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John J. Mearsheimer

This is the full text of a [speech](#) given on June 16 by John J. Mearsheimer at the European Union Institute (EUI) and [published](#) by The National Interest under the headline "The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine Crisis." Mearsheimer is the R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. As part of a [debate package](#) on the West's role in the Ukraine crisis, we have also published a [response](#) to Mearsheimer's comments by national security expert Joe Cirincione.

The war in Ukraine is a multi-dimensional disaster, which is likely to get much worse in the foreseeable future. When a war is successful, little attention is paid to its causes, but when the outcome is disastrous, understanding how it happened becomes paramount. People want to know: how did we get into this terrible situation?

I have witnessed this phenomenon twice in my lifetime—first with the Vietnam war and second with the Iraq war. In both cases, Americans wanted to know how their country could have miscalculated so badly. Given that the United States and its NATO allies played a crucial role in the events that led to the Ukraine war—and are now playing a central role in the conduct of that war—it is appropriate to evaluate the West's responsibility for this calamity.

I will make two main arguments today.

First, the United States is principally responsible for causing the Ukraine crisis. This is not to deny that Putin started the war and that he is responsible for Russia's conduct of the war. Nor is it to deny that America's allies bear some responsibility, but they largely follow Washington's lead on Ukraine. My central claim is that the United States has pushed forward policies toward Ukraine that Putin and other Russian leaders see as an existential threat, a point they have made repeatedly for many years. Specifically, I am talking about America's obsession with bringing Ukraine into NATO and making it a Western bulwark on Russia's border. The Biden administration was unwilling to eliminate that threat through diplomacy and indeed in 2021 recommitted the United States to bringing Ukraine into NATO. Putin responded by invading Ukraine on Feb. 24 of this year.

Second, the Biden administration has reacted to the outbreak of war by doubling down against Russia. Washington and its Western allies are committed to decisively defeating Russia in Ukraine and employing comprehensive sanctions to greatly weaken Russian power. The United States is not seriously interested in finding a diplomatic solution to the war, which means the war is likely to drag on for months if not years. In the process, Ukraine, which has already suffered grievously, is going to experience even greater harm. In essence, the United States is helping lead Ukraine down the primrose path. Furthermore, there is a danger that the war will escalate, as NATO might get dragged into the fighting and nuclear weapons might be used. We are living in perilous times.

Let me now lay out my argument in greater detail, starting with a description of the conventional wisdom about the causes of the Ukraine conflict.

The Conventional Wisdom

It is widely and firmly believed in the West that Putin is solely responsible for causing the Ukraine crisis and certainly the ongoing war. He is said to have imperial ambitions, which is to say he is bent on conquering Ukraine and other countries as well—all for the purpose of creating a greater Russia that bears some resemblance to the former Soviet Union. In other words, Ukraine is Putin’s first target, but not his last. As one scholar [put it](#), he is “acting on a sinister, long-held goal: to erase Ukraine from the map of the world.” Given Putin’s purported goals, it makes perfect sense for Finland and Sweden to join NATO and for the alliance to increase its force levels in eastern Europe. Imperial Russia, after all, must be contained.

While this narrative is repeated over and over in the mainstream media and by virtually every Western leader, there is no evidence to support it. To the extent that purveyors of the conventional wisdom provide evidence, it has little if any bearing on Putin’s motives for invading Ukraine. For example, some emphasize that he said that Ukraine is an “[artificial state](#)” or not a “real state.” Such opaque comments, however, say nothing about his reason for going to war. The same is true of Putin’s statement that he views Russians and Ukrainians as “[one people](#)” with a common history. Others point out that he [called](#) the collapse of the Soviet Union “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.” Of course, Putin also [said](#), “Whoever does not miss the Soviet Union has no heart. Whoever wants it back has no brain.” Still, others point to a [speech](#) in which he declared that “Modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia.” But as he went on to say in that very same speech, in reference to Ukraine’s independence today: “Of course, we cannot change past events, but we must at least admit them openly and honestly.”

To make the case that Putin was bent on conquering all of Ukraine and incorporating it into Russia, it is necessary to provide evidence that first, he thought it was a desirable goal, that second, he thought it was a feasible goal, and third, he intended to pursue that goal. There is no evidence in the public record that Putin was contemplating, much less intending to put an end to Ukraine as an independent state and make it part of greater Russia when he sent his troops into Ukraine on February 24th.

In fact, there is significant evidence that Putin recognized Ukraine as an independent country. In his July 12, 2021, [article](#) about Russian-Ukrainian relations, which proponents of the conventional wisdom often point to as evidence of his imperial ambitions, he tells the Ukrainian people, “You want to establish a state of your own: you are welcome!” Regarding how Russia should treat Ukraine, he writes, “There is only one answer: with respect.” He concludes that lengthy article with the following words: “And what Ukraine will be—it is up to its citizens to decide.” It is hard to reconcile these statements with the claim that he wants to incorporate Ukraine within a greater Russia.

In that same July 12, 2021, [article](#) and again in an important speech he gave on February 21st of this year, Putin emphasized that Russia accepts “the new geopolitical reality that took shape after the dissolution of the USSR.” He reiterated that same point for a third time on February 24th, when he [announced](#) that Russia would invade Ukraine. In particular, he declared that “It is not our plan to occupy Ukrainian territory” and made it clear that he

respected Ukrainian sovereignty, but only up to a point: “Russia cannot feel safe, develop, and exist while facing a permanent threat from the territory of today’s Ukraine.” In essence, Putin was not interested in making Ukraine a part of Russia; he was interested in making sure it did not become a “[springboard](#)” for Western aggression against Russia, a subject I will say more about shortly.

One might argue that Putin was lying about his motives, that he was attempting to disguise his imperial ambitions. As it turns out, I have written a book about lying in international politics—*Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics*—and it is clear to me that Putin was not lying. For starters, one of my principal findings is that leaders do not lie much to each other; they lie more often to their own publics. Regarding Putin, whatever one thinks of him, he does not have a history of lying to other leaders. Although some [assert](#) that he frequently lies and cannot be trusted, there is little evidence of him lying to foreign audiences. Moreover, he has publicly spelled out his thinking about Ukraine on numerous occasions over the past two years and he has consistently emphasized that his principal concern is Ukraine’s relations with the West, especially NATO. He has never once hinted that he wants to make Ukraine part of Russia. If this behavior is all part of a giant deception campaign, it would be without precedent in recorded history.

Perhaps the best indicator that Putin is not bent on conquering and absorbing Ukraine is the military strategy Moscow has employed from the start of the campaign. The Russian military did not attempt to conquer all of Ukraine. That would have required a classic blitzkrieg strategy that aimed at quickly overrunning all of Ukraine with armored forces supported by tactical airpower. That strategy was not feasible, however, because there were only 190,000 soldiers in Russia’s invading army, which is far too small a force to vanquish and occupy Ukraine, which is not only the largest country between the Atlantic Ocean and Russia, but also has a population over 40 million. Unsurprisingly, the Russians pursued a limited aims strategy, which focused on either capturing or threatening Kiev and conquering a large swath of territory in eastern and southern Ukraine. In short, Russia did not have the capability to subdue all of Ukraine, much less conquer other countries in eastern Europe.

As Ramzy Mardini observed, another telling indicator of Putin’s limited aims is that there is no evidence Russia was preparing a puppet government for Ukraine, cultivating pro-Russian leaders in Kyiv, or pursuing any political measures that would make it possible to occupy the entire country and eventually integrate it into Russia.

To take this argument a step further, Putin and other Russian leaders surely understand from the Cold War that occupying counties in the age of nationalism is invariably a prescription for never-ending trouble. The Soviet experience in Afghanistan is a glaring example of this phenomenon, but more relevant for the issue at hand is Moscow’s relations with its allies in eastern Europe. The Soviet Union maintained a huge military presence in that region and was involved in the politics of almost every country located there. Those allies, however, were a frequent thorn in Moscow’s side. The Soviet Union put down a major insurrection in East Germany in 1953, and then invaded Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 to keep them in line. There was serious trouble in Poland in 1956, 1970, and again in 1980-1981. Although Polish authorities dealt with these events, they served as a reminder that intervention might be necessary. Albania, Romania, and Yugoslavia routinely caused Moscow trouble, but Soviet leaders tended to tolerate their misbehavior, because their location made them less important for deterring NATO.

What about contemporary Ukraine? It is obvious from Putin's July 12, 2021, essay that he understood at that time that Ukrainian nationalism is a powerful force and that the civil war in the Donbass, which had been going on since 2014, had done much to poison relations between Russia and Ukraine. He surely knew that Russia's invasion force would not be welcomed with open arms by Ukrainians, and that it would be a Herculean task for Russia to subjugate Ukraine if it had the necessary forces to conquer the entire country, which it did not.

Finally, it is worth noting that hardly anyone made the argument that Putin had imperial ambitions from the time he took the reins of power in 2000 until the Ukraine crisis first broke out on February 22, 2014. In fact, the Russian leader was an invited guest to the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest where the alliance announced that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually become members. Putin's opposition to that announcement had hardly any effect on Washington because Russia was judged to be too weak to stop further NATO enlargement, just as it had been too weak to stop the 1999 and 2004 waves of expansion.

Relatedly, it is important to note that NATO expansion before February 2014 was not aimed at containing Russia. Given the sad state of Russian military power, Moscow was in no position to pursue revanchist policies in eastern Europe. Tellingly, former U.S. ambassador to Moscow Michael McFaul [notes](#) that Putin's seizure of the Crimea was not planned before the crisis broke out in 2014; it was an impulsive move in response to the coup that overthrew Ukraine's pro-Russian leader. In short NATO enlargement was not intended to contain a Russian threat but was instead part of a broader policy to spread the liberal international order into eastern Europe and make the entire continent look like western Europe.

It was only when the Ukraine crisis broke out in February 2014 that the United States and its allies suddenly began describing Putin as a dangerous leader with imperial ambitions and Russia as a serious military threat that had to be contained. What caused this shift? This new rhetoric was designed to serve one essential purpose: to enable the West to blame Putin for the outbreak of trouble in Ukraine. And now that the crisis has turned into a full-scale war, it is imperative to make sure he alone is blamed for this disastrous turn of events. This blame game explains why Putin is now widely portrayed as an imperialist here in the West, even though there is hardly any evidence to support that perspective.

Let me now turn to the real cause of the Ukraine crisis.

The Real Cause of the Trouble

The taproot of the crisis is the American-led effort to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia's borders. That strategy has three prongs: integrating Ukraine into the EU, turning Ukraine into a pro-Western liberal democracy, and most importantly, incorporating Ukraine into NATO. The strategy was set in motion at NATO's annual summit in Bucharest in April 2008, when the alliance [announced](#) that Ukraine and Georgia "will become members." Russian leaders responded immediately with outrage, making it clear that they saw this decision as an existential threat, and they had no intention of letting either country join NATO. According to a respected Russian journalist, Putin "[flew into a rage](#)," and warned that "if Ukraine joins NATO, it will do so without Crimea and the eastern regions. It will simply fall apart."

William Burns, who is now the head of the CIA, but was the US ambassador to Moscow at the time of the Bucharest summit, wrote a memo to then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that succinctly describes Russian thinking about this matter. In his words: “Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all red lines for the Russian elite (not just Putin). In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players, from knuckle-draggers in the dark recesses of the Kremlin to Putin’s sharpest liberal critics, I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests.” NATO, he said, “would be seen ... as throwing down the strategic gauntlet. Today’s Russia will respond. Russian-Ukrainian relations will go into a deep freeze...It will create fertile soil for Russian meddling in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.”

Burns, of course, was not the only policymaker who understood that bringing Ukraine into NATO was fraught with danger. Indeed, at the Bucharest Summit, both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy [opposed](#) moving forward on NATO membership for Ukraine because they understood it would alarm and anger Russia. Merkel recently [explained](#) her opposition: “I was very sure ... that Putin is not going to just let that happen. From his perspective, that would be a declaration of war.”

The Bush administration, however, cared little about Moscow’s “brightest of red lines” and pressured the French and German leaders to agree to issuing a public pronouncement declaring that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually join the alliance.

Unsurprisingly, the American-led effort to integrate Georgia into NATO resulted in a war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008—four months after the Bucharest summit. Nevertheless, the United States and its allies continued moving forward with their plans to make Ukraine a Western bastion on Russia’s borders. These efforts eventually sparked a major crisis in February 2014, after a US-supported uprising caused Ukraine’s pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich to flee the country. He was replaced by pro-American Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk. In response, Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine and helped fuel a civil war between pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian government in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine.

One often hears the argument that in the eight years between when the crisis broke out in February 2014 and when the war began in February 2022, the United States and its allies paid little attention to bringing Ukraine into NATO. In effect, the issue had been taken off the table, and thus NATO enlargement could not have been an important cause of the escalating crisis in 2021 and the subsequent outbreak of war earlier this year. This line of argument is false. In fact, the Western response to the events of 2014 was to double down on the existing strategy and draw Ukraine even closer to NATO. The alliance began [training](#) the Ukrainian military in 2014, averaging 10,000 trained troops annually over the next eight years. In December 2017, the Trump administration decided to [provide Kyiv](#) with “defensive weapons.” Other NATO countries soon got into the act, shipping even more weapons to Ukraine.

Ukraine’s military also began participating in joint military exercises with NATO forces. In July 2021, Kyiv and Washington co-hosted [Operation Sea Breeze](#), a naval exercise in the Black Sea that included navies from 31 countries and was directly aimed at Russia. Two months later in September 2021, the Ukrainian army led Rapid Trident 21, which the U.S. Army [described](#) as an “annual exercise designed to enhance interoperability among allied and partner nations, to demonstrate units are poised and ready to respond to any crisis.” NATO’s

effort to arm and train Ukraine's military explains in good part why it has fared so well against Russian forces in the ongoing war. As a headline in *The Wall Street Journal* [put it](#), "The Secret of Ukraine's Military Success: Years of NATO Training."

In addition to NATO's ongoing efforts to make the Ukrainian military a more formidable fighting force, the politics surrounding Ukraine's membership in NATO and its integration into the West changed in 2021. There was renewed enthusiasm for pursuing those goals in both Kyiv and Washington. President Zelensky, who had never shown much enthusiasm for bringing Ukraine into NATO and who was elected in March 2019 on a platform that called for working with Russia to settle the ongoing crisis, reversed course in early 2021 and not only embraced NATO expansion but also adopted a hardline approach toward Moscow. He made a series of moves—including shutting down pro-Russian TV stations and charging a close friend of Putin with treason—that were sure to anger Moscow.

President Biden, who moved into the White House in January 2021, had long been [committed](#) to bringing Ukraine into NATO and was also super-hawkish toward Russia. Unsurprisingly, on June 14, 2021, NATO [issued](#) the following communiqué at its annual summit in Brussels:

We reiterate the decision made at the 2008 Bucharest Summit that Ukraine will become a member of the Alliance with the Membership Action Plan (MAP) as an integral part of the process; we reaffirm all elements of that decision, as well as subsequent decisions, including that each partner will be judged on its own merits. We stand firm in our support for Ukraine's right to decide its own future and foreign policy course free from outside interference.

On September 1, 2021, Zelensky visited the White House, where Biden [made it clear](#) that the United States was "firmly committed" to "Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations." Then on November 10, 2021, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, [signed](#) an important document—the "US-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership." The aim of both parties, the document stated, is to "underscore ... a commitment to Ukraine's implementation of the deep and comprehensive reforms necessary for full integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions." That document explicitly builds not just on "the commitments made to strengthen the Ukraine-U.S. strategic partnership by Presidents Zelensky and Biden," but also reaffirms the U.S. commitment to the "2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration."

In short, there is little doubt that starting in early 2021 Ukraine began moving rapidly toward joining NATO. Even so, some supporters of this policy [argue](#) that Moscow should not have been concerned, because "NATO is a defensive alliance and poses no threat to Russia." But that is not how Putin and other Russian leaders think about NATO and it is what they think that matters. There is no question that Ukraine joining NATO remained the "brightest of red lines" for Moscow.

To deal with this growing threat, Putin stationed ever-increasing numbers of Russian troops on Ukraine's border between February 2021 and February 2022. His aim was to coerce Biden and Zelensky into altering course and halting their efforts to integrate Ukraine into the West. On December 17, 2021, Moscow sent separate letters to the Biden administration and NATO [demanding](#) a written guarantee that: 1) Ukraine would not join NATO, 2) no

offensive weapons would be stationed near Russia's borders, and 3) NATO troops and equipment moved into eastern Europe since 1997 would be moved back to western Europe.

Putin made numerous public statements during this period that left no doubt that he viewed NATO expansion into Ukraine as an existential threat. Speaking to the Defense Ministry Board on December 21, 2021, he [stated](#): “what they are doing, or trying or planning to do in Ukraine, is not happening thousands of kilometers away from our national border. It is on the doorstep of our house. They must understand that we simply have nowhere further to retreat to. Do they really think we do not see these threats? Or do they think that we will just stand idly watching threats to Russia emerge?” Two months later at a press conference on February 22, 2022, just days before the war started, Putin said: “We are categorically opposed to Ukraine joining NATO because this poses a threat to us, and we have arguments to support this. I have repeatedly spoken about it in this hall.” He then made it clear that he recognized that Ukraine was becoming a de facto member of NATO. The United States and its allies, he said, “continue to pump the current Kiev authorities full of modern types of weapons.” He went on to [say](#) that if this was not stopped, Moscow “would be left with an ‘anti-Russia’ armed to the teeth. This is totally unacceptable.”

Putin's logic should make perfect sense to Americans, who have long been committed to the Monroe Doctrine, which stipulates that no distant great power is allowed to place any of its military forces in the Western Hemisphere.

I might note that in all of Putin's public statements during the months leading up to the war, there is not a scintilla of evidence that he was contemplating conquering Ukraine and making it part of Russia, much less attacking additional countries in eastern Europe. Other Russian leaders—including the defense minister, the foreign minister, the deputy foreign minister, and the Russian ambassador to Washington—also emphasized the centrality of NATO expansion for causing the Ukraine crisis. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made the point succinctly at a press conference on January 14, 2022, when he [said](#), “the key to everything is the guarantee that NATO will not expand eastward.”

Nevertheless, the efforts of Lavrov and Putin to get the United States and its allies to abandon their efforts to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia's border failed completely. Secretary of State Antony Blinken [responded](#) to Russia's mid-December demands by simply saying, “There is no change. There will be no change.” Putin then launched an invasion of Ukraine to eliminate the threat he saw from NATO.

Where Are We Now & Where Are We Going?

The Ukraine war has been raging for almost four months I would like to now offer some observations about what has happened so far and where the war might be headed. I will address three specific issues: 1) the consequences of the war for Ukraine; 2) the prospects for escalation—to include nuclear escalation; and 3) the prospects for ending the war in the foreseeable future.

This war is an unmitigated disaster for Ukraine. As I noted earlier, Putin made it clear in 2008 that Russia would wreck Ukraine to prevent it from joining NATO. He is delivering on that promise. Russian forces have conquered 20 percent of Ukrainian territory and destroyed or badly damaged many Ukrainian cities and towns. More than 6.5 million Ukrainians [have fled](#) the country, while more than 8 million have been internally displaced. Many thousands

of Ukrainians—including innocent civilians—are dead or badly wounded and the Ukrainian economy is [in shambles](#). The World Bank estimates that Ukraine's economy will shrink by almost 50 percent over the course of 2022. Estimates are that approximately 100 billion dollars' worth of damage has been inflicted on Ukraine and that it will take close to a trillion dollars to rebuild the country. In the meantime, Kyiv requires about \$5 billion of aid every month just to keep the government running.

Furthermore, there appears to be little hope that Ukraine will be able to regain use of its ports on the Azov and Black Seas anytime soon. Before the war, roughly 70 percent of all Ukrainian exports and imports—and 98 percent of its grain exports—[moved through these ports](#). This is the basic situation after less than 4 months of fighting. It is downright scary to contemplate what Ukraine will look like if this war drags on for a few more years.

So, what are the prospects for negotiating a peace agreement and ending the war in the next few months? I am sorry to say that I see no way this war ends anytime soon, a view shared by prominent policymakers like General Mark Milley, the Chairman of the JCS, and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. The main reason for my pessimism is that both Russia and the United States are deeply committed to winning the war and it is impossible to fashion an agreement where both sides win. To be more specific, the key to a settlement from Russia's perspective is making Ukraine a neutral state, ending the prospect of integrating Kyiv into the West. But that outcome is unacceptable to the Biden administration and a large portion of the American foreign policy establishment, because it would represent a victory for Russia.

Ukrainian leaders have agency of course, and one might hope that they will push for neutralization to spare their country further harm. Indeed, Zelensky briefly [mentioned](#) this possibility in the early days of the war, but he never seriously pursued it. There is little chance, however, that Kyiv will push for neutralization, because the ultra-nationalists in Ukraine, who wield significant political power, have zero interest in yielding to any of Russia's demands, especially one that dictates Ukraine's political alignment with the outside world. The Biden administration and the countries on NATO's eastern flank—like Poland and the Baltic states—are [likely to support](#) Ukraine's ultra-nationalists on this issue.

To complicate matters further, how does one deal with the large swaths of Ukrainian territory that Russia has conquered since the war started, as well as Crimea's fate? It is hard to imagine Moscow voluntarily giving up any of the Ukrainian territory it now occupies, much less all of it, as Putin's territorial goals today are probably not the same ones he had before the war. At the same time, it is equally hard to imagine any Ukrainian leader accepting a deal that allows Russia to keep any Ukrainian territory, except possibly Crimea. I hope I am wrong, but that is why I see no end in sight to this ruinous war.

Let me now turn to the matter of escalation. It is widely accepted among international relations scholars that there is a powerful tendency for protracted wars to escalate. Over time, other countries can get dragged into the fight and the level of violence is likely to increase. The potential for this happening in the Ukraine war is real. There is a danger that the United States and its NATO allies will get dragged into the fighting, which they have been able to avoid up to this point, even though they are already [waging a proxy war](#) against Russia. There is also the possibility that nuclear weapons might be used in Ukraine and that might even lead to a nuclear exchange between Russia and the United States. The underlying reason these

outcomes might be realized is that the stakes are so high for both sides, and thus neither can afford to lose.

As I have emphasized, Putin and his lieutenants believe that Ukraine joining the West is an existential threat to Russia that must be eliminated. In practical terms, that means Russia must win its war in Ukraine. Defeat is unacceptable. The Biden administration, on the other hand, has stressed that its goal is not only to [decisively defeat Russia](#) in Ukraine, but also to use sanctions to inflict massive damage on the Russian economy. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has emphasized that the West's goal is to weaken Russia to the point where it could not invade Ukraine again. In effect, the Biden administration is committed to knocking Russia out of the ranks of the great powers. At the same time, President Biden himself has [called](#) Russia's war in Ukraine a "genocide" and charged Putin with being a "war criminal" who should face a "war crimes trial" after the war. Such rhetoric hardly lends itself to negotiating an end to the war. After all, how do you negotiate with a genocidal state?

American policy has two significant consequences. For starters, it greatly amplifies the existential threat Moscow faces in this war and makes it more important than ever that it prevails in Ukraine. At the same time, it means the United States is deeply committed to making sure that Russia loses. The Biden administration has now invested so much in the Ukraine war—both materially and rhetorically—that a Russian victory would represent a devastating defeat for Washington.

Obviously, both sides cannot win. Moreover, there is a serious possibility that one side will begin to lose badly. If American policy succeeds and the Russians are losing to the Ukrainians on the battlefield, Putin might turn to nuclear weapons to rescue the situation. The U.S. Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines, [told](#) the Senate Armed Services Committee in May that this was one of the two situations that might lead Putin to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. For those of you who think this is unlikely, please remember that NATO planned to use nuclear weapons in similar circumstances during the Cold War. If Russia were to employ nuclear weapons in Ukraine, it is impossible to say how the Biden administration would react, but it surely would be under great pressure to retaliate, thereby raising the possibility of a great-power nuclear war. There is a perverse paradox at play here: the more successful the United States and its allies are at achieving their goals, the more likely it is that the war will turn nuclear.

Let's turn the tables and ask what happens if the United States and its NATO allies appear to be heading toward defeat, which effectively means that the Russians are routing the Ukrainian military and the government in Kyiv moves to negotiate a peace deal intended to save as much of the country as possible. In that event, there would be great pressure on the United States and its allies to get even more deeply involved in the fighting. It is not likely, but certainly possible that American or maybe Polish troops would get pulled into the fighting, which means NATO would literally be at war with Russia. This is the other scenario, according to Avril Haines, where the Russians might turn to nuclear weapons. It is difficult to say precisely how events will play out if this scenario comes to pass, but there is no question there will be serious potential for escalation, to include nuclear escalation. The mere possibility of that outcome should send shivers down your spine.

There are likely to be other disastrous consequences from this war, which I cannot discuss in any detail because of time constraints. For example, there is reason to think the war will lead to a world food crisis in which many millions of people will die. The president of the World

Bank, David Malpass, [argues](#) that if the Ukraine war continues, we will face a global food crisis that is a “human catastrophe.”

Furthermore, relations between Russia and the West have been so thoroughly poisoned that it will take many years to repair them. In the meantime, that profound hostility will fuel instability around the globe, but especially in Europe. Some will say there is a silver lining: relations among countries in the West have markedly improved because of the Ukraine war. That is true for the moment, but there are deep fissures below the surface, and they are bound to reassert themselves over time. For example, relations between the countries of eastern and western Europe are likely to deteriorate as the war drags on, because their interests and perspectives on the conflict are not the same.

Finally, the conflict is already damaging the global economy in major ways and this situation is likely to get worse with time. Jamie Diamond, the CEO of JPMorgan Chase [says](#) we should brace ourselves for an economic “hurricane.” If he is right, these economic shocks will affect the politics of every Western country, undermine liberal democracy, and strengthen its opponents on both the left and the right. The economic consequences of the Ukraine war will extend to countries all over the planet, not just the West. As The UN put it in a report released just last week: “The ripple effects of the conflict are extending human suffering far beyond its borders. The war, in all its dimensions, has [exacerbated](#) a global cost-of-living crisis unseen in at least a generation, compromising lives, livelihoods, and our aspirations for a better world by 2030.”

Conclusion

Simply put, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine is a colossal disaster, which as I noted at the start of my talk, will lead people all around the world to search for its causes. Those who believe in facts and logic will quickly discover that the United States and its allies are mainly responsible for this train wreck. The April 2008 decision to bring Ukraine and Georgia into NATO was destined to lead to conflict with Russia. The Bush administration was the principal architect of that fateful choice, but the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations have doubled down on that policy at every turn and America’s allies have dutifully followed Washington’s lead. Even though Russian leaders made it perfectly clear that bringing Ukraine into NATO would be crossing “the brightest of red lines,” the United States refused to accommodate Russia’s deepest security concerns and instead moved relentlessly to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia’s border.

The tragic truth is that if the West had not pursued NATO expansion into Ukraine, it is unlikely there would be a war in Ukraine today and Crimea would still be part of Ukraine. In essence, Washington played the central role in leading Ukraine down the path to destruction. History will judge the United States and its allies harshly for their remarkably foolish policy on Ukraine. Thank you.

The causes and consequences of the Ukraine war A lecture by John J. Mearsheimer

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Professor John J. Mearsheimer will discuss the current Russian invasion on Ukraine whilst exploring the potential causes and consequences of the crisis. In this lecture, Prof. Mearsheimer will aim to focus on both the origins of the war in Ukraine and some of its most important consequences. He will argue that the crisis is largely the result of the West's efforts to turn Ukraine into a Western bulwark on Russia's border. Russian leaders viewed that outcome as an existential threat that had to be thwarted. While Vladimir Putin is certainly responsible for invading Ukraine and for Russia's conduct in the war, Prof. Mearsheimer states that he does not believe he is an expansionist bent on creating a greater Russia. Regarding the war's consequences, the greatest danger is that the war will go on for months if not years, and that either NATO will get directly involved in the fighting or nuclear weapons will be used — or both. Furthermore, enormous damage has already been inflicted on Ukraine. A prolonged war is likely to wreak even more devastation on Ukraine. Prof. John J. Mearsheimer is the R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor in the Political Science Department at the University of Chicago. Disclaimer -- The views and opinions expressed in this video are those of the speakers or authors in their personal capacity and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Robert Schuman Centre or the European University Institute. Learn more about the Schuman Centre: <https://bit.ly/3NEAzRI>

3:54

so good afternoon everyone my name is nicola guillo i'm professor of intellectual history

4:00

here at the eui and on behalf of my colleague eric jones director of the robert truman center i would like to

4:06

welcome all of you for this event that we've organized between the history department and the robert truman center

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it's my great pleasure today to introduce our speaker it's a pleasure but it's also a daunting

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task because john mearsheimer does not need an introduction yet he deserves one

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john mesheimer is the roland wendell harrison distinguished service professor of political science at the university

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of chicago an institution where he's taught for nearly four decades prior to that he graduated from the

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u.s military academy in west point after which he joined the air force and then took a phd in political science at

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cornell university now for those of you with a background in international relations theory

4:53

mirsheimer is a household name he is without a doubt one of the towering figures of the discipline

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and probably the most prominent representative of the realist school of international politics

5:05

his 2001 book the tragedy of great power politics is now required reading in any

5:11

introductory class to the discipline and has achieved the canonical status once held maybe by morgenthau's 48 politics

5:19

among nations john has written about security

5:24

concerns realism u.s foreign policy in the middle east deterrence

5:30

the role of lies in international affairs and more recently on the crisis of

5:36

liberal internationalism in his latest book the great delusion published in 2018 by yale university press

5:43

but even if you don't have a background in ir in recent weeks mirsheimer has become a

5:49

familiar name in relation to the discussion of the war in ukraine seven years ago in 2015 john gave a talk

5:57

to an alumni association in chicago on the responsibility of the west

6:03

in triggering the russian invasion of ukraine sadly many of the points he made in that

6:08

talk turned out to be remarkably precise by now this talk has been seen more than

6:14

27 million times this has obviously put john in the

6:19

limelight and it has also earned him a bunch of new critics who have tried sometimes very unfairly

6:25

to put some flack in his fuselage but the fact is that john has never really left the limelight

6:32

and he has a record of being an intellectual irritant to the washington foreign policy establishment

6:38

and the defender of contrarian positions he was one of the signatories

6:43

of the 2002 open letter in the new york times advocating against the decision to go to war in iraq

6:50

he recently defended the withdrawal from afghanistan now you can see why new conservatives

6:56

have never been very well inclined or disposed towards john nesheimer but then in 1994 he was on also the on

7:03

the voice saying that the ukrainians should not give away but keep their nuclear weapons

7:09

now john has always defended his positions out of principle and intellectual discipline something which has earned him many

7:16

accolades and this team of friends and adversaries alike in his devastating critique of american

7:22

foreign policy thinkers in 2017 perry anderson wrote that ir scholars

7:29

are all too often eager to compromise the integrity by offering some veneer of technical

7:34

respectability to whatever policy option is fashionable at the moment but the field also included he added in

7:41

the footnote and now i'm quoting him theorists of distinction whose independence of mind has saved them from

7:47

the temptation of office john mercheimer of chicago is an outstanding example end of quote

7:55

and so the current polemics i think tell us less about john than about the state of public discussion

8:01

when it comes to the war in ukraine an american journalist has recently defined it an intellectual no-fly zone

8:08

we are in a moment in which if you follow the sometimes heated debates on social but also traditional

8:14

media diplomacy has become synonymous with appeasement in which advocating anything short of an

8:20

ill-defined military solution makes you complicit with genocide and in

8:26

which even gesturing towards the possibility that responsibilities may be shared somehow means joining joining an

8:33

extremist fringe that includes not only the ubiquitous noam chomsky but such dangerous fanatics as jeffrey sachs pope

8:40

francis the new york times since the may 19th editorial and possibly now france and germany

8:46

i'm not even getting into the analogies with 1938 that are the intellectual

8:51

equivalent of using a high-grade pepper spray to start a conversation in this context i think it behooves us

8:58

as a public university and even more so as a european public university in which at any given moment

9:04

there's a variety of views on any given topic to uphold the space for serious and engage conversation

9:10

rather than yielding to ambient pressure or worse repeating martial sound bites

9:16

finally beyond legitimate divergences of opinion i want to emphasize what unites us i

9:23

think all of us are here today and i'm sure i know as a fact i can include john in that statement

9:29

that we're here because we are concerned and we care for ukraine but it's precisely because of this

9:34

concern and because this was unjustifiable no matter how you look at it that we ought to give ourselves as much

9:40

intellectual latitude as we can in trying to understand the many causes of that conflict

9:47

and so as to better put an end to its tragic consequences to do this we don't only have a distinguished guest today in the person

9:53

of john mircheimer but eric and i have also asked our good colleague stephanie hoffman who like john teaches ir and

10:00

like john is a cornell phd to offer a few comments to which then john will be

10:06

able to respond after which we'll have a q a with no further ado please join me in

10:11

extending a very warm welcome to professor john mircheimer [Applause]

10:27

just
10:43
can everybody hear me clearly in the rear good if i trail off for one reason
10:49
or another just wave your hands like that
10:54
it's a great pleasure to be here in florence and i greatly appreciate all of you
10:59
coming out to hear me speak i would like to thank my old friend nicholas guiho
11:05
for his most generous introduction and i'd like to thank eric jones and the
11:11
european union institute for inviting me to give this talk
11:16
and i would like to thank stephanie even before she's offered her comments for
11:21
giving those comments and letting me expound on various points
11:26
that i don't fully develop in the talk the war in ukraine is a
11:32
multi-dimensional disaster which is likely to get worse in the
11:37
foreseeable future when a war is successful little attention is paid to its causes
11:45
but when the outcome is disastrous much attention is paid to the origins of
11:51
the conflict people want to know how did we get into this terrible situation
11:57
i have witnessed this phenomenon twice in my lifetime first with the vietnam war and second
12:04
with the iraq war in both cases americans wanted to know
12:09
how did their country miscalculate so badly given that the united states and its
12:16
nato allies played a crucial role in the events that led to the ukraine
12:22
war and are now playing a central role in the conduct of that war
12:28
it's appropriate to evaluate the west's responsibility for this calamity
12:35
i want to make two main arguments today first the united states is principally
12:40
responsible for causing the ukraine crisis this is not to deny that putin
12:47
started the war and that he is responsible for russia's conduct on the battlefield
12:54
nor is it to deny that america's allies bear some responsibility
13:00
but they largely follow washington's lead on ukraine
13:05

my key point however is that the united states pushed forward policies toward
13:11
ukraine that putin and his colleagues see as an existential threat to their country a
13:19
point they have made repeatedly for many years specifically i am talking about
13:26
america's obsession with bringing ukraine into nato
13:32
and making it a western bulwark on russia's border the biden administration was unwilling
13:40
to eliminate that threat through diplomacy and indeed recommitted
13:47
itself to bringing ukraine into nato during 2021.
13:53
putin responded by invading ukraine on february 24th of this year
13:59
second the biden administration has reacted to the outbreak of the war by doubling down
14:06
against russia washington and its western allies are
14:13
committed to decisively defeating russia in ukraine and employing
14:19
comprehensive sanctions to greatly weaken russian power
14:25
the united states is not seriously interested in finding a diplomatic
14:30
solution to the war which means the war is likely to drag on for months if not years
14:38
in the process ukraine which has already suffered grievously is going to
14:44
experience even greater harm in essence the united states and its
14:51
allies are helping lead ukraine down the primrose path
14:57
furthermore there's a danger that the war will escalate as nato might get dragged into the
fighting
15:04
and nuclear weapons might be used we live in perilous times
15:11
let me now lay out my argument in greater detail starting with a description of the
15:17
conventional wisdom about the causes of the conflict
15:22
it is widely and firmly believed in the west that putin is solely responsible for
15:30
causing the ukraine crisis and certainly the ongoing war he is said to have imperial ambitions
15:38
which is to say he is bent on conquering ukraine and other countries as well
15:45
all for the purposes of creating a greater russia that bears at least some resemblance to

15:51
the former soviet union in other words ukraine is putin's first target but not
15:58
his last as one scholar put it recently he is quote acting on a sinister
16:06
long-held belief to erase ukraine from the map of the world
16:12
given putin's purported goals it makes perfect sense for finland and sweden to
16:18
join nato and for the alliance to increase its force levels in eastern
16:24
europe after all imperial russia must be contained
16:30
while this narrative is repeated over and over in the mainstream media and by
16:36
virtually every western leader there is no evidence to support it i
16:43
want to repeat that there is no evidence to support it to the extent that purveyors of the
16:50
conventional wisdom provide evidence it has little if any bearing on putin's
16:57
motives for invading ukraine for example some emphasize that he said that ukraine
17:06
is an artificial state or it is not a real state
17:12
such opaque comments however say nothing about his reason for going to war
17:20
the same is true of putin's statement that he views russians and ukrainians as
17:25
quote unquote one people with a common history
17:31
others point out that he called the collapse of the soviet union quote the greatest
17:37
geopolitical catastrophe of the century of course he also said whoever does not
17:44
miss the soviet union has no heart whoever wants it back has no brain
17:51
still others point out that he said modern ukraine was entirely created by
17:58
russia or to be more precise by bolshevik communist russia end of quote
18:04
but he went on to say in the same speech quote of course we cannot change past
18:11
events but we must at least admit them openly and honestly
18:17
to make the case that putin was bent on conquering all of ukraine and
18:22
incorporating it into russia it is necessary to provide evidence that
18:29
first he thought it was a desirable goal that second he thought it was a feasible

18:37
goal and third he intended to pursue that goal
18:42
there is no evidence let me repeat there is no evidence in the public record that
18:48
putin was contemplating much less intending to put an end to ukraine as an
18:55
independent state and make it part of a greater russia when he sent his troops into ukraine on
19:03
february 24th in fact there is significant evidence
19:08
that putin recognized ukraine as an independent country
19:14
in his july 12 2021 article which i assume many of you have looked at
19:20
about russian ukrainian relations which proponents of the conventional wisdom
19:26
often point to as evidence of his imperial ambitions
19:31
he tells the ukrainian people in that article you want to establish a state of your
19:38
own you are welcome regarding how russia should treat
19:43
ukraine he writes there is only one answer with respect
19:48
he concludes that lengthy article with the following words and what
19:53
ukraine will be it is up to its citizens to decide
19:59
that's not evidence of somebody who's interested in swallowing ukraine and making it part of
russia in that same
20:07
july 12 2021 article and again in an important speech he gave
20:13
on february 21st of this year putin emphasized that russia accepts
20:20
quote the new geopolitical reality that took shape
20:25
after the dissolution of the ussr he reiterated that same point for a
20:32
third time on february 24th when he announced that russia would
20:37
invade ukraine he also made it clear that it is not our
20:43
plan to occupy ukrainian territory and that he respected
20:49
ukrainian sovereignty but only up to a point to be a bit more specific and quote him
20:56
russia cannot feel safe develop and exist while facing a permanent threat
21:03

from the territory of today's ukraine in essence
21:08
putin was not interested in making ukraine part of russia he was interested
21:14
in making it sure making sure it did not become quote unquote a springboard for western
21:22
aggression against russia a subject i will say more about shortly
21:28
one might argue that putin was lying about his motives that he was attempting to disguise his
21:36
imperial ambitions as it turns out i have written a book
21:41
one of the few books about lying in international politics it's entitled why
21:46
leaders lie the truth about lying in international politics and it is clear to me that putin was not
21:54
lying for starters one of my principal findings in the book is that leaders do
22:00
not lie much to each other they lie more often to their own publics
22:07
regarding putin whatever one thinks of him as a human being
22:12
he does not have a history of lying to other leaders although some assert that he frequently
22:19
lies and cannot be trusted there is actually little evidence of him
22:24
lying to foreign audiences moreover he has publicly spelled out his
22:31
thinking about ukraine on numerous occasions over the past two years and he has
22:37
consistently emphasized that his principal concern is ukraine's relations
22:43
with the west especially with regard to nato he has never once hinted
22:51
that he wants to make ukraine part of russia if this behavior is part of a giant
22:58
deception campaign it would be without precedent in recorded history
23:05
perhaps the best indicator that putin is not bent on conquering and absorbing
23:12
ukraine is the military strategy moscow has employed from the start of this
23:17
campaign the russian military did not attempt to
23:23
conquer all of ukraine that would have required a classic blitzkrieg strategy that aimed at
23:31
quickly overrunning all of ukraine with armored forces supported by
23:38
tactical air power that strategy was not feasible however
23:43

because there were only a hundred and ninety thousand soldiers in russia's invading army
which is far too small of
23:52
force to vanquish and occupy ukraine which is not only the largest country
23:58
between the atlantic ocean and russia but also has a population of over 40
24:04
million people you're not going to conquer occupy and absorb a country of that size
24:10
with 190 000 people and you're not even going to have enough troops to launch a classic
blitzkrieg which is
24:18
essential to conquer the entire country unsurprisingly the russians pursued a
24:24
limited aim strategy which focused on either capturing or threatening kiev
24:30
and conquering a large swath of territory in eastern and southern ukraine
24:36
in short russia did not have the capability to subdue all of ukraine much
24:42
less conquer other countries in europe to take this
24:48
argument a step further putin and other russian leaders surely
24:54
understand from the cold war that occupying countries in the age of nationalism is invariably
a prescription
25:03
for never-ending trouble the soviet experience in afghanistan is
25:08
a glaring example of this phenomenon but more relevant for the issue at hand is
25:14
moscow's relations with its allies in eastern europe during the cold war
25:20
the soviet union maintained a huge military presence in that region and was
25:26
involved in the politics of almost every country located there
25:32
those allies however were a frequent thorn in moscow's side
25:37
the soviet union put down a major insurrection in east germany in 1953
25:44
it invaded hungary in 1956 and it then invaded czechoslovakia in
25:51
1968 all for the purpose of keeping those countries in line there was
25:56
serious trouble in poland in 1956 1970 and 1980 to 81.
26:04
although polish authorities dealt with these events they served as a reminder that intervention
might be necessary
26:12

albania romania and yugoslavia routinely caused moscow trouble but
26:19
soviet leaders tended to tolerate their misbehavior because their location made them less
26:26
important for deterring nato what about contemporary ukraine
26:33
it's obvious from putin's july 12 2021 essay his famous essay that he
26:40
understands that ukrainian nationalism is a powerful force
26:45
and that the civil war in the donbass which had been going on
26:50
since 2014 had done much to poison relations between russia and ukraine
26:58
he surely knew that russia's invasion force would not be welcomed with open arms by
ukrainians
27:06
and that it would be a herculean task for russia to subjugate ukraine if it
27:13
had the necessary forces to conquer the entire country
27:18
which it did not have finally it's worth noting that hardly
27:24
anyone made the argument that putin had imperial ambitions
27:29
from the time he first took office in 2000 until the ukraine crisis first broke out
27:37
on february 22 2014 that's 14 years
27:43
nobody made the argument that he had imperial ambitions in his first 14 years
27:49
in office in fact the russian leader was an invited guest to the april 2008
27:57
nato summit in bucharest where the alliance announced that ukraine and
28:02
georgia would eventually become members he was invited to be there
28:10
putin's opposition to that announcement had hardly any effect on
28:18
washington because russia was judged to be too weak
28:23
to stop further enlargement just as it had been too weak to stop the
28:31
1990 tranche of enlargement and just as it had been
28:36
too weak to stop the 2004 tranche of expansion relatedly it's
28:45
important to note that nato expansion before 2014 before the february 2014 crisis was
28:55
not aimed at containing russia given the sad state of russian military

29:01
power moscow was in no position to pursue revenge's policies in eastern
29:08
europe tellingly former u.s ambassador to moscow michael
29:14
mcfaul notes that putin's seizure of crimea
29:19
that was in february 22nd after the february 22 2014 crisis started was not
29:28
planned before the crisis but was an impulsive move in response to the coup
29:34
that overthrew ukraine's pro-russian leader in short nato enlargement was not
29:41
intended to contain a russian threat but was intended
29:46
instead as part of a broader policy to spread the liberal international order
29:53
into eastern europe and make the entire continent look like western europe
29:59
it was only when the ukraine crisis broke out in february 2014
30:05
that the united states and its allies suddenly began describing putin as a
30:11
dangerous leader with imperial ambitions and russia as a serious military threat
30:17
that had to be contained what happened new rhetoric was designed to serve one
30:24
simple purpose to allow the west to blame putin for the
30:29
outbreak of trouble in ukraine and now that the crisis has turned into
30:35
a full-scale war it is imperative to make sure that he
30:40
alone is blamed for this disastrous turn of events
30:45
this blame game explains why putin is widely viewed as an imperialist here in
30:52
the west even though there is hardly any evidence to support that perspective
30:59
let me now turn to the real cause of the ukraine crisis and ultimately the ukraine war
31:06
the taproot is the american-led effort to make ukraine
31:11
a western bulwark on russia's borders that strategy has three prongs
31:19
one integrating ukraine into the eu
31:24
two turning ukraine into a pro-western liberal democracy you all know about the
31:31
orange revolution and three and most importantly incorporating

31:37
ukraine into nato the strategy was set in motion
31:42
at nato's annual summit in bucharest in april 2008
31:48
when the alliance announced that ukraine and georgia will become members
31:55
that's in quotes will become members russian leaders responded immediately
32:02
with outrage making it clear that this decision was an existential threat to russia
32:09
and they had no intention of letting either country join nato
32:15
according to a respected russian journalist putin quote flew into a rage
32:22
and warned that if ukraine joins nato it will do so without crimea and the
32:30
eastern regions it will simply fall apart that's putin talking in 2008.
32:37
william burns who is now the head of the cia was then the u.s ambassador to moscow
32:45
this is at the time of the bucharest summit he wrote a memo to secretary of state
32:51
condoleezza rice that succinctly describes russian thinking about ukraine
32:58
joining nato you want to pay very careful attention to what burns said and then what i'm
going to tell you angela
33:04
merkel has recently said this is burns this is his memo he's the
33:09
u.s ambassador in moscow it's his memo to secretary of state condoleezza rice
33:14
quote ukrainian entry into nato is the brightest of all red lines for
33:21
the russian elite not just putin in more than two and a half years of
33:27
conversations with key russian players from knuckle draggers in the dark
33:33
recesses of the kremlin to putin's sharpest liberal critics
33:39
i have yet to find anyone who views ukraine and nato as anything other than
33:46
a direct challenge to russian interests nato he said would be seen as throwing
33:54
down the strategic gauntlet today's russia will respond
34:00
russian ukrainian relations will go into a deep freeze it will create fertile soil for russian
34:08
meddling in crimea and eastern ukraine burns of course was not the only policy
34:15

maker who understood that bringing ukraine into nato was fraught with
34:20
danger indeed at the bucharest summit at the summit itself
34:27
both german chancellor angela merkel and french president nicolas sarkozy were
34:34
opposed to moving forward on nato membership for ukraine because they
34:40
feared it would infuriate russia angela merkel recently explained her
34:48
opposition in an interview
34:53
i would this i'm quoting angela merkel i was very sure that putin is not going
35:01
to let this happen from his perspective
35:06
that would be a declaration of war think about what merkel who opposed it
35:12
in april 2008 is saying she's saying that she knew that putin
35:18
would interpret it as a declaration of war in other words putting ukraine in
35:24
nato would be a declaration of war and burns has just told you that putin's not
35:29
an anomaly that every russian member of the foreign policy elite including the knuckle
dragers and the
35:36
recesses of the kremlin that he has talked to view it justice putin views it
35:44
the bush administration which was pushing this policy decision for nato however cared
35:52
little about moscow's brightest of red lines and pressured the french
35:58
and german leaders to agree to issuing a public pronouncement that
36:03
said unequivocally that ukraine and georgia would eventually join the alliance
36:10
unsurprisingly the american-led effort to integrate georgia into nato resulted
36:16
in a war between georgia and russia in august 2008 just four months after the
36:23
bucharest nevertheless in the wake of that war the united states and its allies continued
36:30
moving forward with their plans to make ukraine a western bastion on russia's
36:36
borders these efforts eventually sparked a major crisis in february of 2014
36:45
after a u.s supported uprising caused ukraine's
36:51

pro-russian president victor yanukovych to flee the country he was replaced by pro-american prime
36:58
minister arseny yet senior in response russia took crimea from
37:05
ukraine and helped fuel a civil war that broke out in the donbass between
37:12
pro-russian separatists and the ukrainian government one often hears the argument i'm sure
37:20
you've all heard this that in the eight years between when the crisis broke out in february
2014
37:28
and when the war began in february 2022 you see that eight year window there
37:34
just keep the big picture in your mind august 2008 that's the bucharest summit
37:39
but the crisis doesn't break out until february 2014 and then the war breaks out eight years
37:45
later february 2022. the argument is that in the eight years
37:51
between when the crisis broke out and when the war broke out this past february the united
states and its
37:58
allies paid little attention to bringing ukraine into nato in effect the issue
38:04
had been taken off the table and thus nato enlargement could not possibly have
38:09
been an important cause of the escalating crisis in 2021 and the
38:16
subsequent outbreak of war earlier this year this line of argument is false
38:23
in fact the western response to the events of 2014 was to double down on the existing
38:30
strategy and effectively make ukraine a de facto member of nato
38:37
the alliance began training the ukrainian military in 2014
38:44
averaging 10 000 trained troops annually over the next eight years nato was
38:51
training ten thousand troops per year for eight straight years in december
38:57
2017 the trump administration decided to provide keefe with defensive weapons
39:03
other nato's other nato countries quickly got into the act shipping even more weapons to
39:09
ukraine in addition ukraine's military participated in joint military exercises
39:17
with nato forces in july 2021 less than a year ago kievian washington keeve and
39:25
washington co-hosted operation sea breeze a naval exercise in the black sea

39:32
that included navies from 31 countries and was directly aimed at russia two
39:38
months later in september 20 2021 the ukraine army
39:44
led rapid trident 21 which was according
39:49
to an official press release from the u.s army it was quote
39:55
a u.s army europe and africa assisted annual exercise designed to enhance
40:03
interoperability among allied and partner nations remember i'm making the argument here we
40:10
were turning ukraine into a de facto member of nato it was designed to
40:15
enhance interoperability among allied and partner nations to demonstrate units are
40:22
poised and ready to respond to any crisis nato's efforts to arm and train
40:29
ukraine's military explains in good part why it is fared so well against
40:35
russian forces in the ongoing war it's not simply russian incompetence it's the
40:41
fact that we armed and trained those ukrainian forces and turned them
40:46
into a formidable fighting force the headline in a recent issue of the wall street
40:53
journal put it quite nicely this is quoting that headline in the wall street journal the secret of
ukraine's military
41:02
success colon years of nato training years of nato
41:08
training in addition to nato's ongoing efforts to make the ukrainian military a formidable
41:15
fighting force the politics surrounding nato's ukraine's membership
41:21
in nato and its integration into the west changed in 2021
41:29
there was renewed enthusiasm for pursuing ukrainian membership
41:36
in nato in 2021 and the change took place in both kiev and
41:43
in washington let me start by telling you what happened in kiev president zielenski who had
never shown
41:50
much enthusiasm for bringing ukraine into nato and who was elected in march 2019
41:59
on a platform that called for working with russia to settle the ongoing
42:05
conflict crisis reversed course in early 2021

42:13
and not only embraced nato expansion but also adopted a hard-line approach toward
42:20
moscow he made a series of moves like shutting down pro-russian tv shows
42:27
and stations and arresting an especially close friend of putin and charging him with treason
42:35
these were all moves that were sure to angle anger moscow
42:41
president biden who moved into the white house in january 2021
42:48
biden is moving into the white house just as biden justice zelinski is beginning to do a flip on
his views
42:54
towards ukraine and towards russia president biden had long been committed
43:00
to bringing ukraine into nato and was also super hawkish towards russia and you
43:07
want to remember that when he was vice president the obama administration president obama
assigned him joe biden
43:14
with the ukraine portfolio so he was no stranger to this issue unsurprisingly on june 14 2021
about a
43:24
year ago almost a year ago to the day nato issued the following communique at
43:30
its annual brussels summit i'm going to quote we we
43:35
reiterate we reiterate the decision made at the 2008 bucharest summit that
43:43
ukraine will become a member of the alliance dot dot dot as an integral part
43:48
of the process we reaffirm all elements of that
43:54
decision we reaffirm all elements of that decision as well as subsequent
43:59
decisions including that each partner will be judged on its own merits
44:04
we stand firm in our support for ukraine's right to decide its own future
44:10
and foreign policy course free from outside interference on september 1st
44:17
2021 zelinski visited the white house where biden made it clear
44:23
in his public statements that the united states was quote firmly committed to ukraine's euro-
atlantic
44:32
aspirations then on november 20 november 10 2021
44:38
secretary of state tony blinken and his ukrainian counterpart

44:43
signed an important document it's called the u.s ukraine's charter on strategic
44:49
partnership it's available on the website or on the internet if you're interested
44:55
this is what it says the aim of both parties is to
45:00
quote underscore a commitment to ukraine's implementation of the deep and
45:07
comprehensive reforms necessary for full integration into
45:13
europe and euro-atlantic institutions that explicitly builds not just on quote the
45:20
commitments made to strengthen the ukraine u s strategic partnership by
45:25
president zelinski and biden end of quotes but it also reaffirms the u.s
45:31
commitment to the quote 2008 bucharest summit declaration
45:37
in short there is little doubt that starting in early 2021
45:43
ukraine began moving rapidly toward joining nato
45:48
some argue that while that may be true it should not have concerned russian policy makers
we have decided it
45:55
shouldn't have concerned russian policy makers why because nato is a defensive
46:01
alliance and poses no threat to russia but that's now
46:06
that's not how putin and other russian leaders think about nato and it is what they think not
what you
46:14
think or i think that matters and they see nato as a direct threat they see
46:20
nato expansion into ukraine as an existential threat they see it as the brightest of red
46:26
lines to deal with this growing threat putin stationed ever increasing numbers
46:35
of russian troops on ukraine's borders between february 2021 and february 2022.
46:43
remember last year the number of russian troops on
46:49
ukraine's borders continually increased and increased and increased you ask yourself why
was that happening
46:56
it was happening in response to what zelinski and biden were doing and all the arming and
training was taking place
47:01
you noticed all those military exercise exercises i described took place in 2021

47:10
putin's aim was to coerce biden and zolensky into altering course and
47:15
putting an end to their efforts to integrate ukraine into the west
47:22
on december 17 2021 the russians reached the boiling point
47:29
and moscow sent separate letters to nato and to biden many of you i'm sure
47:34
remember when the russians sent those letters to biden and to nato
47:41
demanding a written guarantee that number one ukraine would not join nato
47:46
no offensive weapons would be stationed near russia's borders and three nato
47:54
troops and equipment moved into eastern europe since 1997
47:59
would be moved back to western europe putin made numerous public statements
48:05
during this period that left no doubt that he viewed nato expansion into
48:11
ukraine as an existential threat speaking to the defense ministry board
48:16
on december 21st 2021 he stated this is quoting putin what they are doing or
48:22
trying or planning to do in ukraine is not happening thousands of kilometers
48:28
away from our national border it's on the doorstep of our house they must understand that we
simply have
48:35
nowhere further to retreat to do they really think we do not see these threats
48:40
or do they think that we will just stand idly by watching threats to russia
48:46
emerge two months later at a press conference on february 22 2022 this is two days
48:52
before they invade putin said quote we are categorically
48:58
opposed to ukraine joining nato because this poses a threat to us and we have
49:03
arguments to support this i have repeatedly spoken about it in this hall
49:09
he then made it clear that he recognized that ukraine was becoming a de facto
49:15
member of nato the united states and its allies he said quote continued to pump
49:22
the current kiev authorities full of modern types of weapons end of quote he
49:28
went on to say that if this was not stopped moscow quote would be left with
49:34

an anti-russia arm to the teeth this is totally unacceptable
49:40
putin's logic should be manifestly clear to americans in the audience who have
49:47
long understood i'm sure that we have a monroe doctrine which stipulates that no
49:53
great power is allowed to place any of its military forces in the western
49:58
hemisphere i might know that in all of putin's public statements during the months
50:06
leading up to up to the war there is not a scintilla of evidence
50:12
that he was contemplating conquering ukraine and making it part of russia
50:18
much less attacking other countries in eastern europe other russian leaders including the
50:24
defense minister the foreign minister the deputy foreign minister and the russian ambassador
tomato to to
50:30
washington the russian ambassador washington also emphasized the centrality of nato
expansion for causing
50:38
the ukraine crisis foreign minister sergey lavrov made the point succinctly at a press
conference
50:46
on january 14 2022 when he said the key to everything i'm
50:53
quoting lavrov now the key to everything is the guarantee that nato will not
51:00
expand eastward nevertheless the efforts of lavrov and
51:05
putin to get the united states and its allies to abandon their efforts to make ukraine
51:11
a western bulwark on russia's border failed completely
51:17
secretary of state tony blinken responded to russia's
51:23
mid-december demands by simply saying quote there is no change there will be
51:30
no change putin then launched an invasion of ukraine to eliminate the threat he saw
51:39
from nato where are we now and where are we going
51:46
the ukraine war has been raging for almost four months
51:52
and i would like to make three separate points i first of all like to talk about the
51:58
specific consequences of this conflict for ukraine talk a little bit about the prospects
52:04

for escalation and talk a little bit about the prospects for ending the war in the foreseeable future

52:12

starting with ukraine this war is an unmitigated disaster for

52:17

ukraine as i noted earlier putin made it clear in 2008 that russia would wreck ukraine

52:27

to prevent it from joining nato he is delivering on that promise

52:34

russian forces have conquered at least 20 percent of ukrainian territory and

52:40

destroyed or badly damaged many ukrainian cities and towns

52:47

more than 6.5 million ukrainians have fled the country while more than 8

52:53

million have been internally displaced many thousands of ukrainians including

53:00

innocent civilians are dead or badly wounded and the ukrainian economy is in shambles

53:07

the world bank estimates that ukraine's economy will shrink by

53:14

almost 50 percent over the course of 2022. estimates are that approximately a

53:21

hundred billion dollars worth of damage has been inflicted on ukraine already

53:27

and it will take close to a trillion dollars to rebuild the country

53:34

in the meantime kiev requires about five billion dollars

53:40

of aid every month just to keep the government running

53:46

furthermore there appears to be little hope that ukraine will be able to regain use

53:52

of the azov and black seas the ports on the azov and black seas anytime soon

53:58

before the war roughly 70 percent of all ukrainian exports and imports and 98

54:06

of its grain exports move through these ports this is the basic situation after less

54:14

than four months of fighting it is downright scary to come to

54:21

contemplate what ukraine is going to look like if this war drags on for a few

54:26

more years so this brings me to the second topic i want to talk about what are the

54:31

prospects for negotiating a peace agreement and ending this war in the next few months

54:39

i am sorry to say that i see no way this war ends anytime

54:45

soon and this is a view shared by prominent policy makers on both

54:52
the western side and the russian side the main reason for my pessimism is that
54:59
both russia and the united states are deeply committed to winning the war
55:06
and it is impossible to reach an agreement where both sides win
55:13
to be more specific the key to a settlement from russia's perspective is making ukraine a
neutral
55:21
state which means that ukraine must divorce
55:26
itself from the west especially the united states but that outcome is unacceptable to the
55:33
biden administration and a large portion of the american foreign policy establishment because
it would represent
55:40
a victory for russia ukrainian leaders have agency of course
55:46
and thus one might hope that given all the horror being inflicted on their country they
55:52
will push for neutralization indeed zelensky briefly mentioned
55:57
that possibility in the first month of the war but he never seriously pursued it
56:04
there is little chance however that keith will push for neutralization
56:09
because the ultranationalists in ukraine who wield significant political power
56:15
have zero interest in yielding to any of russia's demands especially one that dictates ukraine's
56:23
political alignment with the outside world the biden administration and the
56:29
on nato's eastern flank and here we're talking about poland and the baltic states
56:35
they're likely to support ukraine's ultra-nationalists along with the americans on this whole
issue
56:42
of creating a neutral ukraine to complicate matters further how does one
56:48
deal with the large swaths of ukrainian territory that russia has conquered
56:54
since the war started as well as crimea's faith it's hard to fathom moscow
57:01
giving up any of the ukrainian territory it now occupies
57:06
much less all of it at least in the foreseeable future
57:12
russia's territorial goals today
57:17

are probably not the ones they started the war
57:23
with at the same time it's difficult to imagine any ukrainian leader accepting a
57:30
deal that allows russia to keep any ukrainian territory except possibly
57:36
crimea i certainly hope i'm wrong but i see no end
57:42
in sight to this ruinous war let me turn to the final matter which is
57:47
the matter of escalation it's widely accepted among international
57:52
relations scholars that there is a powerful tendency for protracted wars
57:58
to escalate other countries get dragged into the fight and the level of violence
58:05
is likely to escalate the potential for this happening in ukraine is real
58:12
there is a danger that the united states and its nato allies will get dragged into the fighting
58:18
which they have been able to avoid up to this point even though we are now effectively at
58:25
war with russia there's also the possibility that nuclear weapons might be used in ukraine
58:32
and that might even lead to a nuclear exchange between russia and the united states
58:39
the underlying reason that these outcomes might be realized is that the
58:45
stakes are so high for both sides and thus neither can afford to lose
58:53
as i have emphasized putin and his lieutenants believe
58:58
that ukraine joining the west is an existential
59:04
threat to russia that must be eliminated in practical terms
59:10
that means russia must win its war in ukraine defeat is unacceptable
59:18
the biden administration on the other hand has stressed that its goal is not
59:25
only to defeat the russians in ukraine but also to use
59:32
massive sanctions to do egregious damage to the russian economy
59:39
secretary of defense lloyd austin has emphasized that the west's goal
59:45
is to weaken russia to the point where it could not invade ukraine again
59:51
in effect the biden administration is committed to knocking russia out of the
59:58

ranks of the great powers at the same time president biden himself
1:00:04
has called russia's war in ukraine a genocide and charged putin with being a
1:00:10
war criminal who should face quote a war crimes trial after the war
1:00:17
such rhetoric hardly lends itself to negotiating an end to the war
1:00:23
after all how do you negotiate with a genocidal state
1:00:28
american policy has two significant consequences for starters it greatly amplifies the
1:00:37
existential threat moscow faces in this war and it makes it more
1:00:42
important than ever that moscow prevail in ukraine
1:00:48
at the same time it means that the united states is deeply committed to making sure that russia
loses the biden
1:00:56
administration has now invested so much in the war both materially and
1:01:04
rhetorically that a russian victory would represent a devastating defeat for
1:01:10
washington obviously both sides can't win moreover there's a serious possibility
1:01:18
that one side will begin to lose badly there is a
1:01:24
serious possibility that if american policy succeeds
1:01:29
and the russians are losing to the ukrainians on the battlefield
1:01:34
putin might turn to nuclear weapons to rescue the situation
1:01:40
the u.s director of national intelligence avril haynes told the senate
1:01:46
this past may that this was one of the two situations that might lead putin to
1:01:52
use nuclear weapons if he is losing in ukraine
1:01:58
for those of you who think it's unlikely that he would turn to use nuclear weapons to rescue
the situation if he's
1:02:04
losing in ukraine i would remind you that nato planned to use nuclear weapons
1:02:10
in similar circumstances during the cold war we were planning to use nuclear weapons
1:02:16
in west germany if the warsaw pact overran west germany if we were losing
1:02:22
against the warsaw pact in west germany we were going to turn to nuclear weapons
1:02:27

to rescue the situation that's what we're talking about putin doing you don't think he'll do it
1:02:32
i wouldn't bet a lot of money on that if russia were to employ nuclear weapons in ukraine it's
difficult to say how the
1:02:40
biden administration would react but it would surely be under great
1:02:46
pressure to retaliate thus raising the possibility of the great power nuclear war
1:02:54
there is a perverse paradox at play here you really want to think about this
1:03:00
the more successful we are the united states and its allies
1:03:06
at achieving our war aims the more likely it is
1:03:12
that the war will turn nuclear let's turn the tables and ask what
1:03:18
happens if the united states and its nato allies appear to be heading toward
1:03:23
defeat which effectively means that the russians are routing the ukrainian
1:03:29
military and the government in kiev is moving to negotiate a peace deal
1:03:35
to hold on to as much of ukraine as possible in that event there would be
1:03:42
tremendous pressure on the united states and its allies to get even more deeply
1:03:48
involved in the fighting it is not likely but certainly possible
1:03:54
that america or maybe polish troops would get pulled into the fighting
1:03:59
which means nato would not effectively be at war with russia it would literally be at war with
russia
1:04:06
this is the other scenario according to avril haynes the director of national intelligence
1:04:13
where the russians might turn to nuclear weapons it is difficult to say precisely how
1:04:19
events will play out in the ukraine war
1:04:24
but there is no question that there will be serious potential for escalation
1:04:30
to include nuclear escalation the mere possibility of that outcome
1:04:36
should should send shivers down your spine
1:04:41
they're likely to be other disastrous consequences from the war which i cannot discuss in any
detail because of time
1:04:49
constraints for example there's reason to think that the war will lead to a food crisis in

1:04:55
which many millions of people will die furthermore relations between russia and
1:05:02
the west have been so thoroughly poisoned that it will take many years to
1:05:07
repair them maybe even decades in the meantime that profound hostility
1:05:15
will foster instability around the globe and especially in europe
1:05:22
one might agree but note that there's a silver lining relations among countries
1:05:27
in the west have markedly improved transatlantic relations have improved
1:05:32
nato and the eu are in better shape than ever that's true for the moment
1:05:38
but there are deep fissures below the surface which are likely to manifest themselves over
time
1:05:45
for example i would expect that relations between the countries of eastern and europe
1:05:50
will deteriorate as the war drags on finally the conflict is already damaging
1:05:57
the global economy in major ways and the situation is likely to get much
1:06:03
worse with time uh jamie morgan the ceo of jp morgan chase
1:06:11
says that we should brace ourselves for an economic hurricane
1:06:19
these economic shocks of course in turn will affect the politics of every western
1:06:26
country undermining liberal democracy and strengthening its opponents
1:06:32
on both the left and the right in conclusion the ongoing conflict in
1:06:39
ukraine is a colossal disaster which as i noted at the start of my talk
1:06:45
will lead people all around the world to search for its causes
1:06:52
those who believe in facts and logic will quickly discover that the united
1:06:58
states and its allies are mainly responsible for this train
1:07:04
wreck the april 2008 decision to bring ukraine and georgia into nato
1:07:11
was destined to lead to conflict with russia the bush administration was the
1:07:17
principal architect of that fateful choice but the obama trump and biden
1:07:24
administrations have doubled down on that policy at every turn
1:07:31

and america's allies have dutifully followed
1:07:37
even though russia's leaders made it perfectly clear that bringing ukraine
1:07:42
into nato would be crossing the brightest of red lines
1:07:47
the united states simply refused to accommodate russia's deepest security
1:07:54
concerns and instead moved relentlessly to make ukraine a
1:08:00
western bulwark on russia's border the tragic truth is
1:08:06
that if the west had not pursued nato expansion
1:08:12
into ukraine it is unlikely there would be a war in
1:08:17
ukraine today and crimea would still be part of ukraine
1:08:24
in essence washington played the central role in leading ukraine down the path to
1:08:32
destruction history will judge the united states and
1:08:38
its allies with abundant harshness for its remarkably foolish policy on
1:08:46
ukraine thank you [Applause]
1:09:20
thank you so much for this uh rich um presentation um john and i see you
1:09:25
are very much ahead of me like you are completely acclimatized to the florentine weather
well i'm i don't know
1:09:31
how super warm and i've been here for nine months you're not only ahead in that respect as
nicola has already
1:09:37
mentioned we both have a phd from the same university cornell and admittedly there
1:09:42
were some professors that were there at your time that were also there at my time and so
when my cohort my cohorts
1:09:49
above beyond when we started our phd the question was always how did john merchamer
and joe
1:09:55
greco to be completely fair come out of the same school as us because you're one of the few
realists if i may who came
1:10:02
out of cornell and so my first question really would be more about whether you can talk a bit
about
1:10:08
where your um theoretical thinking developed you've been to west point you
1:10:13

were at cornell so where does where does the theoretical foundation come from also in terms of your approaches rather

1:10:21

about grand theorizing right so grand theater is what is driving you a friend of mine will call this sweeping

1:10:26

narratives but she's a comparativist so for her it is a strange business in the first place but like so why grand theorizing and

1:10:33

what to use the role of say area studies because i mean you said that until 2014

1:10:40

um people did not see russia as a threat but if we look into scholars who actually were working in the region on

1:10:46

the region in central eastern europe the baltics etc they actually might have told and have told a different story

1:10:53

same with politicians there right i mean right now actually there's lots of complaining about west's planing also of

1:10:58

west's planing within the european union how western europe was imposing a narrative of russia on eastern europe

1:11:05

calling eastern europeans irrational emotional anti-russian so for you as a scholar of grand ir theory

1:11:12

what's the role of area studies and also what's the role of of domestic politics that's where cornell comes in for me

1:11:18

because my entire training was that the boundaries between comparative politics and ir are not very rigid there's lots

1:11:25

of fluidity and you yourself mentioned in your in your talk just now how actually the nationalist elements or

1:11:33

political voices within ukraine would not allow for a neutral ukraine so

1:11:39

apparently there are domestic forces who are very much pushing uh for um a certain solution that you

1:11:46

say actually prolongs the war so would there be no nationalists in ukraine and

1:11:51

ukraine would then zilinski would negotiate with russia irrespective of what the u.s thinks

1:11:56

because that's the question how much he's under the wing of the u.s would there be actually an end to the

1:12:02

war so that would be my my first question and i i admit i hit a few more questions in the first question

1:12:10

oh yeah thank you stephanie uh

1:12:16

i could talk about these questions i could answer these questions for hours on end but i won't do that

1:12:21

uh she asked me first of all where did my you know my realest theory come from

1:12:27

how did i get interested in realism and sort of become a realist theorist

1:12:33

the truth is when i went to cornell i did not even self-identify as a realist much less do

1:12:41

any work on realist theory in those days there were three main theories of international relations

1:12:47

one were the realest theories uh and walter's book had not yet come out the 79 book when i was a graduate

1:12:54

student realist theories liberal theories and marxism

1:13:00

there was no social constructivism at the time with the passage of time marxism

1:13:05

disappeared from the radar scope and it was replaced by social constructivism so by the time

1:13:12

i was at the university of chicago and teaching ir theory it was realism liberalism and

1:13:17

social constructivism but anyway i knew all about marxism i knew all about liberalism and realism but i honestly

1:13:24

did not self-identify as a realist because i didn't do grand theory i wrote a dissertation on conventional

1:13:30

deterrence then i went to cornell actually to the university of chicago in 1982

1:13:36

and one of the first courses courses that i taught was ir theory and i just did it because we needed

1:13:44

somebody to teach it and i remember i read robert gilpin and i read ken waltz

1:13:50

this is an 80 february 83 when i'm teaching walt's and

1:13:55

his book had come out in 1979 and that's when i started wrestling with

1:14:00

walt's book which is a very difficult book to read and i could never make heads or tails of it

1:14:07

then my good friend jack snyder who taught at columbia was writing a book which eventually came out called myths

1:14:13

of empire which was a defensive realist track and it was in the process of giving jack

1:14:20

comments and going back and forth with him and reading ken waltz and going back and

1:14:27

forth with him in the classroom that i started discovered that i was unsatisfied with their realist theory of

1:14:34

international politics and i decided to develop my own and this was very easy to do at the 1:14:41

university of chicago because the university of chicago was a place that privileged theory it was a very

1:14:47

theoretical institution so i naturally gravitated into theory to

1:14:54

ir theory and i discovered that i was a realist uh

1:15:00

i've often thought about why did i end up as a realist and i don't know i could

1:15:06

speculate but i thought that realism provided the best explanation for how the world works

1:15:14

and i therefore gravitated to it but there were surely other factors that

1:15:21

influenced me so that's basically how i ended up doing ir theory

1:15:26

uh and becoming a realist now you asked me about my love of grand theory

1:15:34

i i'm one of these people who has infinite intellectual curiosity and i

1:15:40

love coming up with simple theories about how the world works i understand full well the danger of coming up with

1:15:47

simple theories and i'll get to this in a second when i talk about area studies and domestic politics there are limits

1:15:54

to what general theories can tell you about the world but i instinctively love

1:16:00

them i love simplicity and i think by the way one of the reasons that students like

1:16:07

tragedy of great power politics is because the theory that i put forth is a simple theory you don't have to like the

1:16:14

theory but at least you can understand it because it's simple so i'm just a simple old boy i think by nature and

1:16:21

that's what i think caused me to gravitate to grand theory now your second your third and fourth questions

1:16:27

had to do with area studies and domestic politics and this gets at the limits of

1:16:35

of theory of grand theory or or realism realism as most of you folks know is a

1:16:40

theory that leaves domestic politics on the cutting room floor it

1:16:46

the theory says that domestic politics do not matter now we all know that domestic politics
1:16:53
do matter and the argument that realists like me make
1:16:59
is that they don't matter that much so you can come up with a simple simple
1:17:05
theory that leaves them out and that theory will still have lots of
1:17:11
explanatory power my intuition and it's just my intuition
1:17:17
is that a really good theory like realism can explain 75 of what
1:17:23
happens that means it's wrong 25 of the time
1:17:29
and my argument is that it's wrong 25 percent of the time because those
1:17:34
factors that it leaves on the cutting room floor sometimes jump up and bite you in the
1:17:39
hindering they matter domestic politics sometimes really matters and your simple
1:17:47
systemic theory can explain that particular case so there are real limits to even the best
1:17:54
theory just to come at this from another perspective theories are simplifications of an
1:18:00
incredibly complicated reality there's no way we can make sense of the world because it's so
complicated without
1:18:07
simple theories we need simple theories but because the world is complicated and
1:18:13
theories are simple they're therefore going to be wrong some reasonable
1:18:18
part of the time and my intuition again is that that's 25 that's when domestic
1:18:23
politics comes in so i'm not saying domestic politics don't matter i just don't think in ir they
matter that much
1:18:32
most of the time now area studies very interesting
1:18:37
one of my big gripes about comparative politics is the invariably people who study
comparative politics never take ir
1:18:45
courses they think that people who study ir you know are basically second rate and
1:18:52
these ir theories are not important to know you want to go inside the black box all this talk
about treating states like
1:18:59
black boxes and looking at their interactions is foolish i always say to comparativists i say
1:19:05
this to young graduate students take courses in ir right it's fine to be a comparativist to know
1:19:11

a ton about what's happening inside russia or inside ireland or brazil whatever area you want to study but

1:19:17

don't you want to know basic ir theory how this country that you're studying

1:19:23

relates to other countries according to the basic ir theories just think about china if i were young today i'd learn

1:19:29

chinese i'd become a china expert and i take lots of ir courses best of both

1:19:34

worlds that's my argument but you know somebody recently said to me john

1:19:39

you know you're pontificating about the ukraine crisis why are you pontificating about

1:19:45

the ukraine crisis you don't know anything about ukraine you don't know anything about russia this is an area

1:19:51

that area specialists should dominate my view is are you serious

1:19:59

geopolitics u.s russian relations russian nato relations

1:20:05

is terribly important for understanding the ukraine crisis you have to know

1:20:11

basic ir theory to have a good feel for this crisis and at the same time i would concede you want area studies in there

1:20:18

who can tell you all sorts of things about ukraine and about russian domestic politics and

1:20:24

american domestic politics and german domestic politics as well so i don't deny that for one second

1:20:31

uh and uh so my general point is

1:20:36

learn ir theory you're foolish if you don't talking to comparativeness here and if

1:20:42

you're an ir theorist you better know the limits of your theories and know that area experts and people who focus

1:20:49

on studying what happens inside the black box really do matter

1:20:58

so my second question is a little more complex and i apologize while you give the talk i had to briefly look at a

1:21:04

putin speech to quote a little something but um so in your talk you really stress

1:21:12

a lot of like you said a lot of speeches and you show this as evidence that actually it was mainly the u.s nato

1:21:19

expansion or the threat of nato expansion towards ukraine that was is driving uh putin's war

1:21:25

in ukraine and you say there's no evidence for these alternative explanations that you gave so like it's

1:21:30

pretty mono causal and and uh sorry i tried to cite you here it's a false line

1:21:35

of argument to pursue these other these other arguments so while as you cited there are these

1:21:42

essential threat elements in his speeches there are other elements in his speeches

1:21:47

as well that actually go in a direction of this mythical unity of the ukrainian

1:21:52

and russian nation so actually there are no two nations um he also uses the word genocide by the

1:21:58

way when he talks about ukraine so on his sorry now this will take a while because i'm reading off the phone

1:22:04

but on march 18th in his on the concert making the anniversary of previous unification with russia

1:22:11

putin for example says and now 2022 that's when in the big stadium

1:22:17

with all the flags when he came with this white turtleneck sweater um

1:22:24

and now of course i don't find the right part anymore because i moved around i the main golden motive of the military

1:22:30

operation that we launched in donbass and ukraine is to relieve these people of suffering of this genocide

1:22:37

so i mean this is again and like in the speech he makes reference to denasification and how i mean which is

1:22:42

if you're not russian right you are nazi um so i'm wondering i mean i'm sorry i don't have as many quotes as you had but

1:22:49

i'm pretty sure that in other speeches i would also find references to to these alternative explanations that you say

1:22:56

are no evidence for so so my one my one question is why pick one narrative over the other there seem

1:23:02

to be more narratives than just the existential threat one not denying that existential

1:23:07

threat might be an explanation but there is this strikes me by looking through the speeches that there are additional

1:23:13

explanations as well um also like you cited merkel for example so i i watched that interview as well

1:23:21

it's true she mentioned that she was worried in 2008 about the war but she
1:23:26
also said i knew putin well and every time i saw him he said the soviet union was great
1:23:32
that how much he's actually missing the old soviet days and she's like listen when i was in
these days uh living in
1:23:39
east germany i was not free and i was very happy when the soviet union disintegrated because
then i became a free person so that was always part of
1:23:45
their conversation again this suggests that there are more narratives than just the existential
threat nato expansion
1:23:52
one but also putin potentially at least thinking of
1:23:58
the russian empire the dismissed of the russian empire or a nation that is broader than
1:24:03
what russia is currently in its borders so that that's my first aspect of the
1:24:09
question so now if we buy into this
1:24:14
the essential threat narrative is the main explanation as to why
1:24:20
russia invaded ukraine i'd be curious to hear your thoughts as to why not also
1:24:26
georgia and why why not finland i mean so georgia and ukraine both joined the
1:24:31
partnership for peace in nato in 1994. so some of the training and the security
1:24:37
assistant that you mentioned has been going on for a very long time through this
1:24:42
partnership that they have with nato as many other eastern european countries actually have
1:24:47
and and so as as you say like georgia was part of the discussion in 2008 and
1:24:53
uh so it was ukraine and georgia that were supposed to join nato and then france and germany
said not right now um
1:25:00
and so the declaration was this very ambiguous document that kind of alluded to the
1:25:06
possibility it had a rose revolution the revolution happened as well um it had there was
1:25:13
exactly as you mentioned russia invaded part of georgia but then it stopped there's no more
further invasion
1:25:19
happening in georgia why is russia georgia not an existential threat to to russia in finland i
mean
1:25:27
people argue that actually finland's now declaring also it has applied to become a nato
member right but it's not nato

1:25:34
member yet that is an unintended consequence of this war but right now it
1:25:39
is not member of nato yet and it shares a very long border with russia so why don't we see
this very aggressive
1:25:46
rhetoric and military action also on the finnish border given that this potentially could also be
understood as
1:25:52
an existential threat so if you don't mind unpacking a little bit first of all why picking one
narrative over the other
1:25:59
and and then also um spell out a little bit more as to why actually other
1:26:05
countries where this kind of existential threat narrative could fit to don't seem to uphold
1:26:12
sorry i'm just checking my notes because while you were speaking i was writing so many
things down that i'm not sure but i
1:26:17
think no i got the main just thank you you can come back at me again
1:26:22
uh just on the narratives the conventional wisdom
1:26:29
in the uh in the media and in the west more generally and among western leaders
1:26:37
is that putin was interested in conquering
1:26:42
ukraine and absorbing absorbing it into russia
1:26:51
and he was bent on creating a greater russia and really ukraine
1:26:57
was the first station on the railroad line and
1:27:03
what i say you have to do is you have to find evidence
1:27:10
that he thought that was desirable that goal was desirable
1:27:17
number two he thought that goal was feasible
1:27:22
and number three that's what he had set out to do there's evidence that that's what he was
going
1:27:29
to try to do and my point was there's no evidence of that now your point is that there are other
1:27:38
narratives maybe other reasons for why he did it like denotification
1:27:43
uh dealing with what he called the genocide in eastern
1:27:49
ukraine that may be true i don't dispute that but it doesn't
1:27:55

contradict my basic point it doesn't address the basic issue
1:28:01
that he was bent on an imperial mission
1:28:06
right so there's no question that he was interested in going into the donbass
1:28:13
in part because he thought that a genocide that's his rhetoric was taking place but
1:28:20
again it doesn't address the basic issue on the table what we need is evidence
1:28:25
that he's an imperialist and just to go to merkel
1:28:31
there's no question that merkel says that putin made it clear to him
1:28:39
to her that he thought the soviet union was a wonderful enterprise and remember i
1:28:46
read the quote where putin said in his heart how could you help but miss the soviet union
that's what he said which
1:28:53
is consistent with what merkel said but then he went on to say you know in the rest of the
sentence that this is not
1:29:00
going to happen anybody who thinks that is not got a brain so there's no evidence that he said
i
1:29:06
miss the soviet union and what we have to do is recreate the soviet union or
1:29:12
recreate something that looks like the soviet union you have in my opinion you have to
1:29:18
provide evidence of that to beat me it may be possible to do that eric and i
1:29:23
were talking about that before there may we may discover when archives are opened or there
may be pieces of
1:29:30
evidence out there now that i've just missed but you have to show that that's what he was bent
1:29:36
on doing actually i thought where you might go a number of people have used
1:29:41
this argument about me you know he made this speech about peter the great the other day
1:29:46
and he made it clear that peter the great uh had imperial ambitions
1:29:53
and was interested in reconquering i'm choosing my words
1:29:58
carefully here reconquering territory that the swedes and others had taken away
1:30:04
from russia and then he in a very opaque way implied that he may be doing the same
1:30:11
thing he didn't mention ukraine but one could argue that you know he
1:30:17

sees what he's doing now in ukraine as

1:30:23

similar to what peter the great did that is reconquering lost territory that would

1:30:28

contradict my argument my counter to that is

1:30:34

that he said that after the invasion and i have words in there i've thought

1:30:40

about this long and hard i think his goals have escalated

1:30:46

this is why i think tragically he's not going to give up that territory he's conquered i think he's either going to

1:30:52

incorporate that into greater russia or he's going to create independent republics his goals have changed

1:31:00

my argument is there's no evidence before he went in that he was interested in conquering huge swaths of territory

1:31:07

and incorporating into russia it's like the germans in world war one i don't know how many of you know about the

1:31:13

march 1918 treaty of breslatovsk oh my god it's amazing how much territory the

1:31:20

germans took from the russians via the treaty of breslautovsk in march 1918. of

1:31:26

course it was all eventually reversed okay but when the germans went into the war

1:31:33

in 1914 they did not have those war aims they evolved as the war went on

1:31:41

and that's the great danger that we face with regard to putin in russia now that

1:31:46

the war has started that his war aims have elevated and it'll make it

1:31:52

impossible to recreate a vibrant ukraine which would be from my point of view a

1:31:59

desirable goal

1:32:05

i realized that i thought i only gonna ask two questions and then open to the audience and

1:32:11

time is running out but i'm looking at eric and i thought i try to communicate whether we can have a little bit more

1:32:17

time of course it also depends on you and on you so

1:32:23

so why don't we open up for questions

1:32:28

many questions

1:32:34

can i start with sarah so

1:32:41

thanks

1:32:54

thank you this works good so one is just a factual kind of explanation could you

1:32:59

explain why if nato did not see russia as a threat in 2008 it wasn't

1:33:05

worried about it at all why it was so interested still an expansion and the second one is something about

1:33:12

this concept of winning the war that you were mentioning at the end which makes negotiations so difficult because both

1:33:18

sides want to really win the war what does winning the war mean and the reason i ask this is if i if we look at

1:33:24

russia's behavior in syria i wonder whether permanent instability stability

1:33:30

is perhaps a winning of the war for russia

1:33:49

okay so john i want to thank you for this i'm

1:33:55

i'm so glad you laid out this argument um and now i want to ask you building on what stephanie said

1:34:01

could we challenge your argument with something other than russia's imperial domain right so what if we could

1:34:07

identify another existential threat to vladimir putin like democracy

1:34:13

if we did that then we could start the story with the color revolutions and russia's reaction to those color

1:34:19

revolutions and the beauty of that was that that would explain why the countries that went through the color revolutions

1:34:25

actually requested to be brought into nato and put pressure on the bucharest

1:34:31

declaration right so the advantage there is that now we don't have to to lose the agency of these

1:34:37

countries and we can also explain why russia participates in partnership for peace right up through that summit

1:34:43

russia's not afraid of nato but once nato is being used to protect these democracies

1:34:49

russia is afraid of democracy so russia has to be afraid of nato and and in fact that would help us because a lot of

1:34:56

the timing doesn't always work like 2014 was triggered by the maidan which was triggered not by a nato enlargement

1:35:02

activity but but by a relationship between ukraine and the european union right and then and then once russia gets

1:35:09

in it's all about democracy and the beauty of this is not only can we explain the tension between russia and the west but

1:35:15

we can also explain the development of russia as a polity over the same period so we don't even have to look at words

1:35:20

we can look at deeds as russia clamps down on democracy domestically and finally we can include things that don't

1:35:27

really feature us prominently in your narrative like what is russia doing in belarus right now and why is russia so

1:35:34

concerned about absorbing belarus into a security relationship and i think it all

1:35:39

goes back to the same existential threat an existential threat that endogenizes the whole nato story you tell

1:35:46

and and instead makes this a story about a conflict between a regime that doesn't believe in

1:35:52

democracy and fears democracy those elements that want to promote democracy outside

1:36:08

thank you everyone uh ambassador phd here uh actually

1:36:13

yes so i'll actually uh be very brief because it responds to what professor

1:36:18

jones has said if we use this logic of what happens outside of russia and how it russia responds to it

1:36:25

how does imperialism not actually advances your explanation of the causes of the war

1:36:31

russian imperialism meaning that russia needs to direct how ukrainian and

1:36:38

belarus internal forces act and in which direction those

1:36:43

democratic or not forces can push their own countries and therefore russia's imperialism is the response of russia to

1:36:50

foreign countries uh politics and not russia being imperialistic does not

1:36:57

mean i i don't see why it would imply that the cause you identify would not be the

1:37:02

cause of the current war

1:37:09

okay thank you uh i'll try to be as succinct as possible just because there are lots of questions

1:37:15

your question sarah why expansion before the crisis in 2014. john says it's not

1:37:22

about balance of power politics we're not containing russia it was basically uh liberal hegemony

1:37:30

and the idea was liberal hegemony that was american foreign policy when the cold war ended

1:37:36

describes our engagement policy towards china it explains the bush doctrine in the middle east had three strands to it

1:37:43

one is to spread democracy number two is to incorporate countries all around the planet into international

1:37:49

institutions and three to integrate them into the world economy the capitalist

1:37:55

world economy okay and what we were doing was removing nato and the eu

1:38:01

two institutions eastward and incorporating more and more

1:38:06

states into those institutions so they would be rules abiding citizens two by

1:38:11

moving the eu eastward we're getting everybody hooked on capitalism integrating them into the international

1:38:17

economic order and number three and this was what eric was getting at with the color revolutions

1:38:24

right rose revolution georgia orange revolution ukraine were spreading

1:38:29

democracy right so the name of the game was to turn eastern europe into a giant zone of

1:38:36

peace much the way western europe and our story had been turned into a giant zone

1:38:42

of peace and europe would be one big seamless web of peace love and dope so

1:38:48

that's what was going on there's no talk of containment i found it very hard to

1:38:53

believe that we one would not have been thinking about containing russia before 2014 but all the administrations are

1:39:01

filled with liberal do-gooders like bill clinton and george w bush and so forth and so on and the end result is you get

1:39:08

liberal hegemony now you say what does winning the war

1:39:13

mean this is a great question and one i don't have that much time to go into but

1:39:19

the american case is easy winning as i said is defeating the russians in ukraine and

1:39:26

basically strangling the economy to the point where you knock them out of the ranks of the great powers the russian
1:39:32
case is a trickier case you know a lot of people say what we have to do is we have to
1:39:37
allow putin to save face and i say you don't want to think about in those terms you want to think about it and cause
1:39:43
vitz in terms war is an extension of politics by other means don't get too
1:39:48
wrapped around about what happens on the battlefield the question is what's the political
1:39:54
goal here and john's story is that the political goal is more than anything to make sure you
1:40:00
have a neutral ukraine so winning for putin
1:40:06
is putting an end to ukraine joining the west
1:40:12
joining nato joining the eu so that's winning and that's why in my
1:40:17
formal comments i said that for the russians if you hope to
1:40:22
shut this one down you've got to have a velvet divorce between ukraine and nato
1:40:28
and the united states and ukraine has to be neutral so that would be winning in that particular case but that's a you
1:40:35
know as i said an excellent question just with regard to eric i actually don't disagree with eric at
1:40:41
all i want to remind you that my argument and i tried to say it
1:40:47
so many times that i thought maybe i said it too much our basic aim
1:40:53
is to turn ukraine into a western bulwark
1:40:59
on russia's border and that strategy has three prongs
1:41:05
one is to incorporate ukraine into the eu
1:41:11
to foster a color revolution in ukraine where it becomes a pro pro-west
1:41:18
liberal democracy that's where he was going and third and most importantly to bring
1:41:25
ukraine into nato now i agree with you that the russians lived
1:41:32
the mortal fear of a color revolution in russia and for those of you who are
1:41:37
interested you go home and google the new yorker magazine michael mcfaul's experience as america's ambassador to

1:41:45

russia he was interested in fostering a color revolution in russia putin hated the guy

1:41:52

read page 12 of his memoirs where he talks about putin staring him down at a meeting that he had outside of moscow

1:41:59

right putin lived in fear as you pointed out of a color revolution and correctly and

1:42:05

as eric also correctly pointed out the uh the 2012 crisis

1:42:12

or when the crisis broke out in 2012 it was not about nato expansion per se it

1:42:18

was about the eu and about a color revolution so i'm in complete agreement with you but what i'm

1:42:24

saying to you eric is it's a three-prong strategy all designed to make

1:42:30

ukraine a western bulwark with regard to the graduate student back there i'm sorry i didn't catch your name

1:42:37

in my story about this one and you didn't see it here but just i did this interview with

1:42:44

the new yorker where this comes out clearly for me there's a difference between imperialism

1:42:51

and geopolitics and when i hear the word imperialism used with putin i identify

1:42:59

that with the argument that he was interested in conquering ukraine absorbing ukraine maybe conquering

1:43:06

finland conquering other countries that to me is what imperialism is about it's creating an empire so imperialism and

1:43:14

empire go together for john this is really all about balance of power politics it's all about taking nato and

1:43:22

putting it too close to russia and the russians viewing this as a threat much the way we viewed

1:43:29

soviet tip missiles in cuba during the cuban missile crisis as a security

1:43:34

threat so for me it's all about balance of power logic you can see my realism

1:43:40

coming through and why i don't like the word imperialism but i do want to be clear

1:43:47

here it's all a function of how i define imperialism and how i define balance of power

1:43:53

politics one could define imperialism in different ways and come at me from a

1:43:59

different perspective super so i'll do one more round of

1:44:05

questions maybe if you and we do

1:44:13

i will look at eric once in a while and when i suddenly see a subtle sign where it tells me to end i shall end

1:44:19

and sarah you have that microphone now now then please give it to jeff first given that you no the one closest to you sorry back back back

1:44:28

i'm trying to be efficient so okay uh thank you and thank you john i

1:44:34

encouraged all my researchers to come today because i said you'd give a very entertaining presentation you didn't

1:44:39

disappoint but i mean so you're at eui we we portray ourselves as a premier social

1:44:45

science institution in europe and i guess i'd like to push you and it's really following up on stephanie and eric about sort of the social science

1:44:52

behind your argumentation because i mean when i tell my researchers like developing ir theory

1:44:58

right okay so definitely don't like just establish correlations give us some sense of the causal processes to connect

1:45:04

a to b to c e to d to get us to an outcome um i tell them to operationalize their

1:45:10

terms carefully i tell them to think well what would threaten my argument with alternate

1:45:16

explanations and i just worry sort of it all counts

1:45:21

right i mean you sort of gave us a really interesting narrative here that just sort of fails on all those accounts

1:45:28

you you keep accusing the mainstream narrative of basically cherry-picking stuff to tell us a story

1:45:35

it sort of sounds like you're doing the same thing um to tell another story um

1:45:40

so that's worrying i mean what were your methods i mean how many sources did you look at i assume you can only use

1:45:46

english right so you're just looking at translated stuff um i mean that's an issue right

1:45:53

key terms for you existential fret and you made it clear in the talk right it's nato expansion

1:46:00

anybody who studies russian politics right would tell you in putin's own

1:46:06

words the existential frets was aries comment uh coming back about ten decades is

1:46:12

democracy he's creating the beginnings of a totalitarian system in russia

1:46:19

and so one narrative that's out there an argument of why he did this he had to act now to invade before ukraine became
1:46:27
democracy okay and because that would undercut and destroy his kleptocratic regime he's
1:46:34
created at home alternative explanations final point domestic politics right
1:46:41
it seems really important you have to know this stuff you expressed a prize right that
1:46:47
putin couldn't have wanted to take all of ukraine because look at the setup they didn't have enough forces have you
1:46:53
studied from the russian specialist about the decision-making before the invasion
1:47:00
putin was listening to three people shogu who was telling them stories he thought he could actually take care and
1:47:06
decapitate it you're assuming there was some rationality that decision-making process which simply wasn't there
1:47:14
so i just worry that you know if we sort of really think about the social science behind your your argument it's sort of
1:47:20
it it's not there thanks veronica please
1:47:30
and then veronica if you don't mind give it to your neighbor i think your hand was up too no
yes
1:47:36
so veronica angel postdoc a fellow here at dui i wonder if there's any room for
1:47:43
a nuance on your position on western commitment to ukraine nuance yes
1:47:49
i'm just trying i'm trying to be nice to you really trying
1:47:54
um in your position on western commitment to ukraine's eu and and nato
1:48:00
membership because the opposition to nato enlargement coming from multiple western
1:48:05
nato states that you alluded to as well as lukewarm eastern european support uh
1:48:12
from member states which you did not mention but which also characterizes the
1:48:18
foreign policy of these countries since they did join eu and nato
1:48:23
rather confirms the idea that the need for a buffer zone between the west and russia also permeated
1:48:31
nato's strategic culture not just the russian one so is it your
1:48:37

suggestion that we should believe that the idea of buffer zone creation was never part of post-cold war u.s foreign

1:48:44

policy and does that mean that we should read your interpretation of the war

1:48:50

as a call for the ideological and material investment in a long overdue creation of

1:48:57

this velvet divorce and of territories defined by fragile

1:49:03

equilibria and back to jeffrey's point as well

1:49:10

you use the word evidence a lot which elicits no attention to knowledge making

1:49:15

tools how do you conduct your research it's quite possible that

1:49:20

your position on interpreting putin's intentions and that of people who study

1:49:26

the area is so different because we simply talk to different people who are your interlocutors on the ground

1:49:34

your resources the archival material your concern um and so on thank you

1:49:39

i know it's unfair to the people who will ask questions now but please be a little shorter and if possible one

1:49:45

question per person just so we get a few more people and questions and apologies

1:49:50

next to you yes thanks i you ended your speech by saying that um

1:49:57

history will judge unfavorably should i stand up okay that's what i'm talking about the

1:50:03

united states and its allies but you didn't really talk about the allies during your talk except to say that they

1:50:09

were opposed to the um 2008 decision to um

1:50:16

aim for ukraine and georgia to become members of nato and they couldn't get their way

1:50:23

and olaf schultz was in kiev i think or moscow in february just before the war began

1:50:29

um and he talked about nato uh the prospect of nato membership and he said this is not on the table for the

1:50:35

foreseeable future but he didn't say germany and france are vetoing the

1:50:40

prospect of ukraine joining um nato so my question is

1:50:46

why if germany and france were opposed to the very principle of nato expansion

1:50:52

to ukraine and georgia why did they fail to stop the prospect of nato expansion

1:50:58

from getting onto the agenda and remaining there and a second question very quickly what

1:51:05

should change what what would need to change in the future for that to be possible for the french

1:51:12

and the germans do you mind if i take one more question or do you prefer

1:51:25

we do another round but so we we try to so that i'm just worried that eric will give me the sign very fast so i'm

1:51:31

squeezing one more question can you give the person behind you thank you very much i'm makoto and a

1:51:37

postdoc here my question is about a cheap talk so you mentioned you relied on putin's

1:51:44

statement and i understand that putin usually don't lie to foreign colleagues but

1:51:50

if the war aims the real world or partial war aim is unpalatable isn't it

1:51:55

a good reason for them to rio generic leader try for example when japan invaded southeast asia japan wanted the

1:52:01

oil in indonesia they never publicly said that so you mentioned that we need or counter-argument needs and a definite

1:52:09

proof that putin had intent to you know have an imperialistic expansion but if imperialistic expander

1:52:17

itself is unpalatable then is any kind of unrealistic to expect him to say hey

1:52:22

angela actually i have imperialist ambition and i have intention to follow through

1:52:27

and also relatedly what i think you know uh

1:52:33

it could be a case that if the perception of russia about nato is very

1:52:38

important then isn't it the case that you know the most paranoid people

1:52:45

most people most paranoid to the provocation oh sorry then

1:52:50

i stopped it thank you

1:52:58

let me just start with uh jeffrey's point look social science has real limits and uh

1:53:05

you do your best with the evidence and uh you always

1:53:11

live with the possibility that you're wrong it may be the case that all the available public evidence points in one

1:53:18

direction but when they open the archives in 20 years you'll discover that you were wrong
1:53:24
and this last gentleman or the last question you hear from this gentleman uh
1:53:30
that uh this is just you know uh a cover all this talk about nato expansion is a
1:53:35
cover for the real motive because it's unpalatable maybe proved true
1:53:40
i'm not up here saying i have the truth i'm giving you my interpretation and with regard to the
evidence
1:53:48
before i go before an audience and i go before lots of people when i talk i want to make sure
that i've got
1:53:55
my arguments down that the evidence does support me because i don't want to make a fool of
myself i don't want to end up
1:54:01
with egg all over my face i've read everything i could get my hands on i've talked to lots of
people
1:54:07
and i've given this talk in different forms before lots of audiences and people have run
counter arguments up
1:54:14
against me and pointed to other evidence and so forth and so on so i'm reasonably
1:54:19
comfortable that the available evidence supports my basic line of argument but that's not to
say i'm locked in
1:54:27
and eric and i were talking before in his office and i was telling him if he came across any
evidence in a book that
1:54:33
he was mentioning to me that contradicted what i had to say please
1:54:38
send it to me as soon as possible and i'll change my arguments accordingly
1:54:43
with regard to what an existential threat is i think the russians are quite clear in this particular
case that an
1:54:49
existential threat is there's a threat to their survival in the ir
1:54:56
sense of the term in the same way we viewed nuclear-tipped missiles in cuba as an
1:55:04
existential threat i think there's not much question that the russians
1:55:09
see nato enlargement to include ukraine as a
1:55:16
as a threat to their survival as a security threat of the highest order
1:55:23
with regard to your interesting question about how do i determine
1:55:28

that they didn't have enough forces to conquer all of ukraine
1:55:34
i i actually wrote my dissertation on conventional deterrence
1:55:40
which really revolved around the question of a soviet offensive into western europe
1:55:47
during the cold war i know a huge amount about armored war
1:55:52
and conventional war i went to west point as an undergraduate i was in the army i was in the
air force
1:56:00
i've studied german operations in world war ii
1:56:06
extensively i've studied israeli armored operations in the middle east extensively
1:56:12
and i didn't have to rely on anybody's opinions on whether or not
1:56:19
the russians had the capability to conquer ukraine with 190 000 forces
1:56:25
i could count up how many armored division equivalents they had how many they needed
what was necessary to
1:56:31
conquer ukraine what was necessary to occupy ukraine and then i know enough about social
engineering as well to
1:56:37
think about what kind of force levels they need to do that it is not even close and all the other
people like barry
1:56:44
posen at mit who i know who are experts about the nitty-gritty of conventional
1:56:50
war agree with me on this issue so that assessment is based on my own views
1:56:57
with regard to this young woman over there who commented on my lack of nuance
1:57:04
i think there is no doubt about it that virtually everybody who knows me would
1:57:09
agree that nuance is not my uh modus operandi
1:57:14
uh but you raised the interesting issue about a buffer zone
1:57:20
and the russians wanted a buffer zone that they wanted ukraine as a buffer zone and
1:57:27
that's what they care about regarding bella russ abella russia as well
1:57:33
it's actually nato that didn't want to buffer zone i went to poland about three or four
1:57:39
different times and i told the polls the last thing you want to do is expand
1:57:46
nato into ukraine because it's going to be like poking a hornet's nest and it's
1:57:51

going to cause unending trouble for poland i said you have the ideal situation now in that you have a buffer

1:57:59

zone ukraine between poland and russia and what you should do is everything you

1:58:05

possibly can to maintain that buffer zone and if you poke the bear and the bear takes ukraine

1:58:13

the bear's going to be right next door to you and that is not going to be good but

1:58:19

we were not interested the polls were not interested the baltic states were not interested

1:58:25

and the americans are certainly not interested we wanted to march nato right up to their doorstep so my argument

1:58:31

would be they should have been interested in a buffer zone sort of getting in line with your points but we weren't

1:58:38

uh history and allies uh

1:58:45

this is the question is the third question uh what why didn't

1:58:50

the europeans get their way the europeans didn't get the way because

1:58:58

the europeans danced to our tomb we run nato this is a matter of power we have all

1:59:04

these fictions that we tell people about joint decision making

1:59:10

the united states runs nato and the europeans do what we tell them

1:59:16

you could talk to the russians about this you want to know why putin and lavrov send a letter to washington on

1:59:21

december 17th and say that's the response we care about they don't care about the response from jen stoltenberg

1:59:30

how many divisions does jen stoltenberg have right it's the united states of america that

1:59:36

really matters no it's not but he was talking he was

1:59:42

talking about merkel and sarkozy and bush got what he wanted

1:59:48

my question is why didn't merkel stand up to him merkel understood sarkozy understood

1:59:56

it was the americans who were pursuing a remarkably foolish policy if

2:00:03

you just think about what merkel said germany germany is going to suffer enormously

2:00:11

from this catastrophe in ukraine it is going to have really negative effects

2:00:16

and i say to myself apropos your comments why didn't she throw down the

2:00:22
gauntlet and say under no circumstances are we allowing ukraine to come into
2:00:27
nato that's exactly what she should have done but the germans hardly ever do that
2:00:33
they always dance to our tunes one history
2:00:39
and i don't think i have to explain that to you and number two they have a deal here and the
deal is
2:00:45
the united states stays in europe acts as a pacifier provides security for them
2:00:51
and they basically go along with what we want them to do that's the deal
2:00:56
right they don't want us to leave so they don't want to anger us they don't want to tell us to
jump in the lake and
2:01:03
in the end they cave in most of the time they didn't cave in on iraq
2:01:09
but most of the time they cave in and on this one they caved in big time and i
2:01:15
believe the consequences are catastrophic your point about cheap talk
2:01:21
look your point is basically that this is an
2:01:27
imperial enterprise and they're covering it up with
2:01:34
rhetoric about nato expansion and i can't prove that you're wrong
2:01:43
other than saying i see no evidence that you're right
2:01:48
if when they open the archives you're right and i'm wrong god bless you you're right i was
wrong
2:01:55
i'll admit it but based on everything that's out there in the public record
2:02:00
and sort of what fits in my story from a logical point of view i think you're
2:02:05
wrong that you know they're not that they're not buffaloing us they're not you know
2:02:12
they're not lying to us but i can't be 100 certain on that
2:02:19
i'll be very unconventional i let one more question in but as a gift to you
2:02:24
for dinner so if you'd like this will be a could be a conversation topic because what happens
to be who happens to be
2:02:31
here in the room is one of the architects of european security policy robert cooper and so if
you don't mind
2:02:37

we'll finish with robert who gives us a question that maybe we'll serve for dinner
conversation the pressure is on
2:02:43
before we finish i mean european security policy is rather grand term for what the i worked
2:02:50
for the european union for some time and i wouldn't describe what it has as actually being a
2:02:56
security policy in real realist terms but i wrote a paper
2:03:01
um the um but i was going to say to you and this is partly based on my european
2:03:08
experience um maybe when you write all this down you could
2:03:13
include a footnote about the incompetence of multilateral organizations
2:03:20
organizations um because actually i found the nato declaration that issued from
2:03:26
bucharest really extraordinary i could understand them inviting ukraine to join
2:03:32
or to start the the membership action procedure that meant something i could understand
them remaining silent that
2:03:39
meant something but to say nato will one day be a member of ukraine without
2:03:44
having any program behind it or anything like that that was just a big a piece of of um
multilateral
2:03:52
incompetence and remember this was drafted personally by the heads of government and
that's
2:03:57
when you get real incompetence uh joined together so it's not kind of pure theory but it's um
2:04:04
uh uh but nevertheless multilateral organizations are very curious actually
2:04:10
i think the uk player played a bad role because if the uk had joined france and
2:04:16
germany in saying look this is rather dangerous it needs to be thought about more carefully
2:04:22
maybe we could have got away with saying nothing which would have been a good solution
2:04:27
so ken very quickly
2:04:34
oh sorry over time i've come to appreciate the importance of multilateral institutions
2:04:42
or what you call multilateral organizations when i first you know started thinking about
institutions i
2:04:47
tended to be somewhat contemptuous contemptuous of them and that was foolish on my part
2:04:54
but the argument i would make is that multilateral institutions are run by the

2:04:59

most powerful states and the eu and nato are run in large part by

2:05:07

the most powerful states and with regard to nato and the april 2008 decision

2:05:13

you said that it was evidence of multilateral incompetence i think there's absolutely no question

2:05:20

you're right you're you know i've now studied and talked to people about this you're absolutely

2:05:25

right but it was the americans who were responsible it was the bush administration and if you look at the

2:05:32

decision-making process it was to put it in crude terms a half-assed decision-making process where the

2:05:38

americans really goofed i would just say you from having satan from having spent three days in germany talking to a

2:05:45

number of people about this issue they would take issue with you on the uk

2:05:50

their argument is it's not my argument this is what a number of people said to me the french and especially the germans

2:05:58

were real bolsheviks about opposing the americans they said that the british basically

2:06:04

agreed with the germans and the french but they didn't want to anger the americans so they kept their mouths

2:06:11

closed so that was the story that i heard but that's just more evidence that it was the crazy

2:06:18

americans who were driving the train and that was the point that i tried to make to you folks

2:06:25

apologies to everyone else who wanted to ask questions but as john you said you invited everyone to send you evidence i

2:06:31

hope you also could invite everyone who still has questions to send him questions and

2:06:36

i will just uh invite you to to maybe have spent some time in answering them in the meantime please thank me for for

2:06:43

all the time and patience of answering the questions that have been asked and for your presentation

2:06:55

[Applause]