like to make it even more strongly that is that since 2014. With the occupation and of Crimea, et cetera. The Russians have been very much on the offensive in the public messaging. Of the narrative of this crisis, of the existence of Ukraine, the reason that Russia is doing things and my own view. One can debate, but my own view is that they up until recently were in fact dominating the message. That the West was catching up in Ukraine itself, was catching up to the Russians throughout these various

narratives. So it's NATO's fault. Secondly, it was the fault of Western industry. And thirdly, it was the neo-Nazis in Ukraine. Notice none of these ideas have actually flown very far. But the Russians are masters at doing this, and we are behind still to this day. And that's why I believe that it's very important. The questions, the kinds of questions you ask Steve, are really, in many ways almost one of the key elements of the future. We have to define this not as a part of former part of Russia, Ukraine and trying to maintain its independence or its sovereignty. Rather, we have to say that this is a Russian attack on the entire world order. As it was negotiated. That was one of the most hated as it was negotiated in the late 1990s, and that Russia is in fact exploding the entire structure, not just of military cooperation, but also of globalization, of global supply chains. All these new things that we're learning how to understand and that Russia really is, is disrupting the positive and the development of the world at a time when we have two pandemics, if you wish to call it that first COVID, of course. But secondly, climate, which are in many, in most ways, many times more important to the future of the world and whether Russia feels happy in its historical framework. And so we're facing here. In other words, one of these label level issues multi-level crises, it's a crisis. First, if you're Ukrainian, it's a crisis on the ground. Your country is being attacked and partially destroyed. If you're European, the whole sense of a of stability and a peace in Europe is being affected if you're a human being. Russia is in fact destroying and attacking many of the goals many of the methods that are necessary to make sure that human life continues to prosper on this planet. It's that dramatic. And so what is this war going to be about and when is it going to end? That's the question. It's going to probably wipe down at some place. And when it starts winding down, it will be the very biggest challenge to the West, not to allow it to wind down into a lowering of hostilities or in fact, an end of hostilities that let Russia maintain whatever gains it's had and saying this was legitimate. But rather, we have to define it in a way which makes clear that Russia is disrupting all of us and disrupting our world. And this is very important for Americans because we are the ones that defined this world. You can see it again, how the United States has to be the center of this dealing with this crisis. And so it's important that we define this crisis as being much broader than the future of Ukraine. However important that is, it is we're really talking about. I'm not overdoing this humidity. The future of humanity. And that's going to be a very difficult issue. And that's why I that's why I welcome such discussions as we're having today. But I think also that it's we're still behind in messaging. That's a good word in messaging. What this is really all about.

Steve Sokol [00:46:19] I mean, John, I think you're absolutely right. Obviously, there's a lot at stake for Ukraine, but there's more at stake than just Ukraine. And that's something that we're that we're seeing, you know, playing out. And it's important both to look at what's happening sort of on the ground in Ukraine, but also the broader the broader context, Leon. You know, John was just talking about the fact that at some point, who knows, who knows when this this war will wind down, but it might not be over. Relatively recently, Vladimir Putin announced that the war would be over on May 9th. And I'm curious to hear from you what that tells us if you have any thoughts or insights.

Liana Fix [00:47:15] Yes, I mean, this is the point with autocratic leaders that they want reality to behave in the way which fits into their timeline and in their presentation of themselves. So the idea, obviously, is to use May nine as a huge propaganda event and ideally, the Russian president has some successes to present. So ideally, he would have made progress in the east of the South Pole would be under Russian control so that he could advance a propagandistic argument about the dumbass being liberated in the administrative borders of the US, which would mean a huge advance in the huge battle, which would be very different from the better that Ukraine has faced so far. It would be a

major open battle on the ground, rather than those small units moving towards cities and villages that we've seen so far. So there is concern that until May nine, we will see a major offensive by Russian troops and also an attempt to encircle the Ukrainian army in the east and in the south. And that's obviously something where the West needs to step in to prevent that. If Russia gets a foothold in the east and in the south, this will be the opportunity for Russia to further try and advance on Kiev. We should not hope that Russia's aims for this war have changed. The aim remains to bring Ukraine and the Russian control. The Russian president has said this himself very clearly. Just because the tactics are changing in Russia is now focusing on the East and the south. This will not mean a change of Russia's own.

Steve Sokol [00:49:06] So I'm going to try to pull a couple of threads of our conversation together, but you know, we've talked a lot about the calls from Ukraine for help in defending itself. But it seems to me that there is another issue at play here, which is not just providing Ukraine with the material it needs for defensive purposes, but also supplying the right equipment so that Ukraine can actually go on the offensive and try to take back portions of the country that have been taken by Russia. And so I think we're seeing something play out here where Ukraine, the Ukrainian military, is trying to anticipate a Russian onslaught and anticipate some of the challenges that you just described, Liana. But what can be done to actually help Ukraine go on the offensive and perhaps even emerge victoriously? I'm curious whether either of you have any thoughts on that.

John Kornblum [00:50:19] Yeah, well, I can. I would say that. We've reached now. Very interesting, I'll maybe almost unique, quite at least unique in the last 75 or 80 years since World War Two. That is where one country, Russia, has attacked another country, Ukraine. Ukrainian military is stronger than everyone thought it would be, and it's doing. Good job generally, but it needs massive inputs of weapons of support, material of and also training and know-how. And that they know is moving more and more rapidly into providing this country is doing, but it's really starting to become quite important. And the amount of training which goes on outside of Ukraine, some of it in the United States, by the way, is quite important. So the real question that you're sort of asking Steve, is when is a war, not a war or when does it not a war become a war? So far, every NATO's leader has said, we will not send troops into Ukraine. We will not fight in Ukraine. But the border between essentially quartermastering, the entire Ukrainian army and not being part of the conflict is going to be a very thin one. And this is again goes back to the whole question of how one could bring all of this to an end because we haven't talked about the big elephant in the room yet. That's Russian nuclear weapons who Putin tried at the beginning to sort of suggest that he might be thinking of them. And that, I think caused such a negative reaction that he pulled back. But those weapons are still there, and they are still, in the end, the thing which makes Russia a big power, obviously. In fact, the army has shown that it's not quite the power that we thought it would be, but the weapons are there and they are functioning and they are killing and they could end the world as we know it. Let's put it bluntly. So the diplomacy of this is going to be very, very difficult. I have no. Smart ideas about how that could be pursued, because it's too early to do that, but at some point people are going to have to start talking very seriously with each other about bringing this somewhere to at least the stability so that it doesn't expand into something even more dramatic. And in this case, I would just throw this in as something everybody should watch the role and reaction of China. China has been slowly but clearly pulling back from Russia. And I think we don't need to go into all the details, but it is doing that. And I think that China must be getting very, very uncomfortable about Putin's behavior at this moment.

Steve Sokol [00:53:22] Yeah. Leonid, you have do you have anything to add?

Liana Fix [00:53:28] I think the last point that John Waste is actually something where we should be very clear on the role of China in this context, and I think it was even those who put it very nicely into the terms of pro-Western reality that we see from the Chinese side with the focus on pro-Western level, the reality. So with the idea to put out an order phase of neutrality to prevent the China has costs due to Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine. But at the same time, very clearly standing with Russia in opposing with them hedging money and these sort of ideological foundations is very similar. And therefore, the we might see sort of overt Chinese not voting in favor of Russia at the UN Security Council. China will certainly not openly circumvent sanctions towards Russia, but they will find ways to support Russia if necessary. And this is something and especially from a German context, this is something which should give us, should give us a pause because the way how Russia is now cut out of the global economy, finance targeted with sanctions. This is not something that could be done with China in case China develops interests in the right direction. And the crucial question also for Germany will be whether what kind of lesson should be drawn from the war in Ukraine for relations with Russia because it was actually the whole concept of change to trade once it didn't work anymore for Russia, which was then applied to China. And it might be the case that change through trade has not worked with Russia in the last decades, but might also not work with China.

Steve Sokol [00:55:21] I mean, it's interesting that you bring that up, because one of my fundamental questions in recent weeks has been as Germany rethinks its UST politique and its policy of bundled which hand vis-a-vis Russia. Is this sort of leading to a new debate in Germany about ties between Germany and China as well and the interdependence there? So I think that you've sort of struck up a very important topic or theme related to China, though. One of our viewers just submitted the following question with regard to this notion of a new world order and how it might fall into place. When do you think that China will step in? Will they wait until the end of the war? Or do you think that they'll become involved earlier?

John Kornblum [00:56:24] We just can't oh, go ahead.

Liana Fix [00:56:27] Yeah, just to just to add on what I've said, I think they will not sort of they've done this joint declaration with Russia before the outbreak of the war with China for the first time signed up to measures that would need to be in effect. But they would certainly not sort of they would covertly support Russia, but they would certainly not risk that the economy of their sort of political goals fringed by the war. And we've seen this also that Chinese companies have announced they will not operate anymore more the Russian market, Chinese telecommunication companies. So we do see that Russia China tries to cut its losses. But at the same time, it's very politically very close to Russian.

Steve Sokol [00:57:15] So as we come to a close here, I'd like to to maybe bring bring the conversation back to Germany again with a question that one of our viewers has has posed. Our viewer writes that given everything that we've talked about in terms of the reluctance by the governing coalition, internal divisions in the German government, she would be interested in hearing more about what kinds of tangible steps each of you think Germany must take in the coming weeks and months to address the challenges that it faces. These can be steps that Germany might take unilaterally, both in the economic arena, in the energy arena, but also in the security arena. But it might also be measures that Germany takes in a multilateral context of the European Union or of Naito. And so I guess, you know, to to sum it up, the question is what would each of your

recommendations be for the government in terms of tangible steps that the country should take?

John Kornblum [00:58:30] Well, I will start, perhaps. First, the most important thing will be. How Germany appears to itself, but to Europe and to the world, and especially to the Russians. As a supporter of the continued independence and sovereignty of Ukraine. There's no doubt in my mind that Putin thought that he would be able to keep the Europeans divided and not very not reacting very strongly, and that the key to the whole thing was Germany. It seems to me that he much overestimated or or under understand the kinds of pressures that would be on Germany, and he had been listening too much to certain people who tell it what's going on in Germany and be correct. That's a big point. One. Where is Germany going to stand in the western community of nations? This is not a single act that needs to take or whether sends. This is weapons of that weapons. This is a sense of being fully, enthusiastically and wholeheartedly on the side of Western democracy and especially supporting the interests of Ukraine, but also of the Baltic states of Poland. And also other countries who have already chosen to want to be part of the West, that includes Georgia, that includes Moldova, includes mostly to Armenia, although it has a complex relationship, and it's also starting to include some of the so-called stand countries in Central Asia. And so the longer term issue here, it's going to be the fact that not only can Russia cannot control Ukraine, but it can control its bordering lands at all. They want to be part of our world and not part of its world. And Germany is going to be a key to this. I've this for years that Germany is going to be probably the most important country after the United States and China in the development of the new digital world. And I continue to believe that not because Germany is very far ahead on digital technology, but because it's the switching point across the Atlantic and on around China. And it's going to be very, very important. So I would limit it almost to that. So they should send more weapons here. They should be more enthusiastic. But the real question is, will they step up and be one of the leading voices for the western way of life and. Trying to push the Russians back into a acceptable behavior.

Steve Sokol [01:01:17] Thank you, John. To get the last word goes to goes to you, the honor, thank you.

Liana Fix [01:01:23] Just everything that John said I can absolutely subscribe to, but just to add to if we could have concrete steps, the first one. Sending troops to Eastern Europe, to member states. Rebuilding some of the trust that Germany has lost. The second step? Heavy weapons to Ukraine. Those tanks, Russian German tanks that are not being used would be very useful for Ukraine in the course of the want of thought the next months and then the third step trying to do everything to move forward. The timeline on Germany's exit from Russian oil and gas. Those are my three points.

Steve Sokol [01:02:12] Well, Leonid fix John Kornblum on behalf of both Patrick Ryan and the Tennessee World Affairs Council and the American Council on Germany, I want to thank both of you for joining us once again today. This has been a fantastic discussion, obviously not in an uplifting or sort of positive a discussion with a positive outlook. I think the challenges are too great, but I really appreciate your nuanced insights about what's going on in Ukraine and the broader implications of what's going on in Ukraine, and particularly what that means for Germany right now. So a huge word of word of thanks to both of you for taking the time to speak with members of the ACG and the Tennessee World Affairs Council and our our friends. So thank you both for joining us.

Liana Fix [01:03:14] Thank you very much for the discussion.

Steve Sokol [01:03:17] And, of course, thanks also to our viewers, thank you for submitting your questions. It's always great to have active viewer participation, and I really appreciate so many of the questions that we got for now. Let me wish you all well. Stay healthy and I look forward to seeing you soon, I hope.

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