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WEBINAR

RUSSIA RESURRECTED:
ITS POWER AND PURPOSE IN A NEW GLOBAL ORDER

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PARTICIPANTS:

BRUCE JONES, Moderator
Senior Fellow and Director, Project on International Order and Strategy
The Brookings Institution

FIONA HILL
Robert Bosch Senior Fellow, Center on the United States and Europe
The Brookings Institution

PAUL POAST
Associate Professor
University of Chicago

KATHRYN STONER
Deputy Director
Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. JONES: Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for joining us. I'm Bruce Jones. I'm the director of the Project on International Order and Strategy at the Brookings Institution. And it's my pleasure to host this event, today, focused on Russia's role in a changing global order, and also focus on Kathryn Stoner's terrific new book, "Russia Resurrected."

We have several hundred people with us, on the call, today. That doesn't happen without quite a lot of effort from the back office team, so to speak. I want to start by thanking Kristen Belle-Isle, Adam Twardowski, and Suzanne Schaefer for helping put on today's event. Virtual events are almost as much work as in-person events. So, my warm thanks to them. My thanks to the audience for joining us, and, of course, a very warm thank you to the panel members for joining us at Brookings today.

I'll introduce you, in just a quick moment. I just quickly want to give a shout out to two additional people who helped draw attention to the event. President Biden and Vladimir Putin were so kind, as to schedule their summit the day after this event. I thought that was rather nice of them to help draw attention to Kathryn's book. So, we'll cover the issues of the summit, but we're going to start with the book.

It's a terrific panel to talk about Russia and Russia-U.S. relations today. I'll first start with Kathryn Stoner, who is the author of "Russia Resurgence". She is the deputy director of the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, at Stanford University, and a senior fellow at the Center for Democracy Development and the Rule of Law, on the faculty at Princeton University, for several years, and the author of several previous books, on Russian governance, and post-communist Russia, and, obviously, the author of the book we're here to talk about today.

Paul Poast is an associate professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, and a nonresident fellow at the Chicago Counsel and Global Affairs. He primarily writes about alliances and international organization dynamics, very innovative in his use of quantitative data to study international security dynamics, all of which have frequently brought into focus on Russia's unusually expansive role in international crisis and international security questions. His most recent book is "Arguing about Alliances." He's also, by far, the best academic Tweeter I know of, including on questions of international order and grant strategy.

Our own Fiona Hill is the Robert Bosch Senior Fellow in the Center for the United States and Europe in the Foreign Policy Program at Brookings. In the early 2000s, she was the National Intelligence Officer for Russia and Eurasia at the National Intelligence Council. She's written extensively about Russian foreign policy, throughout her career, including most recently a major book, with Cliff Gaddy, called "Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin," and then, most recently and rather famously, served as Deputy Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Eurasian and Russian Affairs, sorry, European and Russian Affairs at the National Security Council, from 2016 to 2019. So, it's a terrific panel with which to discuss Russian issues.

I want to start, Kathryn, with you. I'm going to provoke you by reminding you of two famous formulations about Russia, one by President Obama, shortly after the annexation of Crimea, in which he dismissed Russia as a "regional power". I thought it was an odd formulation, at the time, given that the region in question was Europe, but, nonetheless, that was his formulation. And then, even more colorfully, John McCain used to refer to Russia as a gas station with nuclear weapons. Having read your book, I take it you disagree. Kathryn, you're muted, I think.

MS. STONER: Okay, we were group muted, but I managed to get myself back here. Well, first, thank you very much, Bruce, for having me, and thank you to Fiona, and to Paul, and to the Brookings Team, for putting this together, and, yes, thank you to Mr. Putin and Mr. Biden. Wow, great timing. It probably has to do with more than me and my book, however.

So, right, the book gets at this issue of conflicting perceptions, really, of power, and in particular of Russian power and Russia's role in the world. So, as you mentioned, Mitt Romney, John McCain, rather infamously, made these remarks about Russia being a little more than a gas station with nuclear weapons, and I think, John McCain, it was a gas station masquerading as a county, Mitt Romney, it's a gas station nuclear -- with nukes, he said, a year or so after that, and Barack Obama, really hurting Vladimir Putin's feelings, called it a regional power, in 2014.

And I think what we're starting to see, and the reason that I wrote this book, is that there was a kind of traditional way of looking at power, in evaluating Russia this way. And, frequently, people say Russia is punching above its weight, and so, I wanted to see if that was true, or maybe whether or not we were, you know, thinking of power in sort of narrow realist terms because, you know, I think what

McCain and Romney are thinking of, and Obama, was that, in comparative terms, Russia has, you know, a GDP of about \$1.7 trillion, compared to the U.S.'s, you know, over 20 trillion. China's is over 14 trillion.

Russia's, just for comparative, you know, perspective, is about the same as Canada's, at 1.7 trillion. Its population is, you know, 144-145 million people, depending on whether or not you count Crimea in there, since 2014. U.S., of course, we have about 325-330 million people. China, much -- way over a billion. Russia spends about a tenth of what the U.S. does on it's military. So, if you look at these kind of traditional measures, what we might call men, military, and money, and you add them up, Russia doesn't look very remarkable, less -- you know, about 3 percent of global GDP.

And yet, it's been tremendously disruptive in international politics. And so, I think, dismissing it, in the way the McCain and Romney, and even Obama did, where he was insinuating was only influential in the former Soviet Region, underestimated what Russia has the ability to do, and I think, partly, that's because they thought of power in these traditional terms, and they were unaware of some of the changes that have transpired in Russia, in 30 years.

So, the book goes through evaluating the means, that is men, military, and money, these traditional means of power, but it also looks at geographic domain where Russian influence has expanded, in the last 15 years, in particular, and then the policy scope, in what particular policy areas Russia is engaged and its weight, how important it is.

So, I'll just say that I hope the book makes two corrections in how we think about Russia, that, first of all, Russia had considerable tools, power tools, that it's not just punching above its weight, but that it's actually pretty weighty in some areas, once we look beyond the traditional measures, of men, military, and money. And that power is multidimensional, and it is contextual, right? So, if you -- a good hand of cards in bridge isn't necessarily a good hand of cards in poker. It depends on the context of the game, of course. And a country's power tools can be good enough, as Russia's are, to be tremendously disruptive, depending on the context.

And then the second corrective is the characterization of Russia, as weak, I think, is outdated. And so, while you, Bruce, quoted, Obama, and Romney, and I added Romney, and you quoted McCain as well, I could add Phil Breedlove, also, who's speaking in 2015, saying that Russia is trying to change the Cold War Settlement, using force, or Generals Dunford, for example, and O'Dara (phonetic)

saying Russia is an existential threat to the United States, and President Biden, ultimately, in October of last year, when he was running for President, identifying Russia as the biggest threat to America, in terms of breaking up security and alliances, and saying that China is a competitor, but Russia is actually capable of breaking up American security and American alliances.

So, so, right. So, the point is we're thinking about power too narrowly. When we think of it more expansively, things look different, and so, I offer different measures of power, in addition to these traditional means. And then, I point out that Russia has become disruptive, in particular under Mr. Putin's Regime, because there is something about Putin-ism, and that not only does Russia have considerable relative power, disruptive power in particular, that Mr. Putin under the kind of authoritarianism that has emerged, in particular, I say, since about 2012-2013, has the will to use what Russia has, pretty much unconstrained, that domestic politics drive some aspects of Russian foreign policy, not to deny that, you know, Russia has interests, all states have interests, but that not all Russian leaders would use Russian power resources, this way, and that the type of regime matters, in determining Russian foreign policy decisions and the deployment of its power resources. So, there is something about Putin-ism. So, maybe I'll just stop there and see where our conversation goes after that. But that's the essential thrust of the argument.

MR. JONES: I just want to pull out a couple of themes that are in the book, that you touched on here, in terms of the scope of Russian power. I'm simply struck by the emphasis on the oil and gas sector, where Russia has obvious strengths. I was just rereading Dan Yergin's "The New Math," where sort of Russia's ability to wield those instruments comes very strongly to the floor, as well as, what has been referred to as sharp power instruments, social media influencing, cyber operations, et cetera, and then the ability to fuse those together in hybrid operations of substantial significance, and I think that point that you entered on, about the wiliness to use these levers of power and sort of unconstrained in the exercise of doing so, is substantial.

You end up calling Russia a good enough power, it's a very Krasnaryan (phonetic) phrase, and then given your -- influenced by your setting there. You do --

MS. STONER: He's a good friend, yeah.

MR. JONES: We need to talk about Russia as a formidable challenge to the stability of

the postwar order. I want to bring in Fiona and Paul, for their thoughts and comments, and we'll sort of engage in a conversation around the book. Fiona, why don't you come in first?

MS. HILL: Certainly, thanks a lot, and congratulations to Kathryn, on the book. It's a really important corrective to all of these points about the way that we assess power and, you know, how we think that countries will operate. I mean, I think, on one point, just to elaborate on something that Kathryn said, you know, thinking about Putin and Putin-ism. I think it's more about the man, himself, and his background, and then the kind of people that he's attracted around him, rather than ideology persona, and I think, that's something that, you know, a point that Kathryn is actually making, you know, throughout the book, as well.

Because it's the nature of the person that makes it more likely that he will use the tools at the disposal, and we could go on, at going down the list of tools, not the ways of assassinating people, you know, be it the use of Polonium, Novichok, at what used to be a highly classified band nerve agent, that most people didn't even know existed, well, let alone that it might be used in an assassination attempt, the use of power military forces, and proxy forces, the Wagner Group, criminals for hire, which is something the KGB has done, you know, back since the 1970s.

And in the old days, it would be criminals that, well, might break into a businessman's bedroom in a hotel, in sort of Saint Petersburg, and plant something, or take something away. Now, you know, these criminals can, you know, sit at distance, in some faceless hotel room, themselves, and hack into someone's computer, and, next, will trade all of the data, or hold their systems for ransom.

So, and then we have a lot of suspicions that these ransomware attacks perpetrated by Russian Actors, who may be given a nudge and a wink, by Vladimir Putin and other people in the Kremlin, or they may, in fact, be directed by them, as in the old days, back -- going back to '70s, when the KGB actually instructed or encouraged criminals to, you know, take some action. There was honey traps, prostitution rings, drugs, you know, you name it.

So, I mean, basically, the point is that Putin comes out of the dirty tricks department of the Soviet Union, going back until the 1970s. He was someone who saw his career and path to power through the black corridors, and through the black operations of the state. And the point that Kathryn is really making here is that it's kind of Putin, unleashed, the guys who do the black ops, unleashed. In the

Soviet Era, we had checks and balances.

It was actually more predicable era, and the ruthlessness was somewhat constrained, even though, you know, when we look back, there were plenty of assassinations. I think the Georgi Markov on London Bridge with the ricin pellet, you know, stuck in the back of his calf, by an umbrella, but you know, we weren't, you know, hearing about this standout. That seemed to be confined more to the world of spies and, you know, the John Le Carre, you know, type activities. Now, there seems to be, you know, common de rigueur for the Russians to do this, and some of the attacks that they inflict on military or intelligence targets are so brazen that they have collateral damage.

In the case of the attempted poisoning of Sergei Skripal, a former Russian Spy, you know, living on a, you know, a new assumed life in Salisbury, in England, Dawn Sturgess, an innocent British woman, you know, was killed in the course of that operation. Many other people were sickened, and a whole town had to be put in lockdown because the agents who perpetrated that had enough nerve agent in their perfume bottle they'd concealed it in to kill 4,000 people.

So, there's a kind of sense of loss of proportion, a loss of restraint, a loss of the checks and balances in the system. And I think that that's kind of the really important to Kathryn's story, as well, because they have kind of unleashed the whirlwind. There is a ruthlessness and aggression that makes Russia formidable, and it's because of the person of Vladimir Putin, and, as Kathryn suggests, another person might do something differently. You know, we saw, under Dimitri Medvedev, a more restrained version, of the same system, because Dimitri Medvedev was an actual lawyer, who, you know, kind of is this sort of contemporary of all of ours, who, you know, came to prominence during perestroika, in the late Gorbachev Period, and always had above board jobs, and, you know, was not head of the dirty tricks department.

So, you know, we can really see that it's the nature of Putin, himself, in the system, which makes him something to be reckoned with, and I think that that's an important point of Kathryn's book, is to really look at the tools, that are under the disposal, because regular countries are not using tools like this.

MR. JONES: Paul, let me bring you in here, both for your comments on the book, or questions, but also your perspective, on sort of Russian foreign policy, as a whole, and how you see this

fitting into the longer story of Russian foreign policy.

MR. POAST: Absolutely, and first of all, Bruce, thank you for the invitation to participate in this, and thank you, Kathryn, for allowing me the privilege of reading this book. I really enjoyed this book. I sent out a tweet about it this morning, and I really mean that this is a book that I -- in the research I'm doing right now, I'm going to be continually referring to it. And I want to share a little bit about why that is because, for me, I think, there's three big takeaways I had from this book.

And the first one was this idea of good enough great power. This is a great concept, and, for me, it explains Russia very well, not just in the current era, but historically. When we really think about Russia, it's always been a good enough great power. During the Cold War, there was always this view that Russia was 100 feet tall, and this -- and it turned out, no, the economists were wrong. Russia's economy is actually much weaker.

Same thing, going back prior to World War I, there was this view that, oh, yes, the Russian War Machine is going to start -- well, no, it turns out, it's actually really hard to get the Russian military moving, and they have mobilization issues. Russia, this was part of the reason why people talk about it, that it -- well, communism kind of skipped several steps, when it was implemented there, because they went from an agrarian society straight to that.

And so, Russia has always been this good enough great power, except the difference is, and this is something that I really liked from the book, is, today, we tend to underestimate Russia in this regard, whereas, in a lot of those cases I talked about in the past, we were overestimating Russian power, Russian ability, Russian influence, and so, I think that Russia's kind of been the same. It's our perception of Russia that has very much changed, and, of course, we could talk about the end of the Cold War, in the 1990s, being a big reason why, maybe, now, we're underestimating, whereas, in the past, we were always overestimating. So, this is one big theme from the book, that I think is just very important to take away, and, again, I really like the phrase of good enough great power, and I'm going to see myself using that, a lot, because it just -- it really works well for Russia, but I could also see it for a host of other countries, as well.

It essentially leads to another big point about, well, why is it that Russia is a good enough great power? And this is something that I have seen, when looking at Russia's foreign policy, and

Russia's tendency to, in the phrase of a friend of mine, always play the heavy. It seems like, if you go back over the past 200 years, who was it that the British tend to always be concerned about? What was the great game about in Central Asia? It was Russia, and then of course, we jump forward. What was Germany about? What was Germany -- the rise of Germany, who was the big threat for them? Was it really France? No, it was Russia. And then we think about the United States, after World War II. Who is it? It's Russia.

So, it's always Russia that seems to play the role of the heavy. And the question is, why is that, especially if it's a good enough great power? It's not this major 100-foot-tall behemoth. Well, the reason why, and this is a point that's very well and precise in the book, is geography. As Dave Kang, at the University of Southern California has said, Russia is the only country that is both a European power and an East Asian power. And it's simply because of geography. You don't have to have the same economic base that the United States has, when projecting power simply means going across your border, and because of Russia's border, how many countries of borders, there is this land mass, it can easily project power into East Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, the Arctic, and Europe, as well as the near abroad, as it likes to refer to the former Soviet Republic. So, it's possible for Russia to do this with a much lower economic baseline than, say, the United States, or, of course, because of the United States geographic position, we have to be able to send in the aircraft carrier group.

We have to be able to have long-range bombers. We have to these capabilities, just because it is much more difficult and more expensive for us to be able to project power. But for Russia, that's never been the case. The big challenge for Russia has always been internal mobilization, and then you go back, historically, that was the big dispute between France and Russia, when they were allies. It was the French who were frustrated about Russia not doing enough to improve their railroads, so they could actually mobilize internally.

But it's never been the matter of Russia having to have the same economic baseline for power projection. And so, I think that that is a key point that comes out of Kathryn's book. It's a point that I'm finding in my own research about Russia, historically, and it's a point that I know I'm going to be coming back to, again and again. So, I really like that this is there, also, because I think this is a point that's very much underappreciated, in general, the role of geography in international politics.

My colleague at the University of Chicago, John Mearsheimer, is famous for using the phrase, the stopping power of water. But I think most of us have to really take that more seriously, that Russia doesn't face that, to the same extent as the United States does. This leads, then, to the third point, the third big takeaway from the book, and it actually dovetails very nicely on a topic that Fiona was just bringing up in her remarks, which is thinking about the role of Putin.

And, for me, I had a little bit of different takeaway from the book. For me, when I was reading this book, a book that kept coming to mind for me was A.J.P. Taylor, famous historian, and not his famous -- you know, the book that most people refer to him as, which is "The struggle for Mastery in Europe", but his book, "The Origins of the Second World War", which was published in 1960. And the reason why this book -- this book, at the time, was controversial, and the reason why it was controversial was because he was taking on the claims, at the time, that the War in Europe was solely the fault of Hitler. It's like, if you remove Hitler, you do not have a war in Europe.

And what he was pushing back against was, well, yes, Hitler had certain character traits. Hitler had a certain risk tolerance, that other leaders didn't. He pointed out that it was the nature of the German system that enabled someone like Hitler to come to power. He also pointed out that there was something about the structure of Europe, at time, that made it tolerable for someone like Europe to come to power, namely that the British were willing to say, you know what, Hitler, I think, in the phrase of Halifax, the foreign minister, is I quote, "bulwark against Bolshevism". They were willing to tolerate someone like that because of the other strategic interests that these powers had. And so, Taylor was pushing back against this idea of just simply saying, it's this person and their unique personality. He's saying, yes, that person has a personality, yes, that person has a risk tolerance. But when you think about how the system enables someone, both the domestic system, as well as the structural international system, enables someone like that to be in power, and, for me, that really speaks to, the question about Putin-ism.

Yes, there is something about Putin, but if it wasn't Putin, would there be someone else who would be in power, who would also want to use these levers, and use them in unique ways, and use them in ways that other powers don't use them, and have this same type of high-level risk tolerance, that we don't see of other countries? So, that's the third big point, that I took away from this book. But, again,

I really enjoyed reading this. It gave me a lot to think about. I know, I'm going to be constantly referring back to it. So, thank you so much.

MR. JONES: Great, and now for -- this is an important theme that I wanted to pull out because I do think that the three of you have slightly different takes. These are nuances, but there is a slight difference in take about sort of the structure of geography and history, the nature of the system, the role of the individual. There are all three -- all three of you write about the interaction, but you do put slightly different emphasis or weightings on those.

So, Kathryn, maybe you want to react to what Fiona and Paul have said and bring to that part of the book the nature of the Patronage System, the nature of the resource accumulation, and the way that drives some of Putin's behavior.

MS. STONER: Sure, well, first, thank you, Fiona and Paul, for generous comments and reading the book. I really appreciate it. It was definitely fun to write, and it went in a different direction than I necessarily intended, at the beginning, when I thought, actually, I could write a quick and dirty, more or less, pamphlet that, you know, corrected Mr. Putin's perception of the Russian power, relative to the United States.

So, getting to the kind of the -- one of the -- just in reacting to Paul on the estimates of power, you know, one of the quotes in the book, of Mr. Putin, and he, himself, is paraphrasing, I think, without attribution, Churchill and Talaran, that says Russia is never as weak as thought, but never as strong as it wants to be. So, you know, historically, this is -- I would agree, this is has been an issue, in terms of properly gauging or calibrating Russia's relative influence, globally. And I think it's also -- it's often because we do look at the wrong things, right?

So, as you mentioned, Russia's got -- has 14 international borders. China is the only other country in the world that has so many. It's, geographically, the largest country. So, it's naturally in the world -- it's going to naturally affect other countries, just because of that. But it's also beyond geography. It's, you know, what Russia has. And, I guess, this, in part, gets to what Bruce is talking about. One of the dimensions of power that I look at, and actually, just getting back to the pamphlet idea of -- and what Russia has, relatively speaking, I was struck that, you know, when -- in 2015, with -- in Syria, we saw Russia's one little coal-powered, yes, coal-powered, aircraft carrier, steaming its way into

the Mediterranean, and it was kind of sad, but -- and I thought, oh, well, you know, there you go.

That's what I'm talking about, but, actually, you know, they don't need aircraft carriers in the way that the United States does. We have 11 active aircraft carriers because that's what we need, given where we are. They don't need that. They're closer to the Middle East, and, you know, they can actually, as we saw, in Syria, launch their cruise missiles, from the Caspian Sea area, and still hit Northern Syria, not at first. It was kind of sloppy at first, but then things got better.

But what Russia has, that sort of is the weight of Russia, in certain policy areas, and, Bruce, you had mentioned that you were reading Dan Yergin's book, that the, I think -- "The Prize", is that the one you were -- I think you read most of --

MR. JONES: No, "The New Math," which is really about sort of the change in the directions of energy flows and the way --

MS. STONER: Yes.

MR. JONES: -- that's it's geostrategic.

MS. STONER: Yeah, so, ironically, I have also been reading that. I've read the whole series, which is great, and so, you know, Russia figures, very prominently, in those because it has this particularly valuable resource, right, and it has had it since, I think, the 1830s or so, when they -- or 1850s, when they first found oil, but that, alone, makes it a particular weighty actor, economically. So, even if we look at the size of its GDP, yeah, relatively speaking, I'll confess that I am Canadian, by birth. It's about the size of my country's GDP. And you guys aren't too worried about Canada coming across the border, and -- well, actually, Bruce, you're a countryman, as well -- coming across the border and you know, taking -- disrupting American elections or whatever.

And that's because of the nature of the political system, of course, that constrains that, and, also, you know, Canadian interests are not to be disruptive of American politics and economics. And I would argue that Russian interests aren't really there either. This is something about -- in terms of disrupting, this is something about Putin. So, to address the question of, you know, would another leader behave the same way?

Well, I think, it depends on regime type, you know, getting to Paul, and, as Fiona said, you know, there's something particular about Putin's background, in terms of who's around him. So, you

know, you might -- it's not unreasonable for a leader to hire someone, if they worked for McKinsey or Brookings or, you know, Ford, to -- if they're leading something, to hire people they know, in that area, right? So, at its most benign, at the most benign interpretation is this is what Putin has done.

He knew people in the KGB, and so, he put those folks in. Well, he also hired, you know, well, not hired officially, but he also has this, a very close friend, a concert cellist, the richest cellist in the world, arguably. Why? Well, we think because he's holding money for Putin, right? So, one of the things they do, as well, which we haven't talked about, is steal from the state. And so, you know, they benefit from having control over state assets and making risk of using those assets, public, well, taking, you know, gains into their personal possession.

So, you know, why does this regime act this way? Well, one, it is because of Putin's background, as Fiona noted, but, two, this is also, as I call it, and I'm using, you know, in -- part of a term that Henry Hale has used, and others have used, it's a patronal, autocratic, and now very personalistic authoritarian system. There is a group around Putin that benefits from controlling this state and those assets, and for now, until we all drive electric cars, and I think I have successfully convinced my husband to get a Tesla out here, but we have to wait, now, because of supply short and chain problems, and, you know, it's only 2 to 3 percent of the American population driving electric cars, a very smaller percentage around the world. Eighty percent of the world's energy is coming from carbon export, or carbon sources, pardon me. Who's sometimes number one, sometimes number two, in global carbon exports? Russia.

So, don't just look at its GDP. Look at what that GDP is comprised of. And, yes, it's revenue -- it's export revenue dependent. In the long run, that's not good for Russia. In the long run, they need to diversify their economy. But I would argue that this regime doesn't always look at the long run. And there are some efforts, as I document in the book, at diversification. They also sell nuclear planes. They also sell weapons. But there's underinvestment in R&D. So, I think the time -- another sort of thing to note about this regime is that its time horizons are quite short, right? And the long run, as it turns out, could be five to 10 years, at most.

And, also, some of the conflicts it's trying to get in are -- you know, it must win because it's existential for this particular group of actors, around Putin, to remain where they are. So, I do think it's a particular kind of system led by a particular kind of person. So, I guess, typically, Canadianly, I come

down in the middle between Paul and Fiona.

MR. JONES: Needed the disrupt international affairs by penetrating academic and thinktank institutions, rather than our --

MS. STONER: Indeed. Indeed, yeah.

MR. JONES: I want to move into the summit, in a minute, but before I do, Fiona, I want to ask you -- let's leave aside the politicians. Inside the intelligence system, inside the National Security Establishment, inside the NSE, inside our administration, do you -- is it your assessment that the professionals have a right sized assessment of the threat that Russia poses (inaudible).

MS. HILL: Yeah, look, I think it is, and, you know, perhaps, you know, our intelligence guys and girls are a bit more like Canadians, as well, because, you know, obviously, I posed, you know, my views of -- there's a little Putin phenomenon about the stock leaf and, you know, picking up on some of the issues in Kathryn's book. But, of course, there's, you know, a lot of structures around Putin that are intrinsic in the state and things that Yeltsin did, you know, by amending the constitution, when Kathryn and I were both together at grad school doing our PhDs, in fact, you know, back in the 1990s, that facilitated the rise of Putin.

The checks and balances were stripped away. There was a constitution that became hyper presidential. The Russian Duma, over time, the Parliament, its authorities were fritted away. Putin was able to free or liberate himself from having to be part of a political party. Yeltsin already started down that path. Kathryn and I were actually sitting in the same graduate seminars with Professor Tim Kolter, at this time, studying it all in real-time, and so, you know, we actually remember a lot of these themes and the way that this develops.

So, you know, Paul is right. You know, there's a lot of things that are inherent in the system, and that another person succeeding Putin could avail themselves with many of the same tools. But the peculiarity about Putin, which is what our intel, you know, guys and others focus on, is that he is a black ops dirty operations guy, from the intel world. And he thinks like a strategic planner. I mean, he doesn't have, you know, Klaus Savitzian (phonetic) goals. Think more Ho Chi Minh and, you know, burying under, and, you know, subversion, and, you know, kind of other means of kind of getting at the enemy. And he does think about all of his illicit tools.

So, when Kathryn made the point, which I think is an extraordinary good one and an important one about looking at the composition of GDP, and oil, and gas, and trying to leverage oil and gas, and when we see them doing that, then, of course, time may not be on their side, over the long-term, but, as Kathryn said, this is a very short-term group think around Putin. Although, Putin's short-term happens to be up till 2036, right now, which is a bit of a long-term, but -- and I think, you know, they're betting that hydrocarbons want to completely be gone by then, even if Kathryn is already starting up a trend of everyone getting Teslas, and they're more affordable now.

And, you know, they're kind of banking on the fact that, somehow, still, after 2036, we'll be mostly in a hydrocarbon world, and, you know, they're not seeing a great urgency to run out to renewables, although, frankly, you know, the recent development on the boards of companies, like ExxonMobil, could accelerate that. So, we'll see. You know, Kathryn may be well ahead of the trend, not just in writing the book, but also in her car purchase.

But the other point is that (inaudible) Putin and others have not just, as I was mentioning, you know, nasty substances, paramilitary forces, criminal hackers, and ransomware, you know, are teams, you know, for example, but they also have a lot of illicit finance. So, there's a lot of off the books money that's stashed away. And that is another element that we've got to factor in, and I think it's one that we're coming to, to the -- you know, in response to your question, to understand, even more so, about how important that might be.

So, Russia, you know, kind of got kicked out of the G8. It's no longer, you know, kind of within the G20, you know, kind of one of the major financial players on the official illicit finance side. But on the illicit finance side, I would argue that Russia was one of the most consequential players. And part of the problem is our own vulnerabilities. You know, there's been a lot of meetings and events on the London Laundromat, you know, where oligarchs in Russia and, you know, Kremlin influencers are parking their money in London.

There's the huge book by Catherine Belton, from FT, the investigative journalist, "Putin's People." She's now being sued by oligarchs, left, right, and center, in London, for the information that she has unearthed, showing that, you know, she was onto something. I mean, Kathryn, you know, touches on some of this, as well, but, hopefully, won't be sued. I don't think your book has laid yourself open to

this, but you are laying out, you know, the same issues that, you know --

MS. STONER: Careful, yeah.

MS. HILL: (inaudible) careful here. But the point is that that illicit finance is insidious, and it's incredibly powerful. And here, in the United States, as well, there's a realization not just in our intelligence community, but in Congress and elsewhere, that we have to shore up our defenses because we have plenty of places from, you know, Miami to Delaware, to New York, to out in California, you know, where Kremlin influences are parking money, using money, trying to get into thinktanks and to universities, and, you know, you name it. We've got a problem there. And so, I think that that is something we kind of -- we're helping to, you know, figure this out, and I think Kathryn's book really helps to frame this in the appropriate way of really making us very careful about how we're thinking about this, the tools that we use and how power can be measured because illicit power is very significant.

MR. JONES: Paul, I want to give you one minute, if you want to come in on any of these scenes, before we shift to the summit.

MR. POAST: I mean, I think that the conversation here has very much highlighted that. When someone reads this book, they're probably going to want to think for themselves exactly the issue that we've been talking about, which is, to what extent is it about the state, to what extent is it about Putin, and to what extent is it about how the two interact? And, for me, I really think that that's what's key. I wouldn't question, at all, that there are certain characteristics about Putin, Putin's background, that makes him particularly more risk tolerant or willing to use more black ops, even cyber, all sorts of different, if you will, sharp power, as the phrase was used in the book, and is used elsewhere, sharp power tools.

But I do think that the nature of the system, NATO expansion, pushback to NATO expansion, something that Putin likes to latch onto, as well as the domestic system, makes it so that someone, like Putin, is in power. And I think that that's, to me, really a key thing. But, again, I think that this is highlighted, that someone will have to read the book, to see for themselves which way they would fall, in terms of that interpretation.

MR. JONES: And which also should encourage them to buy the book, at amazon.com, or barnesandnoble.com, or your favorite local bookstore. Let's shift to the Summit. You know, it seems to me that of all of the areas of Biden's foreign policy, so far, it's -- he's least clear on what he wants out

of the Russia strategy, other than a sense of, like, please, let this go away, so I can focus on the things I really want to do. But -- and that requires a degree of predictability and stability in the Russia relationship. That does not strike me, reading the book, and having known Fiona and listening to Paul. Predictability and stability do not strike me as the things that are most likely to emanate from Putin's Russia. So, I want to do a quick answer from each of you, and then we'll do a longer discussion of quick answer from each of you. Should Biden have gone to this summit? And will anything come out of it? Kathryn, you go first.

MS. STONER: So, it is peculiar that he did it, and, in a sense, it looks like he's rewarding Putin for kind of bad behavior. Recall that, in April, when this invitation went out, there were, reportedly, about 100,000 or so troops, Russian troops, amassing on the Ukrainian border, and so, once an offer of a direct one-on-one meeting was made, those troops were removed, well, a few of them left, anyway. We're not sure how many. Maybe Fiona knows more on that.

So, it looks as though, you know, there's a causality there. It may just be that there's correlation. So, a number of people are saying he shouldn't have -- Biden shouldn't have done this because it does look like a reward for bad behavior, and after all, you know, Alexei Navalny has been not just poisoned, but imprisoned, and now his organization has been banned, and even if you've retweeted something from their social media accounts, in Russia, you could be fined or charged with some sort of crime.

So, so, you know, why do this meeting? Well, there -- other options would have been meeting on the sides of a G20. One argument is that, you know, there is a theory within the administration that they want to focus on China, not on Russia, and so, Biden is delivering a message here, at this meeting, to essentially -- to Putin, to basically calm down, or we'll do, you know, X, Y, and Z, and in particular, in cyber areas. Remember that cyber -- there are two dimensions. One is what the Russian government, itself, does, so, the SolarWinds infiltration, for example. The other is what cyber criminals that we think are in Russia, or are Russian speaking, are doing, and, presumably, the Russian government could crack down on that. However, one reason he may tolerate them is because the deal is you don't do any of that within Russia, do it somewhere else, and we'll abide it.

So, it could be to deliver that message. It could also be to, you know, pursue the

strategic stability, which is to inject some predictability into nuclear arms control, and that should be attractive to Russia, as well. But a force multiplier, and I'll end with this, as we've discussed for Putin's Russia, is disruptive capacity, right? So, there are many areas where Putin's Russia doesn't want stability and predictability. That's a power tool for them, being unpredictable. But, in some areas, they may want predictability. We want predictability, I think, because we would like to turn and focus a little bit more on China.

MR. JONES: Paul, if you were sitting at the NSE and had to write the guidance, would you have suggested that he go, or suggested that he not?

MR. POAST: I think it's totally fine that he's going to speak with them. And the reason why is, let's be honest, I think that whether you are a fan of Donald Trump, or whether you were a critic of Donald Trump, by and large, him going to meet with Kim Jong Un turned out to actually not be a bad idea, and I think people on both sides would agree with that. I think where the criticism comes in is maybe there wasn't enough follow up. There wasn't enough.

But prior -- keep in mind, prior to him meeting with him, there was the same thing, oh, you are going to -- you can't meet with him because that rewards bad behavior, we can't do this. And then he met with him, and then people were like, well, okay, maybe it's not so much about that, it's about let's actually get something out of this. And so, I think that there's less of a concern about rewarding bad behavior or not rewarding bad behavior. It's more of, if you're going to meet with this person, let's get something out of this, right? And I think that -- so, I really think it comes down to that.

Unfortunately, I just don't think there is much that can come out of this. As I said to some other people, I'm expecting a lot of dialogue about dialogue, and that's about it. Let's make sure that we're on terms. Let's try to meet -- something else, we don't need Russia to be constructive. We just don't want them to be disruptive, right? And that's the thing. Now, can he accomplish that? I don't think so. But establishing dialogue is, at least, a first step towards that. But that's about the -- all that I can see.

I mean, it's very similar to extending New START. It's not that extending New START solved anything. It just gave more time to find a potential solution. And so, for me, yes, I think it was fine for him to meet. The question is, what will come out of it? And the most I can see coming out of it is

dialogue about dialogue.

MR. JONES: Jaw-jaw is better than war-war, as is famously once said by one of Fiona's earlier countrymen. Fiona, what about you? Would you have made the recommendation to go, and or what would you tell Biden to do in the meeting?

MS. HILL: Look, I have to say that I think Kathryn and Paul have laid it out very clearly. I think, you know, as Kathryn pointed out, the upticks of the offer of a meeting, you know, were probably the most problematic part of it. I suppose a case might be made that, perhaps, by making that offer in that timeframe, that it did, you know, help to reduce some of the tensions with all the military positioning on the borders of Crimea, onto the border with Ukraine, from annexed Crimea, by Russia, and on the borders with the Donbas. You know, it's hard to say if that was the case. I mean, Russia was clearly signaling that it means mischief and malice towards Ukraine. I mean, that's fairly clear. I think, as Paul, as Kathryn are both saying, we can't expect that much out of it. But I don't see the fact of having a meeting as being appeasement in any way, or, you know, kind of engagement for engagement's sake. And Paul is spot on, in fact, on Kim Jong Un and Trump.

You know, I, you know, kind of am the first to say that, you know, the meeting in Helsinki was not the best there, in terms of the press conference. But, you know, I think that that overshadows, you know, the fact, in Helsinki, that there were some modest steps forward, which are probably the same modest steps forward, what will come out of Geneva, by the way. But there, also, the Trump is the result of all the other things that, you know, kind of happened around. It didn't get credit for actually taking the edge off the confrontation with Kim Jong Un because if you go back to before those meetings, and, you know, the kind of the lovefest of letters, we were fully anticipating that Kim Jong Un might go off halfcocked and signed a missile in the direction of Hawaii.

And, in fact, my brother and sister-in-law were on a boat, in Hawaii, on a family vacation, with their in-laws, the grandparents, the kids, for a big family holiday, when the siren went off in Hawaii. And you can ask them how they felt, thinking this, they're watching the last dolphin, you know, cresting over the wave on their, you know, once in a lifetime trip. Well, this was the end of their lifetime trip. I was just saying that wasn't a nice afternoon for them, and that we were genuinely thinking that Kim Jong Un was going to do something pretty awful, at that time. And Trump, you know, deflected attention away

from that.

Now, as Paul said, did we get something more out of it? Not so much. But we did take the edge off, and I think that that's the best that we can hope for here because, in fact, we've been doing this, going back to George W. Bush, not thinking back to Slovenia and the staring in the eyes, but trying to take the edge off what was a confrontation with Russia, at that point of focus, in Afghanistan and Iraq and all the other things that were happening. That was a -- you know, the reset actually came much earlier than Obama.

We've constantly been trying to figure out how do we deconflict this relationship with Russia and have, you know, some management and stabilization of this confrontation. But there is a through line through this about what the Russians want. That actually goes back to Helsinki, and even before that. And Kathryn put a finger on it, some discussion of strategic stability, arms control, and nonproliferation, and, you know, as Paul was suggesting, it's not just because of New START. It's, you know, where do we go from here?

There's desires to have predictable meetings, an agenda or a set of meetings, and the North Koreans wanted that. Look, we're starting to meet with the Iranians, and we do this all the time with the Chinese. And what are the Chinese doing? Multiple atrocities, terrible things, as well, not just to the United States, exfiltrating data, threatening Taiwan, imprisoning Uyghurs, shooting at the Indians over the Himalayas, I mean, you name it, we can go down the list of things that China was doing. But nobody gets hysterical about who's meeting with the Chinese, and they're the big system threat. So, predictable sets of meetings that, presumably, will talk about our differences and strong -- pass strong messages and, you know, to try to sort of air grievances, and then, you know, they also want to have, bizarrely enough, you know, meetings of businesses, which sounds preposterous, given, you know, sanctions.

But this gets back to something that Kathryn was talking about before. Because Russia wants its business community to be taken seriously, and it is just oil and gas. It wants to diversify, and it wants the businesses that are not under sanctions to be out there as national champions. It knows it has to diversify. And its business is getting put under pressure by investors to, you know, basically, clean up their act on the environment, on social issues, and on governance. Well, you know, good luck with that. But, you know, the whole point is that Russia wants to be taken seriously, also, as an economic power,

beyond just oil and gas. So, they actually do want something out of this, as well. It's just as Paul and Kathryn are saying, how we handle this and how we handle the expectations around it.

MR. JONES: It's actually a very good pivot to a point that I want to try to bring in and at least subpar the remainder of our time, which goes to a really important passage in Kathryn's book. When you're looking, Kathryn, at the geographical scope and the kind of policy scope, you make this point that Russia's ability to influence activities in different regions and in different policy areas is amplified by its relationship to Russia, to, sorry, to China and to India. And that has always struck me as quite important.

If I think about the last 10 years or so, it seems to me we've often seen a system where, whether this is actually coordinated or simply understood, in a sense, Russia's out there at the sharp edge of tweaking the last -- China's sitting back a little bit, but it provides a degree of economic and diplomatic cover to a lot of what Russia has done. And so, I'm curious as to your thoughts about to what extent Russia would be behaving the way it is behaving, were it not for that sort of top cover from China, in terms of the U.S. relationship. India's maybe a slightly different question. Let's focus on China, for now. Kathryn, just your thoughts on that.

MS. STONER: I would say that it is -- I call it, in the book, a forced multiplier, and I think there's some debate about the closeness of the relationship between China and Russia. So, remember, there's China and Russia, and then there's Putin and Xi, which -- and the interests of the men don't always overlap perfect with the interests of the countries. It'd be more so with Xi than with Putin, but. But, you know, Putin's regime, survival, investment, keeping the economy going under sanctions, this is existential, right? When their economy dips, his big fear is social instability. And this is why Navalny, a guy who only, you know, gets 5 percent approval rating, he'd probably more easily be elected Mayor of New York than he would be, you know, well, Mayor of Moscow, or Mayor -- he ran for Mayor of Moscow, didn't win, or, you know, President of Russia. So, why is Putin fearful of him? Well, because of his potential for social instability in those huge demonstrations.

So, with respect to relations with China, China has a huge need for energy, Russia has energy to provide, and so, this keeps the economy going, and although, you know, Russians, over the last year or so, have seen their real incomes, well, more than the last year, they've seen their real

incomes dip, but in particular in 2020, significantly. They're still -- they remain under sanction for the foreseeable future, at least, and so, where is a good place to look for investment? Well, China, and before COVID, there were a lot of Chinese entrepreneurs going to Moscow, looking for investments.

So, I think it gets to the point that Fiona made about, you know, they need investment, they need to diversify China, also, as a high-tech industry. Russian labor's not cheap, but they have a lot of good programmers, and they have a highly educated population. So, you know, there's some synergy, in that respect. So, I think it does help Russia. I want to also mention, Bruce, the Middle East helps the Russian economy, too, you know, some of our great allies in the Middle East, like the Saudis. Russia has a kind of frenemy relationship, I think, with Saudi Arabia, over oil, but, you know, for a while there, they were price fixing on oil. Then, they had a little war, and now they're back to price fixing again, and -- I mean, that is a price war, not a hot war.

But who else is investing in Russia, as we and the Europeans are not? The Saudis, the United Arab Emirates, all of these, and India, as you mentioned, right? So, Russia and India, with pharmaceuticals. So, there are other things Russia produces, and these places, also, are interested in those things. They're also interested in the Northern Passage, as the arc, through the Arctic, because it moves goods faster. So, China's interested in that, too.

So, there are a lot of ways in which, you know, the synergies are there and tight, which is problematic for us, in the United States, if, you know, we're concerned about Russia and China acting together against us. I think it'll be hard to pry them apart, to be honest, in the near-term.

MR. JONES: And Israel, also, spending a lot of -- Netanyahu, I think, is spending a lot of time with the Russians or --

MS. STONER: Yeah. Very --

MR. JONES: -- the most predictable allies, so to speak. Paul, you've thought a lot about alliance dynamics and concert dynamics. How do you see -- how do you see this?

MR. POAST: So, I think, for me, Russia perfectly captures the phrase, I think it was Lord Palmerston, famously said that there's no permanent friends, permanent allies, there's only permanent interests. And I think that Russia has always perfectly captured that, that, you know, unlike the ideas of, you know, a Western Alliance or Western Systems, or with -- Russia has always been, throughout its

history, kind of this country that it has just taken advantage of the situation, as necessary, has been very defensive. Some people would even say it's the perfect realist state, right?

When we think of realism, it was really formed because we thought about Russia, Russia's behavior, which is kind of an idea that I'm wanting to develop more further, in other work, but that's really, to me, when thinking about, well, how does Russia take advantage of the cover, if you will, offered by China? I mean, this is what Russia does. I mean, it was really -- when -- I mean, to give an extreme example, when we think about the horrors of World War II, when we think about, for example, the Holocaust, the focus is on Germany. But then it was later, when the -- "Bloodlands" was written by Tim Snyder, and people go, oh, wait, no, it was Stalin and Hitler that were systematically killing people. It was like people kind of forgot that Russia was doing the same thing, at the same time. And so, there's a lot of examples where Russia has always kind of been able to utilize cover to pursue whatever its interests are, in a particular time. And I think we're seeing that now, with China, and Kathryn laid out a lot of ways in which this is done.

And so, you know, to give you a really concrete example of how to think about this, this is part of the reason why I don't think something like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization would ever become a NATO, right? It just wouldn't become the same way because, maybe not so much because of China, but because of Russia, that it's like, no, is this something we're going to be fully committed to? I just don't see it in the same way. So, that's kind of where my mind goes, when you hear about -- when I hear about this comment about Russia aligning or utilizing. To me, this is something they've always done. They're the ultimate realist state.

MR. JONES: Fiona, your thoughts on this one?

MS. HILL: Sorry, I had my sound off there. I completely agree with Paul. I mean, I think that, you know, perhaps the Russians wouldn't use that term, but that's exactly, you know, the way that they approach things, and, you know, Kathryn really lays that out in the book. I mean, they're -- for Russia, they also see allies as dependents, and they don't want to have any. And Putin always talks about there being a very small number of truly sovereign countries in the world, and he would put Russia up there, and China, and then he hesitates before he adds the United States because he sees the United States as alliances, not as a form of strength, but a form of weakness. And, ironically, that's what Trump

thought, too.

Trump saw allies as supplicants, and he was always talking about the weakness of our allies because they always wanted something, and they wanted the United States to do something for them. And that's the way that Putin thinks. Putin wants alliances and these alignments without responsibility, and, clearly, China doesn't expect Russia to take any responsibility for anything.

In fact, you know, Bruce, as you were kind of laying out there, you know, kind of -- there is, you know, certain, you know, a perspective that China may have on, you know, Russia, as well, and as, you know, Kathryn, you know, is laying out, Russia might get some top cover, but it's not always getting, you know, kind of an assist from China. In fact, when Russia annexed Crimea, China didn't recognize it, and actually encouraged the Central Asian States, at a conference, I think it was actually at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, at the time, in Tajikistan, also not to recognize it.

Now, one might kind of think, hmm, that's interesting, because, truly, China wants Taiwan back. But, you know, China actually saw this as somewhat problematic, in fact, and, you know, didn't like the idea that, you know, kind of Russia, at that point, was disrupting the international order. And, in fact, Russia's annexation of Crimea could cause some problems for Russia with China, down the line, and, you know, I think that this kind of comes out in that slight awkwardness of, you know, the relationship that, you know, Kathryn is sort of describing. It looks like a strategic partnership. It looks like a lot of alignment, you know, Russia doing a lot of the heavy lifting, being the heavy, as Paul put it, you know, for China, by constantly tweaking and clubbing, you know, the West and, you know, these smaller players.

But Russia also sits on a whole bunch of former Chinese territory. And although they were very quick to, you know, basically resolve those border disputes, back in 2000 and onwards, and both Yeltsin and then under Putin, you know, as Paul is saying, they don't have the proper -- they don't have the ability of everything stopping at the water. That's not where their border is. They've got a border that's as long as Canada and the United States, and as, you know, Kathryn's saying, apart from you and Bruce infiltrating, we're not too much worried about what culture is going to do.

But Russia and China, under the Soviet period, they had clashes on that border, on the Amur River, and China, you know, nationalists, unleashed, not the state, itself, you know, often make comments about that being part of Chinese territory. So, at some point, if things changed, what's to stop

China, not now, but, you know, somewhere way down the line, doing a Russia with Crimea because Russia had actually recognized Ukraine's sovereignty over Crimea, back in 1994. But then, Putin said, well, circumstances changed. Well, circumstances might change with China. So, I think there are a lot, in that longer term of issues, that, you know, we might want to contemplate.

But in the, you know, in the shorter term, as Kathryn's saying, they're not thinking about that. In the shorter term, you know, they're out on their subversion. Somewhere down the road, they might want to balance things out a little bit. But we're just not there yet.

MR. JONES: And as Kane has famously said, in the long term, we're all dead.

MS. HILL: Yeah, I think that's what Putin thinks, but not until before 2036.

MR. JONES: Kathryn, 30 seconds, final thoughts from you, before we have to close.

MS. STONER: Well, first, thank you all for -- again, the time and attention to my book, and the kind comments. And, you know, we live in fascinating times, and, you know, Russia is always important, but I think it's particularly important right now, as we are seeing. And thank you very much for the discussion, and I look forward to continuing it.

MR. JONES: And we'll see what happens tomorrow in the Summit, whether, indeed, as you have all predicted, very little comes out of it, but maybe and nonetheless a lowering of temperatures and a management of what otherwise might be a very disruptive challenge. Thank you all for being here. I highly recommend that you buy Kathryn's book. But I also recommend that you buy Paul's book and Fiona's book, which are all still relevant to the debates that we're having today --

MS. STONER: Me, too.

MR. JONES: -- not just about the nature of Russia, but about how the West should respond. So, thank you all for being here, and thanks for being with us.

MS. STONER: Thank you, Bruce.

MR. POAST: Thank you.

MR. JONES: I think we are now just amongst ourselves.

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