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In Focus: Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

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

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Thank you for your continuing support in 2022!

Patrick Ryan [00:00:25] Hello and welcome to this special edition of Global Dialogue, the Distinguished Speaker Program of the Tennessee World Affairs Council. Thank you for joining us today. I'm Council President Patrick Ryan and today we present "In Focus: Russia's invasion of Ukraine."

Earlier this year, we presented a conversation on the invasion of Ukraine featuring Ambassador John Kornblum. We're pleased to have expanded that program to many more with him and other specialists in the field. Today, we welcome back Ambassador Kornblum, along with Professor Marieta Velikova and Dr. Breck Walker.

This series of conversations has been presented in partnership with the American Council on Germany. The ACG is a nonpartisan organization that works to strengthen German-American relations. ACG is a frequent partner with many of the councils of the World Affairs network. We're grateful for ACG President Dr. Steve Sokol for his work with us to foster global affairs awareness.

We're also joined by the World Affairs Council in Harrisburg. We welcome their members and members of the World Affairs Councils of America around the country who are with us today as well. I'd also like to thank our Tennessee partners for the series and all that we do at TNWAC: the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, the newly renamed Belmont University Center for Global Citizenship and the University of Tennessee Center for Global Engagement. Our most recent programs featured a conversation with former Ukraine Minister of Education and Science Anna Novosad from Kyiv, where she is leading efforts to rebuild schools in war damaged areas of Ukraine and a discussion about the Cold War and the current U.S.-Russia relationship with distinguished history professor Thomas Schwartz.

You'll find these programs in video, audio and transcript formats, along with more in the series on our website TNWAC.org.

And there's more to come through our partners at the American Council on Germany and the Peoria Area World Affairs Council. On September 22nd, Peoria will host Ambassador Oksana Makarova, Ukraine's ambassador to the United States and former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, John Herbst. Registration is available through our website. You can subscribe to our newsletter on the website to stay up to date on more in the Ukraine series and our other programs.

We're pleased to announce one of our fall programs in the Distinguished Visiting Speaker Series. TNWAC will host Admiral Michael Rogers, retired U.S. Navy four-star, on November 7th and 8th. He is the most recent director of the National Security Agency, the Commander of the United States Cyber Command, and chief Central Security Service. We'll offer a town hall on the evening of November 7th, then a luncheon and panel discussion on the afternoon of November 8th. So save the dates on your calendars. For that important program, we invite businesses and other organizations to contact TNWAC for hosting and sponsorship opportunities for the Admiral Rogers visit.

One last piece of housekeeping. This World Affairs Council is a public service organized by volunteers and made possible by your financial support. Please become a member and make a donation. The Council is in the midst of a transition from a founder led volunteer organization to a new sustainable model of World Affairs Council. Your financial support is essential to the continued availability of these high quality speaker programs and our education outreach to youth. Visit TNWAC.org to give. Thank you.

Now onto our program.

You'll find the biographies for our guests on the website and in the program notes. But let me tell you something about each of our distinguished speakers.

Ambassador John Kornblum has a long record of service in the United States and Europe. Both as a diplomat, as a businessman, is recognized as an eminent expert on U.S.-European political and economic relations, in particular in Central and Eastern Europe. He served as the U.S. Ambassador to Germany from 1997 to 2001. Before that, he occupied a number of high level diplomatic posts, including U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Special Envoy for the Dayton Peace Process. U.S. Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Deputy U.S. Ambassador to NATO and U.S. Minister and Deputy Commandant of Forces in Divided Berlin.

Professor Marieta Velikova was raised in Siberia, in the Soviet Union and came to the United States to pursue her higher education. A new American as of 2019, she holds an MBA in Financial Economics and a Ph.D. in Applied Economics. She teaches economics and international business courses at Belmont University's Jack C. Massey College of Business and is the Belmont Center for International Global Citizenship Director. Professor Velikova served on numerous boards and activities in the community and is currently a member of the Tennessee World Affairs Council Board of Directors.

Dr. Breck Walker, our moderator, is Vice President of the Tennessee World Affairs Council. He received his Ph.D. in diplomatic history from Vanderbilt University in 2007. His dissertation was on the foreign policy of the Carter administration. He taught at Sewanee, the University of the South, and on the University of Virginia's Semester at Sea program in Spring 2013 and fall 2015. He worked as a historian in the Historical Office of the Office of Secretary of Defense from 2013 to 2016 researching and writing a book on early Pentagon cyber policy.

One last note, you can begin entering your questions for our guests in the Zoom Q&A panel and we will get to those after remarks and conversation among our panelists. Let me turn this over to you, and I really look forward to this conversation. This really is a terrific lineup today, and I am sure that you will bring out the most in in our distinguished speakers today.

Breck Walker [00:06:31] Thank you, Pat, and good afternoon, Professor Velikova and Ambassador Kornblum. It's a pleasure to be with you here today and thank you for taking the time to share with us your insights on the situation in Ukraine. So as we all know, Russia, this has gotten a lot of media attention. Russia invaded Ukraine six months ago and a major land war has developed that has devastated parts of Ukraine, killed and wounded thousands on both sides, embroiled and destabilized the world's economies, and it's a war that threatens to provoke a wider conflict. Yesterday was Ukrainian Independence Day, marking the day 31 years ago that Ukraine declared its independence from a Russian dominated Soviet Union.

So it's certainly an appropriate time to reflect on what the war situation is today and where it may be heading. So, Ambassador, starting with you, if I may, please offer any opening remarks you may have on the ebb and flow of the war to date, and then comment, if you would, on the effectiveness of the West's assistance to Ukraine to date and whether you see that assistance continuing at current or higher levels or instead, as with winter coming and Russia able to use energy as a as a lever against its NATO opposition. Do you foresee the West's support diminishing, dwindling over time?

John Kornblum [00:07:56] Thank you, Breck. Those are very good and very probing questions. I would start first, perhaps by noting that this war, which is being fought by

Ukraine, but very strongly supported by the Western alliance in the Western world is nothing new. Russia and Ukraine have fought over their borders and their affiliation for more than 300 years. And in fact, the Ukrainian independence movement dates back at least until the beginning of the 19th century. Russia is an empire. It always has been one. It has the dynamics more of an empire than of a national state. And so when the Cold War ended, I was the Assistant Secretary for European affairs and it was a big task that we all set for ourselves to try and, shall we say, absorb or work with this new kind of Russia, which is no longer seen as an empire in the cooperation with the West and in cooperation with other neighbors also. This has not turned out - it's not our job here to describe all the difficulties, but it hasn't turned out. But I start with this point, because it's - this conflict and this war is not going to be over tomorrow or next week or next month. And in fact, it may continue on in one form or another and maybe with other countries, countries of the Caucasus or countries of Central Asia for some time to come. And so it's very important that we understand what is going on and why we are doing this. That's why I'm very grateful to the World Affairs Council for another opportunity to discuss the issue, because the future of the United States, the future of our industry and technology, but above all the future of our security depends upon working with Russia, not against Russia. There's no question about that. But at the same time, Russia and the West are going to be opponents. You might call them enemies, whatever word you want to use, for some time to come. And this is the reason that the West has, contrary I think probably to Putin's expectations, joined so wholeheartedly and energetically in supporting Ukraine in its fight against the invasion by Russia. If it weren't for the military support and also the economic support and also the spiritual support that the Western countries and particularly the United States have given Ukraine this war would have been over a long time ago. But we are keeping the Ukrainian republic defended, but also alive basically because - not because we have anything against Russia as such, but because we understand that to allow Russia to take over Ukraine would first be a total abandonment of the principles which we agreed with Russia 30 years ago, which I helped to negotiate, but also would mean that Russia would start looking at other territories. That is simply the nature of an empire to try and control the area around it, not to work constructively with its neighbors, but to control them. And so it's very important that we draw a line here and make sure that the Russians understand that the Western world is not going to give up, people who are part of its territories or a country such as Ukraine who aspire to a democratic future. So far, the war has gone much differently than we expected. I think everybody, including probably in the White House in the first weeks of the war, thought Russia would swoop in and take over Ukraine without too much difficulty. But the Russians didn't count on two things. First was the really atrocious capability and preparation of their forces. And secondly, of the tactics and the engagement of the Ukrainian not only military, but Ukrainian society. And so Russia has become very bogged down. The war has already been a total catastrophe for Putin. This morning I read figures which had been, to the extent you could verify them, verified by the United States government, suggesting that Russia has already lost 70 to 80,000 soldiers in this war. Ukraine considers themselves to have lost probably 20 or 25,000. So it's not - it's a one sided thing. But the Russian military is in very bad shape, but it is still much larger, much more well equipped and much more able to move forward than Ukrainians are. And so we're going to see over the next 6 to 12 months, I think, a war which continues, a Western world which continues to support it. But I think, Breck, as you suggested, there are going to be internal political divisions also after Europe experiences a very cold winter coming up now with - I read today that the recommended heating of apartments and houses in the summer and the winter time this year is going to be 65 degrees Fahrenheit. That's pretty cold if you're living in parts of Europe, other parts not so much. So this is going to be a very difficult winter for everybody. But it'll be a winter where the fighting, if we want to call it that, moves away from the battlefield into, if you will, the

public sector of the press, but also into government offices and buildings. There is a continual discussion about if there is some way to find a negotiated settlement to this conflict. Right now, most people in the West don't see it. And in fact, the Russians themselves, they say, don't think that we're going to negotiate with and that we're going to give up what we've gained. So I don't think there's going to be a negotiated settlement, but there may be heightened discussions during the winter when the war is not quite as hot as it is right now. But in any event, I was just reading the European press this morning, Europeans themselves are coming to the understanding that this is not something which is going to be over in six or nine months. It's going to be, if you will, a permanent situation, as was the Cold War. We should forget that the Cold War lasted for 45 years. And when I first joined the Foreign Service in the 1960s, nobody believed that they would ever see the end. And Chancellor Merkel once made that big speech saying, I never thought that I would ever be able to go to the United States because the Cold War was going to be longer than I would live and I would never get out of this East German country. Didn't happen. The Cold War ended quite unexpectedly for some persons. And this war in Ukraine is also going to end perhaps in ways that we don't quite yet understand. But it's going to be a very, very important historical event which will affect the future of Europe, but also affects the future of the world as we know it. Thank you.

Breck Walker [00:15:42] Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. And Pat may have mentioned this at the top of the program, but I just did want to remind the audience that the second half of the program, we will entertain audience questions. And I encourage everyone to to put a question in if you have one that we can direct to our panelists today. Professor Velikova, to continue with you. By most accounts, the economic sanctions imposed by the West have been at least somewhat effective in roiling the Russian economy and creating hardships for the Russian people. In your view, are the sanctions working as intended and will they be at all liable to play a role in pushing Putin to the negotiating table at some point? And I also wondered whether internal dissent in Russia has largely disappeared. And of course, Putin, the Putin regime has squashed a lot of the opposition and seems to have taken a pretty hard line on that. Is this war in some sense strengthening the Putin regime as he is adept at inflaming nationalist impulses? Or if this continues to be a war of attrition, is the Putin regime going to lose support among the Russian people?

Marieta Velikova [00:17:12] Breck, thank you for your question. I'm going to start with your second question and then I will get to the first question about the economic sanctions. So there's support of the public sentiment inside Russia for this invasion, for this conflict, for this war. I think there is a wide spectrum, right? There are people who are basically the main opposition. It's primarily educated intellectuals, middle class. A lot of those people have left the country in the beginning of the invasion. And then there are people who are, you know, I guess, still supporting, who have remained in Russia. But then there are also people who are opposing this war who have remained in Russia. However, they cannot do it just because if they do it, they will lose their job. They will lose. We have seen what has been happening. So there is this new law for 13 years in prison. So I think it's - there is no one answer how do people feel. But I'm going to offer one point here, which is there is a range. There are people who support and there are people who oppose. And a lot of people have asked me, what do Russian people know? How much do they know about this conflict? And I would say, yes, there is state media, which is state media. But there is also still available, there is access to Euronews. There is access to CNN. There is access to BBC. The question is how many people actually choose these channels of information or these mediums to listen to the news. Probably not a lot. Or it's going to be people who maybe already have left. But there is also another moment that I think a lot of people don't account for. You know, there is incredibly close ties between Ukraine and Russia, right?

There are a lot of Ukrainian people who live in Russia. A lot of Russian people who have friends, who have family in Ukraine. So a lot of information that people also get. It's also from their family members, from their relatives, from their friends, from people who they went to college with. And so that's kind of just to give you a little bit of what people know and where do they get this information. There are families who don't speak to each other. There are, you know, relatives who don't speak to each other. So that's what we see today, just information and what you believe and where you stand. But I would say one more thing. Breck, you said you have seen that there internal dissent or there's an increasing support for Putin. And people have asked me how is it that people can support it? And I would say the main answer here is it's not so much in this case about Putin, but I think it is a response by the West. And what I mean by that, immediately as the invasion happened, the entire world turned against Russian people. And when I say Russian people, I have a cousin who has dedicated his life to science, right? He is working on this projects with NASA, with China, with friends and overnight he has devoted his entire life, you know, to this, to science, to innovation and he has been taken off. His basically, his entire life commitment and education just because he is Russian, right? We have so many examples - with athletes, we have so many examples with opera singers or entertainment people. We have examples where the Russian people who live abroad, how they have, what they have felt. And it doesn't matter how I feel and what I believe as a person who is Russian and lives abroad. And there's so many of us all over the world. And I think that response has been what fueled that kind of unity, right? It's like, well, the entire world is against us. We have been canceled as people, as a nation overnight, right? There are universities that canceled Dostoevsky, that canceled the Tolstoy, there are symphonies that have canceled every Russian composer, you know? And for Russian people it's like, there has been that post, right? Like, wow. Like if that's how, you know, your response. There is basically - it's not that there is a choice. There is no choice but stay united as Russian people. So that's one a little bit on how people feel inside Russia, what they know and why maybe their internal support for Putin has surged over this invasion. On the economic sanctions, I think in general, we have so many cases of economic sanctions being imposed on multiple countries all over the world. What economic data shows is economic sanctions are not effective no matter of the time, no matter of the country. Russia is a little bit different case and the difference is that first, Russia has been under sanctions, under economic sanctions since 2014. So there have been eight years that have allowed Russian economy, Russian state to adapt, right? So if it happened in 2014, I think we'll be in a very different shape and the outcomes will be drastically different then in 2022. The second thing, which is different about sanctions, for the first time ever, we have a country and its citizens that have been cut off SWIFT and I think it's not just access to capital markets, which has been done before, but it's basically, you know, your cut off SWIFT as a business, right, as a government, as an individual. So, and that has had an impact and unfortunately, it has had a really tough impact on people who did leave the country in the very beginning, who moved abroad and who found themselves in the situation where, you know, they couldn't access their bank accounts in Russia and their cards were not working. So, that's what is a little bit different. So, where is Russia today six months after the invasion? I think the economy has been very resilient. I think there was an expectation that Russian economy will collapse. It hasn't happened. Is the economy affected? Absolutely. Are people affected? Absolutely. But in different ways. Primarily people like what has - you know, I even shared earlier with Pat and with Breck like I did, you know, I have a family chat with 30 plus members and I asked them that question and I constantly talk to them. People who have been leaving, you know, who don't go abroad, right? Who, you know, have their job, you know, enjoyed their life. For them, things really haven't changed. Maybe in only the ways it has changed much higher prices on everything. It's not just about imports, it's high prices on everything from your absolutely basic necessities. So

that's the reality, how people are affected. And now the reality is that, you know, we have been the economy that basically is exporting energy, exporting resources and importing a lot of other things. So we have used, we are now got used to, you know, nice things from Italy, nice things from France, nice things from the United States, whether it's electronics, whether it's cars, whether it's, you know, luxury goods. And now it's a little bit different, right? So, and it's not just we're talking not about today, but about going into the future. People who have been able to study abroad, who have been able to go abroad for a vacation, now that is no longer a reality. They can go to some, they cannot go to others. The restrictions on using their cards and access to their resources. However, Russians are resilient. We have been through five crises in the last 25 years, right? We can suffer like no one else in the world. And I say because I've been there in the 90s and I've seen the collapse of the economy in 1991. I've been there in '97, '98 when financial crisis in Asia affected Russia and the first default happened. You know, people are resilient, right? We have historic - we have history. We have historic memory and we just adapt, right? For us, it's not like it's a calamity. It's like it's another crisis so let's get used to it. And people are just, you know, carrying on, you know, they are, you know, you know, they're like, we just going to, you know, kind of tighten our belts and get through this just like we got through so many other things. If you look at a lot of economic indicators and I use them only from not Russian data but economies, a lot of studies by JP Morgan, you know. So what we see is they have record current account surplus and it's all energy exports, natural gas, oil and the prices we see today on energy, we see that their economic activity actually declined only by 1.8% as of June. So there has been a decline. Absolutely. Has it been severe? No. But my last statement here is I have lived in the Soviet Union. And what we do know, that isolation does not create long term prosperity, right? We live in the world where we believe in specialization, where we believe in global markets, right? Where we believe in trade. We believe in foreign direct investment. And for me, as a person who studies economics, who teaches economics, it's incredibly difficult to survive, to prosper, to innovate, to progress being an isolated country. And today, Russia is an isolated country, right? There getting all the goods through the Middle East. They completely pivoted their investment and trade deals to Asia. Yes. But still, you know, I cannot see even like as of today they have weathered it for the most part. They are resilient in the economy. And then a big part is now relocated towards supporting the army. But for the most part, you know, people are still like it hasn't been a calamity. But what it would be like in five years? In ten years, right? Like for the children of my brother who lives there. So that's, I think, a different question.

Breck Walker [00:28:19] Well, thank you. Thank you. John, let me turn to you again and ask just a touch of a hypothetical, but I think it's a hypothetical that Western leaders must be asking themselves when they're thinking about how this ends. But if it ends with a settlement where Russia expands its territorial influence in some way, like NATO agrees not to bring Ukraine into NATO or Russia gets recognized influence over eastern Ukraine, something of that sort. I'm wondering what would be the impact in geopolitical terms? Does Putin become a more influential player on the international stage? Does it strengthen his - does it strengthen the credibility of his regime at home and abroad? Does NATO stay unified in opposing any further Russian expansion? Do things go back to normal? Does the West return to more normal diplomatic and economic relations with Russia? So, I guess I'm asking if there was a settlement, what would happen and how should the West think about that and devising a game plan for trying to bring this to an end at some point?

John Kornblum [00:29:27] Well, the West is not devising any plan to bring aid to an end. I was in a discussion with groups in Washington yesterday and I follow the European press very closely. There is nobody who is in any way interested in finding a negotiated

settlement to this problem right now. And so that doesn't mean there won't be at some time. But right now, it's not an issue. And it's not an issue, I think for two reasons. For us, because of the great heroes, heroism of the Ukrainian people have made a very clear example of what being a free country means. And secondly, because the Russians have been an unpleasant partner for some time, and I could give a quite a different view of Russia than Miss Velikova has given, but that's not a subject here. But the fact is that Russia was given a very strong start by the West. Sometimes we forget that the West, that means the United States and Western Europe contributed billions of dollars in humanitarian aid to Russia. The Russians didn't survive these problems in the 1990s by themselves. They survived on the basis of tremendously large amounts of economic aid. I was working on these issues from 1990 through to 2001, and never once did we try to push Russia into a corner or try to undermine Russia. There were dynamics in Russian society which are simply there and which are not positive ones. And ones we have to learn to live with again in the future. And that's the thing that the political leaders are trying to figure out right now. And also scholars are trying to figure out, how we deal with a society which seems to have so much self rejection and so much anger about its neighbors that they can't ever be a partner. That's going to be the problem. The Ukrainian issue is a very major one. But don't forget, we have had the so-called frozen conflicts in Russia, the Russian border in Georgia, and Karabakh in the so-called left bank of the Dnieper river and other places which began before Putin even thought of being in office. These frozen conflicts began in 1992, 93. And the Russians were occupying portions of Georgian already in 1993, 94. So this is not something which is new. It's not something also which is a disaster or the West knows how to deal with this. Well, it's a real disaster, this big one quite on the economic side. I think that Marieta is right that the Russians know how to survive these things. But in 1912, let's go back to 1912. Russia produced more steel than any other country in the world. Russia was on its way to becoming an industrial powerhouse. The Soviet Union killed that. Then in 1990, again, Russia was given lots of support to become a big economic power also. Russia has chosen not to do that. Russia is now a totally isolated country. It's missing the digital revolution. It's missing everything dealing with climate change. And so we're going to have a long term issue with Russia. How do we bring Russia back into the normal society, as you mentioned? But if that include another frozen conflict, this time in Ukraine, then it's not going to be successful. And so that's the challenge being faced here is really a major one.

Breck Walker [00:33:21] Well, thank you. Well, Marietta, let me follow up on John's remarks with a question for you, and then we'll open it up for the audience questions. But if John's correct, and this does turn out to be a continuing unsettled war of attrition over many months, if not years, how does the Russian, how do the Russian people react to that in terms of support for the current regime? And do you have any thoughts on how Putin himself might deal with that from a tactical or strategic standpoint? An ongoing, unsettled hot war?.

Marieta Velikova [00:34:00] I think one thing I would like to say is, I think, like what we see today in the world. Right? We see a clear division. Right. That the West has their position in this conflict. But a lot of the rest of the world actually does not share the view of the West. Right. So I think it's not just about Russia. Right. And its place in the world, but even outside of this conflict, there is you know, we have a very different geopolitical situation. Right. Because if you look how many countries in all. And I don't want to use the terminology "take a side." Right. But how many countries do not share the position of the West? Right. And that's a factor. It's not my opinion, you know, it's a fact. So I think we are today in the world where we have a clear division right in the way the West is. Right. And how they approach this, how they think about it politically, geopolitically, economically,

strategically, and where is the rest of the world. And that is not one platform or that is not, you know, one clear united position. So I think if we think about this conflict and I do want to be incredibly clear, you know, I do not believe any human can support any invasion by any country into any territory. Right. A death of any human. But I think in this case, what it means for Russian people. Right. What it means for Putin and you know. As of right now, I think people feel like, first of all, Russia, the Russian mentality, our history, our geography is we believe we need a strong leader, it is just how we are. Right. Just because of the country, because of our history, because of how huge we are and also because of who we are as people. Right. We are not a people who always respect the order of rules. Right. It's you know, it's. It's who we are. So we do need a strong leader. And we need a strong leader, not just for us as a state, as a nation, but also to represent our interest on the global scale. Because Russia. Yes, its economy, you know, it's basically energy. However, because of our location, because of our location, still because of our nuclear arsenal, we are still a player on the global scale. Right. And so people because of that, they even believe that because of that, we need to have even a stronger leader. So as of right now, as of right now, what I see, what I hear. Right. A lot of people possibly cannot believe us invading, killing our neighbor, our relatives, our friends. Right. However, like, who else is there to represent us? Who else is there to defend our interests, our borders, our national state? And we also have a history where we have been invaded by every emperor and empire, you know, by Hitler, by Napoleon, by Ghengis Khan. So we have that history and that's how we think. Right. So it's interesting how, you know, like the West sees us only as an invader and attacker, and rightfully so. But there is another part that we also have been attacked, and therefore we are also very concerned about protecting and securing our borders and our state. So as of right now, I think we don't have a chance. And either we don't have another chance. I apologize. We don't have another choice. Right. But we have to support the leader we have. And I will be I'm very curious about to see what happens during the G20 meeting in Indonesia, where China will be. Xi Jinping will be there. Putin said that he would be there and Indonesia is the host country confirmed. So it will be interesting to see that dialogue and the conversation among the global leaders about this conflict. So and another thing, yes, long term, the reality is very dark for Russia. However, there is also it's not just Russia that is affected by this economic sanctions, but it's the entire world. Right. To a different degree. But Europe to a high degree. Right. Because of energy dependency. And so and I have family in Europe. Right? I have family, part of my family lives in Bulgaria that do depend on Russia, Russian energy. So that's why it will be interesting to see what happens. But as of right now, I don't see the support for Putin decline. I don't see it declining any time soon. And as I said, it's not so much because of internal because of him, but more of external threats.

Breck Walker [00:39:12] Okay, thanks. We have several questions from the audience, so let's see how many we can get to. First question and I've been talking we've all been talking about, I think, the West perspective and the and the Russian perspective. The first question deals with your thoughts on the Ukrainian perspective. And the question is, if a cease fire in place were proclaimed tomorrow, could Ukraine survive the loss of territory and resources, or would the political implications be too difficult for the Zelensky government to control? I guess another way to ask the question might be is Ukraine interested in a settlement at some point? And John, let's start with you on that, if that's okay.

John Kornblum [00:39:56] There will not be a settlement tomorrow. So that's a theoretical question. I think that if Zelenskyi was convinced or decided that he had to make a solution which included giving territory to Russia, ceding territory to Russia that he would be no longer president. I have, Dr. Velikova has family in Russia. I have tremendous contacts,.

my wife is Ukrainian. Let's not forget that. And I hear a lot of what's going on there. What Putin has made one major accomplishment, and that is to electrify, to solidify, to strengthen Ukrainians sense of their self value and their patriotism. There is not going to be a peaceful settlement to this. That doesn't mean that at some point everybody will be so tired. So that's the way WWI ended, after all. Everybody will be so tired that they just give up and there is some kind of solution. I'm not saying that might not be the case, but not in the next six months or even to a year. Will that be the case? And so Russia is going to have to deal. And I think I mentioned before, I have dealt with Russia almost, not exclusively, but to a considerable extent from the beginning, from the late 1980s through 2000. And I know the people who are doing this. I know that developments took place, and I know how difficult it was to establish democratic institutions in Russia. I understand all this. But this did not happen yesterday. I mentioned the immense amount of economic aid which came from the United States. We had a special office in the State Department which did nothing but coordinate aid to Russia. There were hundreds, maybe even thousands of volunteers, some of them friends of mine, who went from the United States to Russia or some from Germany or France or England to Russia, to help Russia build modern infrastructure. So this is not -- the West has never been against Russia. Who has been against Russia are Russians. And the reason that Putin is behaving the way he is is not just because it looks like right now that the United States is not on his side, but because he knows that if there were a free election -- my wife has been an election monitor in Russia three times and she has got a much different discussion about elections in Russia than you see outside of Russia. If there were ever a free election in Russia, Putin would probably not even survive with his life. So this is not something which is just about Russia and the world. This is about modern democratic society. And I can tell you again, the West went as far as we could go in helping Russia to do this. And in the end, it turned out to be, unfortunately, the same dynamics which I agree exist there, took over and we have what we have. So the opposite to that is that Ukraine is now a modern, patriotic, democratic society, which never felt part of Russia, which never had close relations as we tried to here, and which is very determined to maintain its independence.

Marieta Velikova [00:43:21] Ambassador, with all respect, I think there is, we cannot talk about Ukraine as one.

John Kornblum [00:43:27] Yes, you can. Ukraine is one country. In 1992. Ukraine had a referendum for independence. 95% of the population voted in favor of it. And even in the so-called provinces, which are Russian speaking, the eastern provinces, the vote was 60%. There is a Ukrainian nation. And you don't understand that maybe because you've never cared to understand that. But the fact is there is a very, very strong Ukrainian nation.

Marieta Velikova [00:43:58] Well, I would say eastern Ukraine and western Ukraine, they are very different.

John Kornblum [00:44:03] Yes. That you've been taught that you've been brainwashed to believe that. It is not the case.

Marieta Velikova [00:44:08] Ambassador, I actually have traveled to western Ukraine in 1995 as a 15 year old, and I personally witnessed the hatred that people in western Ukraine have for the Russians.

John Kornblum [00:44:22] Well you see that in the United States too. People don't like each other. But the fact is, Ukraine is fighting as a unified Ukraine. By the way, let's note a small point here, which is historically important. Ukraine has now decided that the second

language in the country, which used to be Russian, is now going to be English. They are now teaching English as a second language. They want nothing to do with Russian.

Marieta Velikova [00:44:52] I will just respectfully agree to disagree.

John Kornblum [00:44:55] Well, we'll see.

Breck Walker [00:44:58] That's why these Podcast are interesting to hear different perspectives on everything. We have another question talking about the West support for Ukraine. And I know we John, you touched on this a little bit at the beginning, but if this becomes an unsettled situation over a long period of time, how likely is it that the West in both of your opinions that the West will continue the levels of support that they have brought to bear today? And, John, maybe you could speak specifically to Germany, because in the beginning of the war, Germany came out very strong for what it was going to do. And it's I mean, at least the press reports are that its efforts, its actual efforts in terms of materials sent to Ukraine and so forth, have not really measured up to what it initially had thought.

John Kornblum [00:45:49] That's right.

Breck Walker [00:45:49] You could talk about, both of you, and Marietta why don't you go first about how you see the West's support, how firm it is going forward, if this turns into a very intermediate to long term situation?

Marieta Velikova [00:46:02] Breck, you know I think if we are, so we all see that right now, the global economy is slowing down. Right. We saw the decline in GDP of the United States in two consecutive quarters. So I think when we see the economy that was booming in 2021 starting to decline in 2022 worldwide. Right. If you look at all the forecasts for global economic growth, or country specific economic growth being a trajectory, a downward trajectory, it creates a question of right allocation of resources and scarcity of resources. We are all battling inflation that we haven't had for a long time. So I think the support will be there. I really firmly believe that support will be there, but I do believe that the support will start dwindling down and simply just because of the economic realities that other countries are facing. Right. Whether it's inflation, whether it's high energy, whether it's, you know, just, you know, not even being able to provide energy to keep people safe and to keep people in a warmth throughout the cold winter. So I think I believe that the support will start dwindling down. And I was in Europe this summer and I had a lot of interesting conversations with people in Italy and they said the position of the United States and the position of Europe is a little bit different because we do not rely, we I mean, the United States on on energy as Europe relies on Russia. Right. It's a very different situation. And so in Italy, people I think were more pro let's negotiate, let's find a solution. Let's end this, right. Then I think United States is in a little bit different position. So at least that's what I've heard, even just talking to people in Europe. They are tired. It's on their land. It's in their geographic proximity. They are the ones who are dealing with all the refugees whom they have to absorb, whom they have to house, for whom they have to provide. And what Europe has been doing, and I know it from even like my aunt who said I've never seen Europe do what they did right. It wasn't response to Afghanistan refugees was quite different. Right. But the response to Ukrainian refugees, it was day and night. But at the end of the day, as economic recession hits, you know, then those questions become a little bit, I guess you can see them in in a different way. So I see resources start dwindling. That's my personal position. And I think there will be more countries and parties and stakeholders being more determined, let's find a solution. Let's come to the table. Let's

negotiate, because it's not just Russia that is affected by economic sanctions. Every country is affected by the situation, whether it's energy, whether it's food prices, whether it's inflation, whether it's disrupted supply chains. So we're all affected. So therefore, finding a solution, it's not just the stake of Ukraine and Russia. It's really the, and it's the stake of every country in the global economy.

Breck Walker [00:49:27] Right. Well, thank you. Now, John. Is the West going to stay the course and how?

John Kornblum [00:49:33] Well the West will stay the course. But I do agree that it's going to be difficult to maintain levels of support as we've had, we have just run out of money. There's no question about that. And so that means that we have to be intelligent about it. That means that the Ukrainians have to be intelligent about it. But it means also that we have to have the right narrative for what's going on in the world. And so far it's been holding. But you know, again, I'm a veteran of the Cold War. We kept the Cold War going for 45 years. And there were many times when people thought, oh, this is, are we over doing this. You know, what? Does it really matter whether Poland is democratic or not? And the reason that the Cold War was able to be, and the United States, by the way, spent hundreds of billions of dollars defending Western Europe in those years militarily. The reason, one of the reasons, there were two reasons why it continued to be total solidarity on the western side. One of them was that the Soviet Union was so bad, and this is the case with Russia today, too. So there was always something you could point to. You had to be like this. But secondly, that in Europe in particular, the advantages of democracy, the advantages of an open society, which they hadn't had beforehand because World War Two had just come to an end, were quite obvious. And these are the things that we have to now point out, not so much how much money we need to have or whatever, and also not how bad Russia is. We don't need to point out how bad Russia is when they kill people at hospitals in theaters. Over the weekend, a train station was bombed with 150 people killed for no reason whatsoever. That's, that gives us enough motivation right there to keep going. But the really important question is going to be, does the West believe, I agree completely that its economic interests will continue to be served by the kinds of relationships we have? The energy issue is going to be big for Europe, but already most European countries have plans for ending their support for their dependence, rather for Russian oil and gas. So we'll see. This is this is not an easy subject. This is a very difficult subject. And it's very interesting that it has come up now just about exactly 30 years after the end of the Cold War, when we thought that history was over. We find out that history is not over, and the Europeans are coming to terms with their own shall we say naivete about Russia? They thought they really could just trade and they did have dialogue and have cooperation with Russia that it would be okay and they have found out that that's not okay. So it's going to be a very difficult time not making it easy in any way, shape or form. But I think in the end that the attraction of Western society is going to be the one which wins.

Marieta Velikova [00:52:47] Can I just respond to one point. You know, I think this is like it hurts me when people say, oh, Russia is bad, right? I mean, it's such a large country with 160 million people. And is it right to say just like by one sentence, by one word, to characterize, to generalize in such a linear way, a nation?

John Kornblum [00:53:12] Would you like me to repeat it again?

Marieta Velikova [00:53:14] For many...

John Kornblum [00:53:14] Russia is a bad country. It kills people. It kills people in railroad stations, in hospitals. It deports people to its country. It rapes. It maims. It executes. These are things which Western armies have never, ever done in the modern time, ever since World War Two. That is a bad country, Professor. That's a bad country.

Marieta Velikova [00:53:36] When the Iraq invasion happened, does it make every American citizen, right, a bad person or does it make America a bad country?

John Kornblum [00:53:47] These these kinds of arguments, these are called the, "What about that? What about that?" That doesn't work very well when you're dealing with reality. The Russian ability...

Marieta Velikova [00:53:56] But it is a reality, right? It's not a theory. I'm saying there was in fact, there was invasion by the United States of Iraq. Also a sovereign country, sovereign territory on a very false pretense.

John Kornblum [00:54:11] No, Iraq, which had invaded and taken over the Republic of Kuwait that had been exporting terrorism. The difference between Ukraine and Iraq has nothing, there's not even even the smallest bit of cooperation or coordination.

Breck Walker [00:54:29] I don't mean to interrupt, but we have about 5 minutes left. And I have a couple of other questions, at least one that I'd like to get in front of both of you all, if that's okay. And again, there have been several commentaries recently suggesting that at least Europe and Germany in particular, are -- they want, they don't want Russia to win, but they don't want Ukraine to win, because if Ukraine starts winning in a serious military way, it raises the risk that Russia does things that might bring NATO countries directly into the conflict. I'm just curious whether you all think that is a concern of the European countries and does affect the kind of the level of support that they might give Ukraine or not?

John Kornblum [00:55:15] I don't think so. That's an issue. But of course, the bigger issue is if Putin were to win, what would be the fate of the Balkan states, the Baltic states and Georgia, the Republic of Georgia? I spent several years in the Republic of Georgia. They are at the moment petrified at the thought of what Russia might do. So, you know, it's six of one, half a dozen of the other. You just don't know. There is nothing that can be predicted in a situation like this. What you can do is base it on your own values, on your own interests and on your own cooperation. And if that works, good. But if it doesn't work, you have to try something else. But I don't think that I really believe that contrary to what Professor Velikova says, Ukraine is a nation and it's going to it's becoming a nation even more than it was before with the help of Vladimir Putin. So this is going to be the important thing for the West is going to be. Do we give a sense that we are abandoning this nation, which is fighting for democracy? Or do we not? And that's so far that's what that explanation has been quite successful.

Breck Walker [00:56:25] Okay. Thank you for that. And Marietaf let me ask you then, how do you assess the risk of this conflict between Russia and Ukraine widening and bringing in other Western nations or it becomes not localized. How do you assess the risk of that happening?

Marieta Velikova [00:56:44] You know, I really think that at this point, right. I think with the direct threat of global recession, with continuous inflation, with high energy prices, high food prices, I think at this point, I think countries and different stakeholders are going to be

more determined to actually find a solution. And I think a sign of it and evidence to that is that Putin is going to be at the G-20 meeting. Right. We don't know what will come out of it. Xi Jinping is going to be there. I think to me, the fact that Western leaders even agreed to be in the same room with Putin, that agreed to at least have a conversation or to be open to a conversation. It's a sign or evidence to the fact that the only way we can find, you know, solution. A way to to end this atrocious conflict is if we sit down and talk. Right, there is no other end. And so the reality is that we don't want to expand it more than what it is because it's already has affected. You know, so let's actually try to find a solution and let's talk. That's it. Maybe I'm naive, you know, but the fact that ... I'll be very curious to see what comes out of G20. And it might be a total failure and it might lead to nothing. Right. But at least I'm still hopeful in the power of dialogue and conversation among the global leaders, because they all have a responsibility. Every single one of them has a responsibility. Right.

Breck Walker [00:58:40] Well, thank you. We've had over 100 listeners to this panel discussion. So you have really drawn quite a crowd. And thank you for your time today. I wish we could go on further because this has been a terrifically interesting conversation, presenting different perspectives. I need to turn it over to Pat for his concluding remarks, and let me just say thank you, John, and thank you, Marietta, for for a very interesting and heartfelt discussion on all sides. So, Pat, I'll turn it back to you, if that's okay.

Patrick Ryan [00:59:14] Okay. Breck and Dr. Velikova and Ambassador Kornblum, thank you for a stimulating conversation on the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the consequences for Europe and the world. These are the important conversations that we need to have at the World Affairs Council, and we're pleased to be the convener of discussions of this nature on global affairs awareness. Thank you all for joining us today. You'll be able to find this video program on our archives at [YouTube.com/TNWAC](https://www.youtube.com/TNWAC) as well as on a podcast in the "Global Tennessee" series. You can get that wherever your Podcasts are, iTunes, etc.. And we'll have a transcript posted on [TNWAC.org](https://www.TNWAC.org) for you in a couple of days. Make sure you subscribe to our newsletter. You can go to our home page to subscribe and you'll get notifications when those are available for your reference. Thanks again to our partners in this series, the American Council on Germany, the World Affairs Council of Harrisburg and the World Affairs Councils of America. And look for our next program on September 22nd with the Ukraine Ambassador to the U.S. and a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine. And that will be hosted by our friends at the Peoria Area World Affairs Council. And you can register for that on our website. And mark your calendar for programs on November 7th and 8th with Admiral Mike Rogers, former director of the National Security Agency and the chief of the U.S. Cyber Command. Now, please become a member and make a donation through our website to the World Affairs Council. Your World Affairs Council brings you these programs only because the support we get from you. Thanks again, Ambassador John Kornblum, Professor Marieta Velikova and Dr. Breck Walker. Everyone, have a good day. We're adjourned.

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