

# Russia, Ukraine and the West: Is Confrontation Inevitable?

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## Question 1

There was a word that's been bandied about: neutrality. I just wanted to maybe let you guys expand on that issue a little bit. It seems that if we look at real success stories over the past century, the countries that have really avoided confrontation with Russia – Finland and Austria come to mind – for the longest period have been countries that pledged neutrality. As a result, I wanted your views on why that's not been, given the success of having countries that are neutral in dealing with Russia and being unmolested even when being democracies, why hasn't that been the option that America has been pushing more aggressively? Given what you said about Ukraine being an existential threat to Russia, in terms of its democracy. We do have this experience of democratic Finland being on the Soviet border and not being viewed as an existential threat, perhaps because it was neutral.

## Michael McFaul

Can I respond quickly, because we have an empirical problem here. I'll let others answer your real question. The assumption in your question, that the United States was pushing for Ukraine to join NATO, is just not true. Some Ukrainians – some of your friends probably, Chrystia, and my friends – were incredibly upset at us for that. Go back and read the letter in 2009 from a group of very prominent East Europeans, wrote about the Obama administration saying that we had sold out the project of NATO. So this has been concocted as a result of this crisis. This has not been a policy before.

## John Mearsheimer

I just wanted to say a word about neutrality. I think the solution is to create a neutral Ukraine that is a buffer state, and what neutrality means is that Ukraine cannot be part of NATO. It cannot be a Western bulwark against Russia. Furthermore, the United States and its European allies cannot support any government in Ukraine that is decidedly anti-Russian. That's what you need. But you can't move in that direction now because we have decided to double-down on the policies that we've been pursuing in the past. We think that we can punish the Russians and continue to talk about NATO expansion, continue to talk about EU expansion, continue to talk about the Orange Revolution, and we'll live happily ever after. That's a huge mistake.

## Question 2

Despite John's misgivings about being American, the West on this panel is overwhelmingly from the North American continent. Yet we're sitting in London. Where is Europe in all of this? We're not talking about Ukraine being the 51st state, we're talking about it being part of Europe. Does Europe have a role? Is it just a buffer? Is it a proxy? Is it a puppet? Do we have a purpose in all of this?

## Roger Cohen

What about Europe? We see the usual disagreement now emerging on further sanctions, with the Obama administration wanting to go further, Europe hesitating. What role should Europe play?

## Chrystia Freeland

I think that is an excellent question. Actually, inside Ukraine, the thing that prompted this Ukrainian revolution, that drove it, was not – it wasn't about geopolitics. It was about a desire to have a European-type political and economic system. It was really about, as Roger pointed out, Ukrainians looking across the border at Poland and saying: why the heck can't we live like that? I think the most important thing for Europe to do but also for North America to do right now is to focus most of our energies on the 90 per cent of Ukraine which is absolutely clear on what it wants, which is in the best interests of the whole world, which is to build a prosperous, democratic market economy. That's going to be hard enough. If we can help them do that, that's where I see the path to success. If Ukraine can be economically and politically successful, even with rumbling pain on the edges, that becomes an argument in and of itself – and stabilizing, by the way, for Moscow as well as for countries to the west.

## Dmitri Trenin

In purchasing power parity terms, Russia's GDP last year was about 70 per cent of the EU's average. If you're sitting in Kiev, you may wish to be in Munich, but you probably know that in your lifetime your GDP will not reach Germany's level. Poland, possible. But other options are also available. There are countries down south that have lower GDP. Actually, Russia's GDP, if you're sitting there weighing your options, Russia does not appear such a weak contender. Actually, Russia's GDP is three times higher than Ukraine's today. You may say it's all because of oil and gas and all that, but it's also a fact. It's way above some other countries in southeastern Europe which are members of the EU.

So there is a choice. A lot of Ukrainian industry in the east traditionally even to this day is working for one market only, and that's the Russian market. This is something we all should have been thinking about, about a year ago. I think Europe, in my view, started playing (unwittingly, maybe) geopolitical games without – or having unlearned to do geopolitics. But by design, so it was about normative things, bringing to Ukraine, but the geopolitical element of that was missing. I think that was a cardinal mistake of the European approach toward Ukraine.

The fact that Europe, again for a very good reason – Europe said that we don't discuss countries that want to be associated with us with any third country, which is a perfectly good point. But in this particular case, I think it played a pretty bad role in what happened later and what is likely to happen now, because it is a big question. Bailing out Ukraine – I wholeheartedly support Ukraine's modernization, Ukraine becoming a prosperous, stable country. But it will take a very serious effort. So far we have not seen much of that effort coming from the international community, let's put it that way.

### Question 3

Ambassador, last week in your seat was the secretary-general of NATO. I asked him whether the expansion of NATO was tantamount to provocation on Russia. By the same token, what I'm going to ask you is this: think of your southern border in Mexico. If there was chaos there and Russian politicians and businessmen were helping the people against the government, and [indiscernible] together, what your government will do?

### Michael McFaul

Again to NATO – Putin is the one that's given NATO new life. NATO was not in great shape just a couple years ago. NATO was leaving Afghanistan. We don't talk this bluntly, and maybe I shouldn't right now – I'm remembering the live-stream – but let's be real, they were struggling for a mandate. Now he's made it clear. In the same way that he's helped Ukrainian identity and nationhood, his actions are what has given new life to NATO. It was not – I'm telling you, I worked in the White House for three years and I went to the NATO summit –

### John Mearsheimer

But you're not answering his question.

### Roger Cohen

Do you buy the Mexican analogy?

### Michael McFaul

Actually there was a civil war in Mexico. There was fighting there, the Chiapas, twenty years ago. There was fighting there and we did not intervene.

### John Mearsheimer

That's not his point.

### Roger Cohen

The question was if Russians were helping –

## Michael McFaul

But Mexico is a democracy with relations with us. It's hard for me to imagine, like why would the Mexicans want that? That's kind of the essence of what I'm getting at. There's no military threat from the United States to Mexico, so to bring the Russians in, it's hard for me to imagine. But the Russians did have a base in Cuba for a long time. By the way, Putin was the one who closed it.

## John Mearsheimer

And how did we react? We were furious.

## Michael McFaul

No, we lived with it for forty years. Come on.

## John Mearsheimer

Fidel Castro is still in their gun sights.

## Michael McFaul

My personal view, we should have lifted the embargo a long time ago. There is a legacy.

## John Mearsheimer

But we didn't, that's the point.

## Michael McFaul

But John, they had soldiers there, they have soldiers – no. We would not stop some military relationship between – look at what they have with Venezuela right now, that's all brand new. Do you see us invading Venezuela? We're not doing that. Again, you're overestimating American power, my friend. This is the 21st century, not the 20th.

## Dmitri Trenin

No, I think it's also a fact that the safe limits of NATO's enlargement to the east have been reached. They were reached years ago. What we've seen in Georgia, what we're seeing in Ukraine, testifies to that fact.

## Question 4

I just want to agree with Dmitri but I want to put it to the panel that the European Union was not just irresponsible, it was grossly negligent for this particular reason (and for other reasons). One cannot but find the argument that John Mearsheimer puts across, even though one might not want to agree with it, extremely appealing. But I just want to put this point to you: the European Union engaged in a plan to expand the European Union when Putin is one of our primary suppliers of natural gas, in the face of common sense. In fairness, that was an idiotic thing to do. We've had no apology for that. We've had no rush for shale, no new energy strategy. Winston Churchill said in July 1913: variety, always variety, when it comes to sources of energy. The European Union failed that test. I'm really depressed, we've had no serious criticism or any self-examination about that. Thank you.

## John Mearsheimer

To paraphrase Talleyrand: it was worse than a crime, it was a blunder.

## Roger Cohen

I don't think that was a question, but anyway. Yes.

## Question 5

I have a question regarding the NATO remarks of Professor Mearsheimer. We kind of say that NATO is a threat to Russia but maybe it's a threat not in military terms, but the very discourse of NATO is an instrument for the Russian government to manufacture public concern and make it easier for them to keep that corrupt regime there. Also what I would like to say: in the Georgian war, Mr Putin was in charge of the war very much. He flew to Vladikavkaz the next day from Beijing. The second thing is, do you think that, when you said the Ukrainian people have no choice, do you think that a former KGB colonel's opinion is more important than the will of millions of people to get rid of Soviet hierarchy and become a free society?

## Chrystia Freeland

Well put.

## Roger Cohen

The essential question is, why shouldn't Ukrainians be free? Why do they have to be in the hands of KGB agents who think they should control their lives?

## John Mearsheimer

On your first question about how the Russians think about NATO expansion, all that really matters is what the Russians think –

## Michael McFaul

A Russian.

## John Mearsheimer

– and exactly why they think a particular way doesn't matter. The truth is that if you go back to Boris Yeltsin, Boris Yeltsin made it clear that NATO expansion was unacceptable. Every Russian leader, every foreign policy elite in Russia, has made it clear that NATO expansion is a no-no. They think that and if you don't take that into account when you're in the West, you run into the problem that this gentleman on my left described.

What was the second question?

## Roger Cohen

Should Ukrainian lives be controlled by the KGB or should they have the freedom to choose what they want to make of their lives?

## John Mearsheimer

That's a loaded question. It gets back to the earlier issue that I raised about rights. The idea that Ukraine simply has the right to choose whatever it wants and that's the way the world works now in the 21st century is rhetoric that you hear all the time, especially here in Europe and especially in Washington. But I'm sorry, that's not the way the world works when a great power's interests are threatened. Ukraine is of huge strategic importance to the Russians, as Dmitri made clear. When you start talking about taking NATO and the EU and moving it eastward, and you talk about doing social engineering inside of Ukraine that's designed to bring to power leaders who are decidedly anti-Russian, you are really asking for big

trouble. If they were doing this to the United States, to get back to this gentleman's question, you could rest assured that whoever did that would pay an awful price, as Fidel Castro and the Cuban people have found out. They did not have a right.

## Roger Cohen

I can see various panellists itching – Mike, go ahead.

## Michael McFaul

I just want to say one thing because I think this is getting – we're framing this, we've accepted John's logic in this debate and I want to break it down.

## John Mearsheimer

You have?

## Michael McFaul

No, this debate. I haven't. I want to say some provocative things just to make sure there's a different point of view here. This notion that we're in a great power competition with Russia is not something I experienced when I was in the government for five years. When Barack Obama went to Moscow in July 2009, he gave a speech at the New Economic School. Guess what, I had a hand in it. He said: we think it's in the national interest of the United States – every phrase, go back and read the speech, you can pick it up right now – every one of his paragraphs was not, we want peace, love and understanding with the Russians. It is not, we feel your pain, although there is some of that in there about World War II. It is: we believe it is in the United States' national interest – so a realist argument – that Russia become strong, prosperous and closer to the United States.

Which is to say this framing of NATO in, NATO out – we rejected that. We thought that there could be neutral cooperation on big issues, including missile defence, Dmitri. We went farther than anybody else to try to cooperate with them. My own view – and I wrote this, so it's always there, whatever you write, and I wrote a lot of other stupid things – but I advocated for Russian membership of NATO 20 years ago. By the way, you're wrong about Yeltsin and Putin. Both Yeltsin and Putin – Putin, February 2000, said Russia in NATO, not a bad idea. He said that. I think he was actually in London when he said it, it was a BBC interview, you can look it up.

Which is to say we are not damned for the rest of time to be in superpower competition with Russia. I think there's an alternative vision which is more about institutions, rules of the game and cooperation, not this debate we're having as if the whole – all the problems of Europe and Russia and the United States is NATO expansion. This feels a little surreal to me when I think of all the other really big problems that my administration is facing. What happens with NATO is just an instrument to a much larger set of issues,



which in my view – my personal view now – 90 per cent of them, there is overlap between Russia and the United States, not competition.

### Chrystia Freeland

Following on from what Mike has said, the world has changed.

### John Mearsheimer

It hasn't changed.

### Chrystia Freeland

We might not want the Ukrainian people to have agency but they do have agency.

### John Mearsheimer

They don't.

### Chrystia Freeland

They didn't call Mike up, they didn't call the White House up, they didn't call Brussels up and say: hey dudes, is it okay if we overthrow our kleptocrat who is trying to install an authoritarian regime here? They did it because that's what they believed in for themselves. This is the new 21st century geopolitical reality, which realists sometimes don't want to acknowledge but it is there. And you know what, actually? So far the Ukrainians are winning. Who is ruling Ukraine?

Second quick point. Let's not fall into the mistake of moral equivalency. So many times this evening we've been talking about, well, the US did this so Russia can do that. The reality is today's Russia – not all Russia, but the ruler of this Russia – is building an increasingly authoritarian regime, one which represses its citizens and one which is absolutely kleptocratic. When the Ukrainians were thinking about, do we want to be in an economic relationship with Russia or Europe – Dmitri is quite right, economically it was much more convenient for the oligarchs, including Petro Poroshenko, who sold most of his chocolates to Russia and had factories there – it was better for them to continue to be involved in that relationship. But you know what? Occasionally, not always, but occasionally politicians and citizens say: my human dignity and living in a democracy and in freedom – you know what, sometimes that matters in the world. That is really what is at stake right now in Ukraine.

## Question 6

It's quite disheartening to hear the professor, especially as I come from Macedonia, and I hear the professor's discourse very similar to what we have witnessed in the former Yugoslavia with Milosevic. But let's put it aside, and do not smile.

## Michael McFaul

Which professor, by the way, just so I know which one?

## John Mearsheimer

You've got to be careful.

## Question 6

But for the sake of all these victims in Yugoslavia on behalf of such a policy, I would rather not smile. I just want to ask Chrystia, as potential future foreign minister of Canada, what kind of new policy should the West have, should Putin continue with this kind of attitude?

## Question 7

I have been struck by the fact that there hasn't been any discussion of the main elements of the Russian approach to Ukraine in the six months preceding the action in Crimea. I wonder why this is. The Russians first – Sergey Glazyev came out clearly and said if Ukraine signs the association agreement with the EU, Ukraine will be taken apart. Russians then proposed a boycott on all Ukrainian products if the agreement was signed. Putin then came out and said Ukraine, Belarus and Russia are one people and we want to see them in a Eurasian Union, the purpose of which is to bring all three parts of the Russian nation together. In the negotiations in December leading up to the agreement between Russia and Ukraine, the whole question was about giving Russia control of the Ukrainian economy and preventing Ukraine from signing a trade agreement with anyone else. To my knowledge, there was no discussion of NATO. And the Russians have come through and carried out precisely what they said they were going to do if Ukraine decided to sign the agreement with the EU. Is this not the real basis of Russian policy in the six months leading up to the invasion of Crimea?

## Question 8

I want to take us away from NATO and back to Ukraine. The Ukrainian people elected Petro Poroshenko, who is one of the richest people on Forbes' list, with enormous industrial assets in Russia and vast business interests. As Professor Mearsheimer said, the Russian leadership has the whole toolbox to work

on these issues. My question to you is looking at the future. If, for instance, in a year's time, liberal reforms in Ukraine fail and Petro Poroshenko would be taking a Ukraine into Russia's orbit, what the Western reaction might be?

## Roger Cohen

Why don't we start with you, Dmitri, with the last question. If liberal reformists fail, what would the Russian reaction be?

## Dmitri Trenin

I've been silent for a period of time so I will have a lot of other things to say before I – well, maybe I will start with this.

## Roger Cohen

Dmitri, I appreciate that. We're also three minutes over the official end of the debate, so bear that in mind.

## Dmitri Trenin

I think the fact today is that Ukraine has gotten rid of a regime but the system is largely in place, sadly. Again, with all due respect, not all kleptocrats live in Moscow. There are some who live in –

## Chrystia Freeland

London?

## Dmitri Trenin

– Dnipropetrovsk. Some who live in Kharkov. Some who live in other parts of Ukraine. They are now the allies of Poroshenko. They are now in good standing, for very good reasons. So let's not talk about labels. Labels cannot get us there. I lived in a country that was all about labels until 1991. Ideology, I must tell you, does not bring you very far. What I see today, what is disturbing in my view about the West, is that there's a little bit more ideology, a little bit less common sense in the Western debates – certainly when we're talking about Russia but not only. There is a degree of ideologization – whatever, too much ideology – in foreign policy debates. Not good. Take it from a Russian, former Soviet. Not a good thing.

That's why I think talking about moral equivalence is not a good thing, Chrystia, frankly. Again, in international relations, you can't achieve much with some very important countries, starting with China. That's not the way to go, in my view.

My next point will be that one big problem, probably the fundamental problem with NATO enlargement is that – and I'm thankful to Mike for saying that, I've always known that he's on the right side of history, at least part of the time.

## Michael McFaul

You just have to have a long view, right, Dmitri?

## Dmitri Trenin

When he talked about his support about Russia's membership in NATO. I think the problem we are facing, in a nutshell, is that the post-Cold War settlement was flawed because it did not include Russia into a common security system with the West – as it did include Germany, as it did include Japan after the Second World War. I don't think Russia would be happy with the position of Germany or Japan in US-led alliances but that's a different story. I think that's the fundamental issue. That is what we are dealing with. That is why NATO in Ukraine is important to Putin, to the political establishment, military and security people, and many others. I may say it doesn't matter. I may say, who cares? The Baltic states, Romania, who cares? It doesn't really matter. For a lot of people back home, it does matter.

## Roger Cohen

But Mike's been saying all through that it's a straw man.

## Dmitri Trenin

Yeah, it may be a straw man, but it's not one man's opinion only. I think we will be kidding ourselves if we think it's all about Mr Putin. If only Mr Putin were to be replaced by somebody else – we'll be kidding ourselves if we were to say that. So I think the fundamental failure was the non-inclusion of Russia under terms appropriate to Russia, appropriate to its partners, into a common system with the West.

## Roger Cohen

Dmitri, if you could look forward in answer to the question – looking forward now, the Poroshenko experiment doesn't work out. There was a question about how Russia should respond. Then we'll go to Chrystia and what you'll do as foreign minister.

## John Mearsheimer

Prime minister.

## Roger Cohen

I thought it was foreign minister. Eventually prime minister, dealing with Putin.

## Dmitri Trenin

I think it's too early to tell what the Poroshenko experiment will bring. It's too early to tell what the new revolution – call it a revolution – what the new revolution will bring. Again, my heart is in the right place and I feel for the people in Ukraine. But we've seen one revolution failing many people's expectations. A lot of effort will be needed for Ukraine to succeed. If the experiment unravels – I never thought it was a good idea for Russia to seek Ukraine inside the tent. I always thought that in the Russian national interest, the best way to deal with Ukraine will be to deal with it as with a foreign country. You will have to be able to secure your national interests so much better than when you have them in, pay for them, give them a huge vote in your councils and then face the prospects of them turning their back on you and going. That I think would have happened had Yanukovych signed on the dotted line and included Ukraine into the Eurasian Union. I think Russia was spared an enormous amount.

Very lastly. There is one thing I am very disturbed also about. Much as Chrystia said Mr Putin is helping Ukraine coalesce, I see now Western pressure on Russia helping the Russian nation coalesce with the West as the other, as the enemy. Not a good scenario, in my view, not a good outcome. But that is what I see. Russia is not turning imperial, it is turning nationalist. That's a different thing for a post-imperial nation.

Very lastly. Putin starting a war against Georgia. Being in Beijing is a fun way to start a war. He basically rushed to Vladikavkaz as a president or a senior politician would rush to the scene of an earthquake or something like that. But that's a small footnote to history. I'm done.

## Roger Cohen

Thank you, Dmitri. Chrystia: you're foreign minister, President Putin continues in this nationalist vein – some would say aggressive nationalist vein. What do you do?

## Chrystia Freeland

Okay, Roger, I'm now a politician: I have to reject your hypothetical completely. I am just a humble, mere, foreign trade critic for the Liberal Party. I have to say we're just the third rump party, we hope to form a government in 2015 but there's a lot of hard work ahead of us. So here's what would be my Ukraine foreign policy, and this is broadly what Canada is doing. We have cross-party consensus on this.

One, Dmitri is right. Ukraine had its revolution but it hasn't rebuilt its country. There is a tremendous amount of work to do. The West has given Ukraine its support now and we have an obligation to help them out. It's chiefly up to the Ukrainians whether they make it work or not and they're going to be the guys who win or lose depending on that, but we should be helping them a lot. It's not just about giving the Ukrainians money, it is about helping them do the institution-building and democratization they didn't do in the 1990s. So that would be one.

Two, keep up the pressure on Russia but don't enter into a new Cold War. So make it very clear – I think these targeted sanctions, surgical sanctions, have been effective. Putin has started to pull back a little bit. Have eyes wide open, be aware that we may have to go further, but be tactical about it.

Point three, and this is a point that Mike has made very well: we're in a new phase of relationship with Russia. It's not about partnership, it's not about helping Russia in its modernizing efforts. It is about a transactional relationship with a country which is unpredictable and frankly hostile to some of our most cherished and, for me, very personally and deeply held ideals about the world.

Point four, Europe's energy. Europe has to sort out its energy. This is a long-term thing. We have to work on it. Canada should be helping. We have a lot of this stuff so let's work on that really hard so that there is less vulnerability vis-à-vis Russia.

And finally, for all of us here, we have to all recommit to multilateral institutions. There was a question about this being so much a US-focused debate. It's not fair to our American friends to expect them to do everything and they have told us frankly they're not prepared to. So everyone who wants to live in a democratic world that has some trade and capitalism going on, we all have to probably pay a little more attention and spend a little more money on that stuff than we thought we were going to. Freedom isn't free.

## Roger Cohen

Mike, the last question goes to you. It was a question from that gentleman about, wasn't this really about the EU association agreement. Wasn't that actually the true catalyst to what happened? If you could at the same time answer one other question that came in via Twitter: did NATO not promise to Russia in 1997 that it would not expand and increase its military presence?

## Michael McFaul

You're absolutely right, Ambassador. I was still in the government for the six months that you described. It was not about NATO – there was no discussion of NATO at all, zero. By the way, I see some social scientists here – it's an easy thing to do, just do a little content analysis of Russian press up to that point and then after, and find out how many times the word NATO appears by the state-controlled press. You'll see, because I've seen the data, it just spikes after. So it was not about NATO. It was about the EU.

This interesting point that Dmitri raised about maybe Putin sees these things as joined at the hip – that's an interesting thing I hadn't thought about. But it was all about the accession agreement. Initially, because I was still ambassador, the Russians were thrilled with the outcome. I remember very vividly, I don't want to name names, but a very senior administration official in Moscow, I saw him two days after Yanukovich didn't sign. He's like: we kicked your ass (excuse my non-diplomatic language, but that's what he said). We beat you! He was very excited about it, they had taken us. That was interesting. No disrespect to the EU but he was talking about the Americans. We had nothing to do with those negotiations, by the way, we're really busy with other things. That is maybe part of our problem too.

Then I went over to the guys who are in charge of the economy and they weren't so excited, because it was a \$15 billion price tag, but that was the debate. It was not about NATO, so you're right about that.

But I want to end on a bigger issue that's related to this. As the debate unfolded and as things got more polarized because of the demonstrations, and we were chasing that history, we were not leading that history. I think we had a pretty good assessment of whether Yanukovich was going to sign that agreement or not, in terms of our administration. We did not have a good assessment of the response, at least from where I was sitting and my point of view.

But our argument to Russia is the one I want to leave you with tonight, which is: this does not have to be zero-sum. The Canadians at the time were negotiating a trade agreement with the Russians. You know what our view of that was? Knock yourselves out. As long as it abides by NAFTA, as long as it abides by the agreements with us, we don't see the world in these zero-sum terms. That was our argument to the Russians. As long as it's WTO consistent, because we just spent a lot of time getting Russia into the WTO, this can be good for Europe, good for Ukraine and good for Russia. We – I'll just say 'I', I don't want to say 'we' anymore – I don't think the world is this group of states. We are reifying this – I want to meet Mr Russia someday. Russia thinks this, Russia thinks that.

I'll end with two anecdotes. Because I'm in London, it reminded me of the first one. The first time we met Medvedev was here, April 1st, 2009. We came here, it was on the sidelines of one of the G8 or G20, I can't even remember. Back then the debate was about a phrase that the Russian government was using and Medvedev has used called 'privileged spheres of influence', if you remember. He said this and a short time before, the president of Kyrgyzstan had come to Russia and they had signed a \$2 billion bilateral agreement. Sometime afterwards – maybe it's correlation, maybe it's causation; I'm not going to speculate – but sometime afterwards we got a notice that we had to close our base in Manas. That was, for me, my first major crisis as a US government official, because very senior people at the Pentagon said: we need that base. It's the White House, you've got to achieve this military objective for us. You've got to do it.

So Obama came here and a big chunk of that discussion was about Kyrgyzstan. You never read about it because we didn't read it out, because we didn't know how it was going to end. But he said: look, I'm the new guy, I don't understand all this balance of power politics and privileged spheres of influence. But here's the way I see it, Dmitry. We've got this base there. Does it create influence for the United States? Is Kyrgyzstan somehow in our sphere of influence because of the transit centre there? He said, yeah, we spend some money, about \$60 million I think it was at the time. But what are we doing with that base? We're flying women and men from the United States military in there to get a good night's sleep, hot dishes to eat, showers, and then we're sending them on to forward operating bases – and he didn't say this as crudely and I don't want to put words into the president's mouth, so this is my interpretation of what he said, because I want to be careful here – and then they're going to kill bad guys. The people they're killing, if we weren't fighting them, would be fighting you. And by the way, they are fighting you, as you know dramatically from your experiences in Chechnya. Same people. So help me understand why that's not in Russia's national interest? Help me understand why somehow closing this base is going to make you safer?

The point the president was trying to make is this zero-sum, 19th-century 'great game' in Central Asia for security makes no sense at all.

Second story is about economics, because we've been talking a lot about economics and the EU. My other anecdote is just personal. I live in the Silicon Valley, I've lived there for three decades. We have allegedly – don't quote me but we have over 100,000 Indians, we have 50,000 Chinese citizens and we have 40,000 Russian citizens there. So all the great powers are represented, you can see them every night in Palo Alto. Are they playing some great power game? Are they undermining our sovereignty, as sometimes it's portrayed in Russia? No, they're making money, they're making goods, they're working at Google. Google has a transnational strategy that has nothing to do with this discussion we're having. The notion that somehow by being in the Russian orbit you're going to make Russia richer or Ukraine richer, or we're going to steal away the Ukrainians so that we get them and the EU doesn't – that just doesn't ring true to me with the global economy that I see and witness every day. It's not zero-sum like that.

That's why I see this as a giant tragedy, what's happened, because the opportunities for integrating Russia, the opportunity that I thought was real for 20-25 years, feels like it took a really big setback. I think we're all losers – Russians, Ukrainians, Europeans and Americans – because of this tragic moment we're in.

## John Mearsheimer

I just wanted to make a quick point. My point in the beginning was that NATO expansion, EU expansion and the Orange Revolution are all inextricably linked. They're part of a package that's designed to basically make Ukraine part of the West. When I talked about the precipitating cause of the crisis, I did not mention NATO. I said it started with EU expansion. But the really key event was the coup on February 22nd. I think absent the coup on February 22nd, and just EU expansion and all of what happened in late 2013, you would not have the problem you have today. So it's all three of those things bound up together.

Finally, I would just say in regard to Mike: he has a particular view of the world. He thinks that the Russians should share his view. It's a view that says geopolitics don't matter. The problem for Mike is that the Russians don't agree with him.



## Michael McFaul

Actually, some Russians do. Putin may not, a lot of Russians do. Before the crisis he was at 43 per cent.

## John Mearsheimer

Putin is in charge, Mike.

## Michael McFaul

Before the crisis – no, this is very important. You now see two very different parts of the world. Before he invaded Crimea, he was at 43 per cent.

## Roger Cohen

Thank you, everyone. As somebody said to me recently, if President Putin is really serious about protecting Russian speakers and ethnic Russians wherever they are, he may be about to annex the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. So this could affect us all. On behalf of Chatham House and *The International New York Times*, thank you all. Thank you to all four wonderful panellists.