

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Garry Kasparov, Author and former World Chess Champion

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I: America, Post-Cold War (0:15 – 25:20)

KRISTOL: Welcome back to CONVERSATIONS, I'm Bill Kristol, and I'm thrilled to be joined today by Garry Kasparov – Kasparov, sorry, my Russian is not very good – great chess champion, democratic activist, and thoughtful and perceptive analyst, also, of Russian politics and American politics and world politics.

So last time we ended with – that was a happy ending – but the world doesn't always, doesn't stop with happy endings. History did not end.

KASPAROV: Always goes in seasons. That's why I called my last book *Winter Is Coming* to warn people we are entering another dangerous period.

KRISTOL: It's a wonderful book, and I want to get to that, and I want to talk about what's happened in the last 25 years.

One of the most striking things – you mention this in your book, and you've written this elsewhere also – talking about Vladimir Putin, and you say, well, people say – it's often said he plays chess, he's very clever, and we in the West are just playing checkers. You say that's bad analogy, that's not the right way to think about Putin.

KASPAROV: It is really bad, and I was almost annoyed hearing that Putin plays chess.

KRISTOL: This is not just because you play chess, right?

KASPAROV: And Obama or other leaders of the free world they play checkers. I thought I had to defend the integrity of my game because chess is not a game for dictators for numerous reasons. One, it's transparent. It's all information hundred percent available so you know exactly what you have, you know exactly what your opponent has. You don't know what he or she is thinking, but you definitely know what kind of resources your opponent can use to hurt you, to damage your position.

Also, chess is very much a strategic game so you have to think long-term. Dictators don't think long-term. Dictators, especially who are in power for so long as Putin is, they have to work on the survival mode. Because it's all about today, maybe tomorrow morning. Everything that helps us survive is good. Because the moment the dictator thinks long-term, he'll definitely miss guys from his own entourage hitting him in his own back.

The game that defines dictators much better is poker because it's about bluffs. It doesn't matter whether you have a strong hand or weak hand. You can have a weak hand, but if you're comfortable bluffing, raising stakes, and if you can read your opponent.

And let's not forget Putin is not a military dictator. He's not the military general, he's a KGB guy. And we have to give him credit, he's quite a shrewd KGB guy who can read his opponent. He proved it many times dealing with Bush 43, with other foreign leaders, that he could actually find a way of building communication and getting what he wanted.

And playing poker means that you have to read your opponent, and today, Putin knows that no matter what kind of hand he has, the opposition – whether it's Obama or European leaders – they'll fold the cards. Syria was a classical example – this moment of Obama's infamous "redline," what Putin had? A pair of 5. But he acted as if he had a royal flush. And Obama, he went with a full house and just folded the cards.

So it's very important to understand that this is the dictators always operate short-term, and democracies must operate long-term because it's not about one individual who's currently running the country, whether it's president or prime minister. It's about the success of the country. It's about the success of the system. It's about pressing, you know, all advantages and their strategic, lasting institutions that could make the difference even when the president or prime minister is no longer in the office.

KRISTOL: Let's just go right to that since that's so interesting. What about the problem for the United States that we are more set up to play checkers or chess maybe, but not poker? Do you think it's a problem for Western democracies in combating someone like Putin? He has this intrinsic advantage?

KASPAROV: Putin hasn't come out of the blue, you know? It's not just Putin. That's why again in my book *Winter is Coming*, I emphasize why Vladimir Putin and enemies of the free world must be stopped. Because Putin, you may call him bosses of bosses, *Capo dei Capi*, he's like a spider in the center of this web. Because Putin helps other bad guys, other thugs, dictators, and terrorists to sort of feel free to attack the free world.

Because they all know that unless they attack the free world, unless they attack the United States as the leader of the free world, they will have no credibility with their own people because neither Putin nor Iranian mullahs, nor Al Qaeda, Islamic State or other dictators around the globe, they have nothing to offer but confrontation. They have to present themselves as the protectors of their own people against the world evil. And of course, they have to attack the free world that produces everything that, by the way, they use quite effectively against us. They cannot compete in innovations, they cannot compete in ideas, in productivity. But they can compete in something quite different because for us, each human life is unique.

For them, killing a thousand people, hundreds of thousands of people, a million is a demonstration of strengths. So we should realize that they have no allergy for blood. And they will keep pressing their advantage, and it's not that we have grown – that our enemies have grown stronger. It's our resolve that has grown weaker.

KRISTOL: And the resolve is consistent with not becoming like Putin, right?

KASPAROV: Since going back to the collapse of the Soviet Union, that was an absolutely unique moment in world history, and the United States was, at that time, was a lone superpower, and it could do literally everything. So that was the moment to start thinking long-term, creating new institutions, the same way as Winston Churchill, Harry Truman conceived and built institutions after Fulton's speech. Thinking long-term. Because the entire infrastructure that helped America and the free world to win the Cold War was built in late 40s. In '91, '92, America had to think long-term again, but we had an administration, the Clinton Administration, that was in party mode.

KRISTOL: Let's go through those administrations since for Americans that's so interesting. What went wrong? What could we do that we didn't do? First President Bush?

KASPAROV: The first President Bush was uncomfortable with big changes because he grew up at the Cold War time, and he was quite scared about consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union and collapse of the Communist system. Probably he didn't have enough imagination to see America changing the world dramatically. So making dramatic impact. I can hardly imagine him just saying "Evil Empire" in the early 80s because we all remember that Bush, among others, criticized Reagan for being so bold, so aggressive because nobody could have imagined that one day there would be no Soviet Union. So suddenly, Bush was presiding over one of the most grandiose moments in history, and he tried to play it safe.

I think the biggest mistake he made that actually led to many mistakes later on, it was the First Gulf War. It had to take on Saddam. To remove Saddam. That could – but in '91, '92 America, I think, was in the position to actually fix these problems. I think '91, '92, later on with Clinton in the office, there were two years, like window of opportunity when the United States could come up with new ideas, like rebuilding the United Nations.

KRISTOL: Come back to Saddam for a minute because I very much – I was in that administration, and I won't say that I saw that much in the future. But I thought to myself, I had the instinct that you could not let the guy wage an aggressive world and kill people and burn the oil fields in Kuwait and then you go back to the status quo ante. He pays no price. He's ruling the same – I mean, he lost some people, he lost some wealth, but basically he's still in power with the same nation and the same borders that he had before. That seems to be a terrible signal. I don't think – I think it had consequences. Don't you think Milosevic saw that, in Europe, and said, "Well, okay, you can launch an aggressive war, and you don't get deposed. You don't end up in jail or dead."

KASPAROV: Absolutely. America wasn't ready to actually to exercise withdrawal. It was American leadership that helped the free world to survive against Communist onslaught and eventually to win the Cold War, but American leadership was required to start thinking long-term. 10, 20, 25, 30 years ahead by rebuilding the wall. By actually demonstrating it's not just the end of history, liberal democracy has won. To show the vision of the future. I think that's the lack of vision and the fact that the Clinton Administration was very much concerned about domestic affairs and enjoyed life because there were no threats.

People used to think that the Clinton Administration was wonderful, successful. I mean I have totally opposite view because you should not look – let me use a chess metaphor. You should not look at just the final position. When Clinton left the office, America was still a superpower, but remember what happened when he entered the office. What happened from 1992 to the year 2000? In 1992, nobody argues, America was all-powerful and could do many great things. We don't want to spend too much time arguing about it. I believe that rebuilding the United Nations and coming up with something more like a league of democracies and imposing these values, forcing other countries just to accept that it's not just lip service, they have just to follow the rules and regulations, and respect human rights.

Now, in 2000, when Clinton – technically 2001 – but Al Qaeda was ready to strike. Putin was already in the office. When you look at the world map, you realize that this eight years, they were just the worst years because so many opportunities were missed. I don't want to mention the fact that Osama Bin Laden could have been killed a couple of times, at least a couple of times. I think it was a kind of negligence because America was so powerful, and again, maybe it's human complacency. Maybe you say it's inevitable because nobody cared because "it's the economy, stupid," because nobody was thinking about global consequence.

And, you know many bubbles were created at that time, would have been the housing bubble and some of the financials bubbles. They were building up because people wanted to relax.

KRISTOL: And then George W. Bush, if we could just walk through the US Presidents.

KASPAROV: During my book tour, I've been saying this is the year of US foreign policy that was so consistent during the Cold War, from Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan. Yes, there were differences but it was in a range because all presidents, Republicans and Democrats, they realized they had an existential enemy and they had just to work just to protect the United States and the free world. And they knew that it was their duty. Listening to the debates, for instance – I like very much the Kennedy and Nixon debates, you just understand there were two great Americans disagreeing on means but agreeing on goals.

So what's happened since '92, it's where the administrations that changed quite dramatically, the foreign policy, and it was working more like pendulum, swinging from one side to the other. Clinton did very little, W did too much, Obama has been doing nothing. It sent a message – sent numerous messages across the world. While people knew in the 50s and 60s and 70s and 80s that America was there, America was consistent. Even if you have a change in the Oval Office, one party replaces another, you could rely on the United States. America was behind American allies.

Today? It's probably, it's a springtime to be an American enemy because this administration gives up everything to the enemies and betrays allies. And going back to George W. administration, it's very popular to criticize Bush today, Bush 43. Especially for the Iraq invasion, and I've heard many voices, even within the Republican Party, it's just floating with the popular trend.

First of all, I have to say as somebody who was born and raised in a Communist country, I cannot criticize any action that led to the destruction of dictatorship. I think his people had wrong expectations. When they saw the collapse of Saddam's dictatorship after American invasion of Iraq and then the collapse of a few other dictatorships during the Arab Spring, they had expectations that next day, it would be a democracy. It's wrong.

It was very naive because dictators succeeds the staying in power for so many years, not because he's a nice guy, just helps his people to get out of poverty, but because he's brutal, he's cruel. He succeeds in destroying opposition, first political opposition and then freedom of press and remaining horizontal ties in the society. All the NGOs, anything that could represent not just a threat to him, but it's any sort of the slightest dissent. It's kind of a political desert. What do you expect in a desert after 10, 20, 30 – in the case of Gaddafi, 42 years of dictatorship?

The end of dictatorship means there's a chance, and there was a chance in Iraq. Then, we could talk about mistakes made by Bush Administration, but again, we should not forget that while Clinton started his presidency with America being all-powerful, Bush started his presidency with 9/11. Do we want to get out of his presidency as a success or failure? We should look at the 9/11 effect throughout his presidency. America was not attacked during Bush presidency. Yes, American soldiers fought wars outside of the United States, but again, they protected America. It was a war, but I think it's after the collapse of Berlin Wall and the Cold War, people just lost the sense of borders. It's a digital world.

They don't understand that wars can be fought way outside of the borders, and in this extent, to this – if we look at the terrorist threat to the United States, Bush Administration was a success, though of course again, I think he failed to see the dangers of Vladimir Putin. He also couldn't rally European allies behind him. It was not most efficient policy, but again, compared to what's happened after him, I think we should probably give him sort of A-.

KRISTOL: If you step back and just think of the most fundamental question, if you were a radical Islamist, a terrorist, someone who wanted to kill Westerns and have jihad succeed and maybe found a caliphate, you felt you were losing, I do believe, by November 2008. For all the mistakes of the Bush presidency, after the Surge, you were on the retreat, you controlled nothing, really.

There were things we could all criticize about things Bush should have done in his second term and didn't do, perhaps, and ways in which Rumsfeld didn't properly understand that you have to have a lot more troops in Iraq and force order and provide security. But I do think that if you compare that to the

beginning of the Bush Presidency, we were at last in the right direction and that certainly doesn't feel to be the case now.

KASPAROV: Absolutely. We live in a world where perception often beats reality. And I think it's the aura of the Iraq War and also the War in Afghanistan. It's created an image. Again, a perception, in the minds of millions and millions of Americans and, of course, people outside of the United States, that they just don't understand that there were benefits of these wars and one of them was that the radical Islamists, they were not defeated, but they were not as capable to attack the free world as they were in year 2000, at the end of Clinton's second term.

KRISTOL: If you look at Syria, staying out of war turned out to be a very good recipe for radical Islamists to recruit people in Europe and everywhere. Right?

KASPAROV: Since you mentioned Syria and the current crises, I will probably use a chess metaphor. You could make a wrong move. You could even have a wrong plan, but the world thing you can do is, "Oh, I made the mistake six moves ago, so how can I go back? And just to rectify the mistake and maybe just to sort of change the direction."

This is the best way to lose the game. Because you don't go back. Even if you made a mistake, you have to stick with what you have now on the board and to move forward just using your resources and just trying to come up with the best plan of what is available. So, even if we disagree about the Iraq invasion in 2003 and the consequent moves made by Bush 43 Administration, the decision of Obama Administration to retreat, especially announcing it, this is the worst you can do. At noon, at that day, that month, we are out.

By sending the signal to the radical Islamists, to the forces that were about just to recover and prepare again for attacks against the free world, that was a recipe for disaster. It created a vacuum. It's not a surprise that we live in a world today that is a much more dangerous place than in 2008. It helped Vladimir Putin to regain his confidence and because after his attack against the Republic of Georgia in 2008 in August, he was basically rewarded by Obama/Clinton "reset" policy instead of paying a price for taking territory of neighboring country.

And of course, you know, it helped terrorist groups to regroup and, of course, it helped Iran to gain so much power. You know, I can hardly imagine the Shah would dream about total control of Iraq and basically spreading the Shia influence across the nation and becoming the dominant power that it dwarfs out the Arabian Gulf monarchies in the region.

KRISTOL: A country that in 2009 had serious threats to the regime from the Iranian people, I think, in part inspired – everyone makes fun of it now – inspired by the elections, the free elections in Iraq and the sense that "Gee, we can elect our leaders" –

KASPAROV: That's another chess rule. You press your advantage. If you have a promising position, if you have an initiative, you have to press. You have to try to convert it into some kind of decisive factors that will help you win the game. If you do nothing, if you retreat, so the initiative goes to your opponent and then you'll be on the defensive. That's what happens.

KRISTOL: I suppose if it's poker, not chess, there's even the psychological effect of retreat and of being, and of showing an unwillingness to fight is even greater. In chess, if it's a tournament, you lose won game, and it's a fresh start. Poker is more cumulative, you might say.

KASPAROV: Also, the reason I think poker analogy is much more sophisticated because when I'm talking about equal military powers, equal in strength. Iran, come on? Assad. Even Russian today it's a pale shadow of what was Soviet Union, especially under Stalin.

Opposing Stalin in 1948, opposing Khrushchev during the Cuban Missile Crisis, confronting Evil Empire in the early 80s. It was very different. And hearing Putin is so dangerous, you know, we cannot comfort

him because some terrible things could happen. Come on. Let's look back and understand what kind of challenges other American presidents had to deal with during the Cold War.

It's more about psychology because when you look at this for instance, Iranian deal. How on Earth can you imagine that Iran would get everything, probably even more, than they could dream in their wildest dreams while, you know, just America kept giving in on every demand? Even before Iran could actually have the demand on the table, I think Kerry was ready to accept it.

KRISTOL: I want to come back, I want you to explain what happened in Russia. That's obviously something you were so close to, but you should write an article, not to obsess about the poker and chess thing, but I think you should write an article for *Foreign Affairs* magazine, some prestigious magazine that's read by the foreign policy establishment, called "It's Poker, Not Chess". It could be a famous article. It could be assigned, be like George Kennan, it will be assigned for decades to come.

It's a very real insight. I do think also your point about the Cold War was more like chess in a way – two big, somewhat even powers, fairly stable chess board, you might say. You could imagine, "They do this in Berlin, and we do this here."

KASPAROV: Since '91, it was more of poker because again, it's America, even today is much more powerful than all the enemies combined. It's probably the first time after the collapse of the Soviet Union that the forces of freedom, the free world, had overwhelming military and economic advantage. And also politically, it dominated the field because even the worst dictatorships now they're trying to pretend that they have elections.

Not pressing it's advantages looks quite odd because it again create this vacuum, and also I think it affects ordinary people in these countries. Whether it's Iran, Arab countries, Russia, because they used to look at America as a beacon of freedom and the country that stood firm defending the free world. And now it's quite odd because America is there, but America is not there. The whole stories about current political climate here and elections, they're for the eroding reputation of the United States, and I think the damage caused by this administration to the prestige of the country, and especially to the prestige of the presidency, this damage could take years to recover and rebuild.

It's easy to lose your reputation, it's easy to lose your friends, to lose their confidence, than to regain it.

II: Russia, Post-Cold War (25:20 – 39:05)

KRISTOL: Let's talk about the 25 years in Russia. You watched that so closely, and it didn't have to happen this way. It wasn't inevitable.

KASPAROV: The moment we say inevitable, it sounds a bit Marxist to me. I'm always very cautious in claiming inevitability and blaming it for what's happened. Though, of course, there were objective reasons for Putin's rise.

So going back to '91, '92. I don't know whether we could demand from Yeltsin more than he did but, of course, now we understand that sort of restarting Russia as the successor of the Soviet Union was a mistake. It was and is a natural move, and I think everybody expected it because there was so many problems during the collapse of the empire. You had former Soviet republics turning into independent states and then you had financial issues – how are you going to deal with the currency, the Soviet property abroad, and the debts between the republics? Also about the nuclear arsenal.

And you can hardly blame Yeltsin Administration. By the way, being under pressure from Americans and Europeans to find simple solutions. Nobody thought long-term. It was all about "Let's find simple solutions." For example, bring all the nukes to Russia. Oh, Ukrainians are worried? Fine, we'll give them guarantees. We know what's happened with guarantees. Ukraine gave up 2,000 nuclear warheads. 2,000 nuclear warheads. More than China, England, and France combined. In exchange for the guarantees from the United States and the UK. What's happened? They walked away from that.

Also, again, there were economic problems. There was, at that time, if I remember, there was very little help from the outside world because nobody knew what was happening in Russia, and everybody wanted to stay away. There was a lot of moral support. Thank you, great. Some financial aid, but not, I think, there was no, again, strategic advice. How to build institutions. Typically, following what Bush 41 did with Gorbachev, putting all his eggs in this basket, the Clinton Administration put all the eggs in the Yeltsin basket. Americans wanted just to deal with one individual or his administration rather than getting involved in this – I wouldn't call it nation-building because Russia was still a capable country at that time – but helping to build institutions that could make Russia a long-term ally and friend of the United States.

KRISTOL: State-building, institution-building.

KASPAROV: One of the problems that we have not resolved at that time – and I believe it's absolutely vital for the future of my country, if we want Russia to play a positive role in the world in the 21st century – is to reject its criminal past. The Soviet Union should not, had not become sort of foundation for free and democratic Russia. KGB is a criminal organization to be banned, and the crimes of KGB, whatever the name, because it changed many names, but it was still an organization that aimed at destroying any dissent and protecting dictatorship in Russia.

And it's not probably, this is not an accident. Since KGB was literally not touched in '91 and '92, it had its revenge eight years later with Vladimir Putin and KGB taking over the Russian presidency. Also, I think it's just the whole Soviet history had to be revisited. We could not rely just on Soviet mythology about Stalin's role and winning World War II. Yeltsin did a little. Again, he was too busy with the economy, fixing this and that.

And one of the turning points was 1993 where the conflict with Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet ended up with this military clash in the streets of Moscow. My sympathy was on Yeltsin's side. I think that he was right, and he was dealing with the bad guys. But, today, I understand that it was not about protecting Yeltsin at all cost, what we had to do was protect institutions at all cost. The Yeltsin winning this very short few days of civil war in the center of Moscow, with this tank showdown, helped him to consolidate power.

But he ended up with Russian Constitution that was not very democratic. Again, it was much better than the Soviet Union, but it already had seeds that helped Putin to become who he is today. The constitution assigned too much power to the president, and then the next seven years, Yeltsin has been sliding in this wrong direction. It was all about protecting his power and eventually protecting his family. In 1994, he started this war in Chechnya. Again, it's not unusual that the leader in trouble is looking for a small war, a victorious war, to boost his credentials, but that was the beginning of one of the worst disasters in post-Soviet history.

KRISTOL: And it wasn't necessary?

KASPAROV: If you look at Chechnya today with Putin's henchman, Ramzan Kadyrov, being in charge and having his proud army, 20 to 25,000 former guerillas now just wearing Russian uniform and is used to kill people. They do nothing. They're terrorizing not only people in Chechnya, but across Russia.

They are a part of this business negotiations. Chechen style. They have been used for murdering Putin's enemies outside of the country and recently in front of Kremlin. So, and go back to General Dudayev and Colonel Maskhadov, first leaders of Chechen pro-independence movement in early 90s, and you look at what they asked from Moscow. And what Kadyrov got from Moscow. Basically, Kremlin today has been paying ransom to Kadyrov just to keep them quite because this is the lost element of Putin's legacy, the remaining legacy. He pacified Chechnya, and there's a peace in the Northern Caucasuses, though it's a huge price paid. Putin carpet-bombed Chechens, he erased Chechnya. And instead of horrors of the first war, especially the Second Chechen War, and Putin, Yeltsin could have accepted relatively modest demands short of independence. Yes, maybe it was not easy politically, but just again knowing what's happened after wars, that definitely was a mistake. Huge mistake.

And then 1996 elections. Again, I was on the Yeltsin side. We were terrified by even the remote chance of Communists coming back. But the best thing that Yeltsin could have done at that time was probably just to find a successor because there were so many options in 1995 and 1996. I remember one, for instance, he was the head of Moscow Innovation Institute, one of the best intellectuals in Russia, one of the leaders of democratic movement, an ambassador for France.

People like him could take over and we'd elect – '96, they could have won elections. The problem was in 2000, it was already different. People were quite frustrated. Also, they could feel that everything Yeltsin said and did was not necessarily in the favor of Russian people, but it was already, it was more leaning towards the interests of oligarchy and Yeltsin's family. That's why I'm still mourning the moment where Yeltsin, sent Boris Nemtsov, the first Deputy Prime Minister at that time and many believed his successor and it's hard to image what would be – actually, it's easy to imagine what would be Russia if Boris Nemtsov would be picked up as the Yeltsin successor. But maybe '98, '99 was already too late because there was a financial collapse and there was a huge backlash – like a pendulum was swinging to the opposite side – and Yeltsin was looking for a strong man. They came up with someone they thought they could control.

As many times in history, many times before, this man who looked just as sort of a good soldier that would follow the orders and would protect Yeltsin's family, protect the interest of Russian oligarchy. He turned to be the worst dictator, the worst choice, that Russia and Yeltsin could have made at that time.

KRISTOL: And you don't buy the argument – or do you? – that either EU expansion, or NATO expansion, including the countries of Central and Eastern Europe sort of provoked Russia or legitimized a kind of nationalism in Russia in reaction against what they portrayed, at least, as a kind of anti-Russian alliance?

KASPAROV: I think it's quite annoying that there is so many people in the West, in the free world in America and Europe, they still use this argument. It's an insulting argument not just for people in Ukraine, who have been suffering immensely over the last few years fighting for freedom. Fighting to be independent. They are dying, they show they are ready to die by defending their freedom.

It's also about what about small nations? Estonians. Latvians. Lithuanians. Who suffer terribly under Soviet occupation for decades. No, if not today for NATO membership, that included Baltic States, who doubts Russian tanks would be rolling over streets? What about Poles? They also suffered immensely by being attacked by Hitler and by Stalin, and then just living under Soviet occupation for more than 40 years. What about them? Just denying their rights to be protected by NATO. A big part of Europe. That would probably make this conflict even worse because Putin would have not stopped short of using this advantage.

I think that, to the contrary, that in the 90s, there was two – in US policy towards Russia, it was too much of carrot and almost no stick. There were so many things that could be achieved if America had the plan, vision, and strengths. Few people remember that the beginning of the Iranian nuclear program and the first moment where American president addressed his Russian counterpart about this potential problem was in 1995. That was the beginning of Russian transfer of nuclear technology to Iran.

The United States Congress had a bipartisan resolution authorizing President Clinton to raise the issue with Yeltsin and, if necessary, to cut financial aid, which was absolutely crucial at that time, if Russia would refuse to halt these transfers. Clinton – he just had a press conference with Yeltsin. Yeltsin laughed, hugged Clinton, Clinton laughed. He decided that it was not so important for national security, and it could jeopardize reforms in Russia.

The same language – also, we can look at North Korea, 1994. So in 1994, Clinton Administration signed this nuclear deal that propped up the North Korean regime, the worst dictatorship on the planet these days, saved them from collapse, and now 22 years later, they have the nukes, they have the missiles, and they're still in power. I could start counting this moment after moment, and I think that this is the

reason Putin believed he could go anywhere, whether it's Ukraine, Syria, or you name it. It's because he saw nothing but weakness.

III: Vladimir Putin's Russia (39:05 – 1:10:28)

KRISTOL: I was struck reading your book, too, your account and also articles you've written and speeches you've given, what it's like in Russia today? I don't think people really – I was discussing foreign policy to someone, and I said, you know, we have to stand up to dictators. I made the point you made earlier and others have made – I'm certainly no expert on this, but we underestimate how important Putin is, I think, to the alliance of dictators around the world. As you say, he's at the center of the spider web. But also someone said to me, well, he's not really a dictator. He's been elected, and Medvedev was there. And there's still some freedom of association and press. But I think Americans do not understand, and I probably don't either, what the actual state of dictatorship is in Russia.

KASPAROV: Today, it's full-blown, one-man dictatorship. There are some windows of democracy that Putin uses and his propaganda uses just to preserve the image of Putin still being a democratic leader. It's quite important because, unlike Stalin's dictatorship, or old-style dictatorship, modern dictators, they have very close ties with the free world. Having these connections, having access to financial markets, to new technologies, so building these political and cultural ties, creates an illusion.

It helps them both ways. One, just it keeps him – Putin, in this case – in the loop, and Putin's propaganda machine used most effectively the fact that Putin for many years was the member of G8. I couldn't pronounce G8 because G7 was seven great industrial democracies – the Group of Seven great industrial democracies, and I didn't think Russia fit. To be part of that. It was also, by the way, an advance payment to Yeltsin. It's, again, common and then expecting Russia would become sort a full-blown democracy that could play by the same rules.

China was not invited. This is much more powerful economy. Or India, for the sake of argument. It was Russia because there were very high expectations. But Putin took it for granted. He kept taking things from leaders from the free world without giving anything back. 2006 was sort of a climax where Putin was a chair, the year that Russia had a chair seat in so called G8, G7 plus one. In St. Petersburg, Putin had a massive propaganda coup that was all over the place in Russia.

How could – whether it's me or Boris Nemtsov, or whatever – how could we convince even those Russians who were sympathetic to our cause that Putin was not a democrat? If he was there chairing the meeting with Bush, Blair, Berlusconi, I think, Merkel, Chirac – this is a picture, you know? And also solve wars. And we were trying to warn people about the potential threats of Putin dictatorship.

KRISTOL: So has Putin – is it fair to call him a dictator? There are elections, and there seems to be some press and civil society and so forth.

KASPAROV: It happened before in human history, then eventually dictators have been elected. First place was Adolf Hitler.

To describe Putin, we should try to actually use certain analogy with normal democratic country, the United States. Number one, Putin never participated in a single debate in his life. One of the first things Putin did in year 2000, after becoming Russian president, of course, he restored the Russian anthem. Very important by the message. What I could do if given the chance. But after Russian's nuclear submarine *Kursk* sank, what he did? He eliminated live television in Russia. Since year 2000, there is no live television in Russia.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

KASPAROV: Yes, that is right.

KRISTOL: So you don't – there's no breaking news.

KASPAROV: Only 9 o'clock, and the news is totally controlled by Kremlin. Otherwise, that is it. It's all recorded. Then, when people say, oh he was elected, but, you know, elections, it's not just a one day when you actually cast your ballot. Elections is a complicated process. Casting the ballot is a climax of this process, but it's a very complicated process. Starts with a registered political party. You cannot do it in Russia today. Unless you have Kremlin's consent.

Raising funds, you will never see a penny because everybody knows the moment you support the opposition – by the way, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the richest man in Russia, in year 2003, it was not even, not to challenge the regime but he had some ambitions of being independent. Most successful Russian company in 2003, so the richest man. Ten years in jail. This was a message, just to understand. You can't even think about challenging the decisions made in Kremlin.

It's like here, you know, it you want American parallel, it's like administration saying – Bush Administration destroying Microsoft and putting Bill Gates in jail because he's supporting Democrats. Impossible. But those are the realities. By the way, we're talking about 2003, 2004, 2005. Dictatorship doesn't happen overnight. This is not something, oh, it's a coup. Putin dictatorship – as, by the way, many others, going back Hitler or even Stalin – it was just grabbing here and there a little bit. It's not actually sending the warning signs. Every day, you discover a little bit less freedom here and there, and Putin knew that he had to offer something to Russian people, make them feel comfortable while he was amputating one piece of freedom after another.

He was very lucky oil prices jumped so he got cash. Russia never had so much cash available. Putin was quite generous in just paying it and creating also this sense of satisfaction in people. Russian middle class appeared out of the blue. And unlike in tumultuous 90s under Yeltsin, people could think about the future, they could make some plans. They could travel abroad. Just stay at a decent life so they liked it. They thought maybe, this was democracy, maybe, this is something we should support. And at the same time Putin gradually destroyed any opposition, any group's opposition that could potentially be challenging.

When in 2005, I ended my professional chess career and moved in what people very generously call politics in Russia, the most popular question I was asked was whether my chess knowledge, my chess experience was helpful in navigating in these rough waters and again, Russian politics. My answer was, it was not. Because in chess we have fixed rules, clear rules, and unpredictable results, and Putin's Russia is exactly the opposite. Results stay the same while the rules constantly change.

You mentioned Medvedev, the name that probably young Americans already forgot and for good reason, because it's a shadow. It was a fake. It was another covert operation. But a very successful one. Putin, as every dictator who managed to stay in power for so long, I mean, he had great animal instincts. He knew where he could press, where he had just to make a waiting move. Not to press his luck. He knew that in 2007-2008, it would be too dangerous for him to actually go against Russian Constitution, to change it and stay for the short term because that would send the message about his plans.

By the way, maybe, again, it's hard to argue now whether it was doable or not but in 2007-2008, he could have walked away. Probably paying off the Khodorkovsky and the Yukos, so settling some old scores and yet so much money, so much influence, he could probably buy International Olympic Committee to become the President there.

So he could have had a comfortable life. The very fact that he decided to stay as technically number two guy, but of course, as a puppet master, pulling all the strings, for me, it was an unmistakable sign. It's – he's there for life. Amazingly, Americans, Europeans, they looked at Medvedev, at Putin's puppet, as a savior. Somebody they could work with. As somebody who could one day revolt against Putin. The shadow doesn't revolt against its master. And Medvedev proved it. All he did enlarged the Presidential terms, from four to six years, and he basically brought Putin back in 2011.

He announced that he would not run, and his boss would go back to Kremlin, while he would stay as Prime Minister. Again, he could be Prime Minister, he could be whoever, it's all about Putin's comfort. And again, Putin knew that. Medvedev was important because he represented so-called liberal wing, and Putin was always very good in creating this balance between so-called liberals – when I say liberals, Russians, we use this word for pro-Western affiliation and the guys on the security side.

At the end of the day, they're all doing the same job. Hitler also had some guys, you know – Stalin that did important things for economy just to make sure the country was functioning, and the guys, the police workers, had to come down to the dirt jobs. Putin always knows how to keep this balance. Even today, he still has his guys around him because he knows those are very good in killing people and dispersing demonstrations and doing the police job. They will not be very good in keeping his economy afloat, especially at the time of the low oil prices.

In 2012, Putin came back, and it was quite an amazing moment when President Obama met at that time, yet-President Medvedev and sending him a message that, "I'll be more flexible."

KRISTOL: After his selection.

KASPAROV: "After my reelections."

KRISTOL: And making fun of Mitt Romney for saying in the campaign that Russia was a great threat, right?

KASPAROV: Yes. Romney said, "Russia was America's number-one geopolitical foe." And Romney was right. The problem with the statement that Romney didn't believe in it. For Romney, it was a figure of speech. Romney wanted to attack Obama. And Obama trashed him. And you could see that Romney didn't know how to respond. There was no passion.

When Reagan said, "Evil Empire," he believed in it. And it's when American presidents with Truman or Kennedy, where they stewed against Soviet Union, they believed in it. They knew it was something so important that they had to take risks. For Romney, it was just a sound bite, and he didn't know how to play with this when Obama aggressively pushed him back. But for Putin, this message, it was like a *carte blanche*. Move on. Do whatever you want.

I think at that time Putin already knew that he could go to Ukraine or other places, and I don't want to find an excuse for Putins or Hitlers of this world, but the problem is they always take this kind of statements as a weakness and basically an invitation to continue. Hitler never believed that England or France would go into war for Poland because they gave up Czechoslovakia, and in his mind, what was the difference? Czechoslovakia? Poland? It's in the east of Europe, it's not for you. Why now? What's the point? Same with Putin. Georgia? And a message he's sent many times – actually, George W. also heard this message, and he didn't react. Putin repeatedly said, "The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical disaster." And also, many times he repeated that Russia had special rights for the so-called near-abroad. This sphere of influence.

This is the way Putin saw and still sees the world. It's like the 19th- or early 20th-century map with big powers, czars, the monarchs, just pushing the weak nations. It's all about the concept of the great nations. There's few big nations that could negotiate. In Putin's mind, it's Russia and America. That's why he always addresses America. And Russia propaganda is pretending it's not the war in Ukraine, it's Ukraine is America's proxy, so that's why we're fighting America there. It's not Erdogan, Erdogan is just a puppet. He did it because he was ordered by the White House. And no matter what America does, no matter how many messages about flexibility America sends, no matter how many concessions America makes, no matter how many treaties it signs, it still remains the number-one enemy because for Putin it's the only enemy worth having.

To look strong he must have a strong enemy. As long as America remains preeminent, it will be the number-one target for every revisionist power, for every dictator, for every terrorist group. This is a big

mistake that has been made by not just this administration, but I think many Americans who simply don't understand if you're country is unique, if it's exceptional, if you believe in American exceptionalism, it has a price, you will be number-one target.

Unless you understand it, you will pay the price because you want to be exceptional and you want to be loved, it's not easy. I was the world champion for a long time, and trust me, a lot of admiration but also hard feelings. But in this case, it's a policy. It's a conscious policy of enemies of the free world to preserve America's status as a number-one target because that's what makes them feel good, feel strong, and that's they keep their subjects, those they govern under their thumbs.

KRISTOL: I think the use of phrases like "sphere of influence," "near-abroad," which I assume they have Russian antecedents, but also very effective over here for the foreign policy establishment, which is full of people who never liked the overly universalistic, democratic, human-rights rhetoric of Bush. Maybe there were some criticisms that were fair, but that didn't seem subtle enough and sophisticated enough. And they loved Kissinger and spheres of influence and geopolitics. I think in a way Putin was very clever in – I don't know how much he intended this – but he gave the foreign policy establishment a way to pretend to understand and sympathize with what he was doing.

So when he invaded Ukraine, it's you've got to understand, it's, you know, Crimea and history and this and that. And everything gets explained away, you know?

KASPAROV: He knows there's a huge crowd on both sides of Atlantic that would be willing, that's always willing to accept his arguments. He throws a little bit of food here and there, and they all just are ready to bite it.

Crimea, for God sake, it's a first case of annexation of the territory of a neighboring country in Europe since 1945. Actually, in the world, it's the second one since Saddam Hussein, Kuwait. And we're still talking about it as if maybe there were some arguments, maybe in a kind of historical truth. This is something the young people should understand, the moment they hear historical, quote-unquote, "historical arguments" in the geo-politics, look for trouble. There are rules, regulations, treaties, agreements.

We live in world where you cannot appeal to history. Because once you get started, especially in Europe, especially in the Middle East. In America, it is probably easier because you have 400 years, that's, more or less, it's clear. You go to the continents where some places just changed hands hundreds of time – you don't know, 100 years ago, 200 years, 300 years ago. That's why in 1945 the decision was made that nobody touches the borders. And what Putin did – that's one of the greatest, what you may call, contributions to the world – he ran away from this consensus. It's like opening Pandora's Box.

KRISTOL: What was the key moment do you think? Do you think '08 with Georgia?

KASPAROV: It's not only Georgia, but general weakness. Georgia was a test. And he realized that he could get away with that.

KRISTOL: Bush reacted fairly okay, maybe to Georgia. McCain pushed him, and McCain was in the campaign. Then, McCain was ridiculed, we forget this in '08, for saying, "We are Georgians." Maybe it was a little bit of an overstatement. Obama ridiculed him, and then, Obama takes over. I always thought this was underestimated as an important moment.

They announce the reset with Russia, the same government, the same country that invaded a neighboring country that was incidentally a pretty decent country, a friendly country to us, and pretty democratic. That it invaded it just six months before. That's a pretty astonishing message, if you think about it.

KASPAROV: Actually, this moment was just the beginning of this "sunshine policy" of this current administration that continued for so many years. And it has destroyed the trust between American allies

and countries like Georgia, tiny country that believed in America, believed in America's intentions, good intentions in supporting freedom and democracy. And believed if you played by the rules, if you built your country based on the common values of the free world, you will be helped one way or another.

We could see just around the world that America's on retreat. It becomes so natural for all these dictators and terrorists just to grab the territory if it's being vacated. The vacuum doesn't survive for too long so it's automatically being filled, and in the case of the Middle East, it was filled by Russia, by Iran, by Islamic State, by other terrorist groups. The vacuum in the foreign policy in the United States of coherent, long-term planning, comprehensive foreign policy, or in Europe, has been filled by the populists' demands. People just lost the track, just they see no connection between foreign policy and domestic affairs.

Which is quite ironic because at a time when we live in a world that's getting smaller and smaller because all of these great technologies, devices, that by the way invented in our world – in the free world – that we can learn everything about the most remote parts of the world, that's happened there, whether bad or good. At this time, people don't realize that their success, domestic success, their jobs, the financial security, they depend very much on the role that this great country plays in global affairs.

You cannot expect to get benefits from trade, from finance, from a very mobile labor market, pretending that you are no longer interested in global affairs. I'm also not happy with this tired premise of the United States being global policeman. I think it's a wrong concept because you should not talk about a policeman who is just working his old beat, shooting or carpet-bombing occasionally bad guys. It's about leadership. Global leadership. Which, by the way, includes policing. But global leadership is more about showing the vision. This is something that is so badly needed because, again, you offer nothing, you try to stick with status quo, this vacuum, the ideological vacuum, will be filled with bad guys.

Why do you have so many young boys from well-off families from Europe, from Australia, New Zealand, this country, going abroad and joining ISIS? Because there is always a tendency just for young people to fight for something new, something different. And unless we offer our vision, we'll keep losing this battle. And this is something that helps Putin and alike to sort of dominate global agenda because we are not just on retreat, we're trying to preserve status quo, and we offer no vision. A long-term vision, five, 10, 20 years ahead of time.

That's what could be done by the United States because this country has a history. By the way, 20th century was the American century. It has values that are vital for success. Free market, religious liberty, its openness. These values that attracted people to the United States when I was a kid, and I grew up on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Ignoring them, just trying to abandon them, trying to pretend you could be just another country, it hurts free world, and it hurts the United States. Every country, every individual has his or her role and walking away from the role that is designed for you by destiny is just its self-destruction.

KRISTOL: For what it's worth, I very strongly agree with that. During the Bush years, we overstated a little bit the end of tyranny. All the critics were showing how clever they were by showing, "Oh, history is more complicated, oh, you can't just, oh, there's a tension sometimes between interest and values," as if everyone doesn't know that. And they totally, in my view, underestimated the importance of that big vision, both in terms of helping people we wanted to help around the world and helping the American people understand what we were doing in a bigger way than having to say in this intervention here and that one there and helping these democrats here.

You need people to have a bigger sense of it, and I think it was important internally in terms of morale and the feeling the country was about something bigger than just having the GDP go up two percent from year to year.

KASPAROV: Yes, but I think the GDP gross was much higher than two percent when America played –

KRISTOL: That's true, too. There was no tension, really.

KASPAROV: Things are connected, and then, we are now just seeing this. It's like an identity crisis. And the Trump and Sanders, for me, it's just two sides of the same coin. They are more like these reflections of this crisis because a lot of people they have no – They need the vision, and unless there's the global vision that is coming from the mainstream, something that is based on the values that made this country great and help us to build a dominance of the free world around the globe. Unless this vision is available, again, there is a vacuum. Someone else will come along with either very nationalist, xenophobic ideas, or with the siren song of socialism.

KRISTOL: It is amazing – we're talking in April 2016, and Donald Trump's leading the Republican field, Bernie Sanders is trailing Hillary Clinton by a little bit, half the voters are, basically, more or less, going for either an authoritarian who sympathizes with Putin or a socialist who went on his honeymoon to the Soviet Union. After America wins the Cold War and after the basic principles of liberal democracy and of American democracy are vindicated, one would think by looking around the world. It's kind of an unbelievable moment.

KASPAROV: Promoting the book, my latest one, *Winter Is Coming*, I crossed this country and visited many places, universities, met different kind of crowds. East Coast, Midwest, West Coast. Addressing young crowds I had a sense that for many of them the Soviet Union as remote as ancient Greece. The history of the Cold War I think it's – unless you're talking to a crowd that – but for, you know, just for millennials and even just for people in their mid-30s, it's something that had no relevance for who we are today.

And having this kind of break, sort of, in historical memory, I think, it creates a sort of perverted vision of the modern world. It's very important we recover this historical knowledge. We understand what's happened and why it's still relevant. The Cold War was not won by accident, it was not just won because economic superiority or military minds – that was important, of course – but it's also values. The values that are in the foundation of this country, but also the values that attracted so many people around the world.

Right now, it seems that Americans are looking – not typically for Americans – looking for over-simplistic solutions. We just believe we could have our low-paid jobs back to the United States. But unless you address people with your vision, explaining to them this is 21st century, and in the 21st century, you should not look back. Ask what you did right, what you did wrong, but you should look in the future and being a leader.

As Harry Truman said in 1951, by the way, answering Obama six years earlier, “We cannot lead the forces of freedom from behind.” This is America's role. And we heard it and then it was repeated by many presidents. There are so many things that can be done. By the way, there is still, you know, America, even with all these negatives in economy and political life, it's still the driving seat of innovations. It's still the most vibrant economy in the world. Though, of course, when you look at the numbers, it's the first time that America dropped from the top 10 of the countries, the most comfortable countries for doing business, which is quite amazing. Surprisingly, the only country that is in the top 10 from the Western hemisphere is Chile.

IV: Thoughts on America (1:10:28 – 1:20:08)

KRISTOL: The history of foreigners coming to America, living in America, or just visiting from America, they have often been perceptive about America in a way that if you grow up here it's a little harder to see it. Let's talk about that for a few minutes to conclude. When did you first come to America?

KASPAROV: First time I remember it was February 1988. Actually, it was my first trip across the ocean. I was already the World Champion. We played a World Blitz Championship in Canada in St. John, in the north. Then, I visited New York, it was my first trip, and many trips in '88, '89, 1990. And of course, I played in New York regularly. I played in 1995 the World Champion match with Viswanathan Anand from India, we played on the top of the World Trade Center. Having the first game opened by Mayor Giuliani, on September 11.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

KASPAROV: Yes. September 11, 1995.

KRISTOL: At the top of the World Trade Center.

KASPAROV: 170th floor, we played there.

KRISTOL: About America, what do we underestimate or overestimate?

KASPAROV: I saw a tremendous change because we saw what America did and just under Ronald Reagan, it liberated the world. That's again, the way we saw it. And I saw a lot of changes. For instance, New York since I visited America the first time, even from early 90s, has changed quite dramatically. At that time, West Side in Manhattan, Upper West Side was not the place to live. Now, I live at the Upper West Side. It's a great neighborhood. We could see this tremendous changes under Mayor Giuliani in New York.

Again, we all celebrated the end of Communism and saw – this is the years of Clinton Administration. Again, rosy time. Let's enjoy it. I have to say that I didn't have much time to sort of reflect on all these changes. Now, I'm thinking about it, and now as a professional chess player, I have to look back to analyze it, and I think whether it was inevitable or not, so we go back to the same point. It was very difficult for Americans after the hardship of the Cold War not to lose the sense of urgency of rebuilding the world. Again, America did a great job in helping the world just to be shaped as it is now. When you look at every device we're carrying in our pockets or purses and technologies, and it's still – it's not Made in the USA, it's almost like a Made in China but it's conceived and invented in the USA.

It still remains the most attractive country for immigrants. The talented, those who are looking for a chance to succeed. But, every country, even as great as America should, again, should look in the mirror and should reinvent itself. Because time changes. Time changes. Our institutions must change but our values must not. Based on the values that made this country great, I think it's time to look in the mirror and just to start reinventing the country. Going back to the notion of risk, sacrifice, this is something that is so vital, it's embedded in the nature of capitalism.

Recognizing that it's a success of the country. It's a success of the nation, it's a success of the free world, which could be a failure of an individual or group of individuals, but unless we try just to recover this spirit, this spirit of capitalism, this spirit of freedom, the spirit of the free market, with these values of risk and sacrifice, I think we'll be doomed just to become hostages of the political populists who are trying to offer us solutions that already failed.

My response to Bernie Sanders' stories, fairy tales, is that the failure of capitalism is still much better than the success of socialism. We know that! And I don't think that we have to respond to Donald Trump because we know what happens when people become addicted to this kind of primitive philosophy that it's like drug. It offers you a little bit of comfort and illusions, but eventually you pay dearly for your attempt to escape reality.

KRISTOL: And you've spoken on a lot of college campuses and this recent book tour for *Winter is Coming* – what is your sense? One always hopes the next generation –

KASPAROV: It depends on the institutions, but obviously most of the colleges, they are leaning Left and then because the academics there, the teachers they – I think they are selling the – not selling – they are presenting the vision of the world that is outdated. That has nothing to do with reality. I'm also affiliated with Oxford. I'm the Senior Visiting Fellow of the Oxford. I just spend a few days a year there. I can tell you the atmosphere in Britain, in the Oxford campus, it's quite different from many similar institutions in terms of stature and prestige in the United States.

It's far more cosmopolitan, it's more open, inclusive. Here, it's just the – often, you know, in campus in the United States, you could see very aggressive reaction because it's like an attempt to cover your sort of the lack of intellectual arguments by ideological stubbornness. Again, I hope there will be more debate. That's what I wanted to achieve by promoting my book. *Winter is Coming* is not just a warning but also a story. You read, you may disagree, but go back to debates. Again, it's a very important part of American culture, debate. We mentioned the Nixon-Kennedy debate, you told me about the Reagan-Carter debate. There were debates. Today, we don't have debates, they're not listening to each other. It's all about the sound bites.

Debates where the country could actually find what's the best way to move forward, and it's very important that the political class will not argue about the goals. We'll disagree about the means, but the goals will remain the same as the values, and hopefully, we'll see the recovery of the political class, but it also depends on the mainstream. All things are connected. So that's why the young generation should learn more about the history of the United States and get to be proud of this history. This is not just a book or many books written by some people that – And the books have nothing to do with our lives today. No, we have to learn from this book, we have to learn from this history, and based on this knowledge, based on these achievements and accomplishments of the Founding Fathers or the forbearers in the United States, we have to move to the future.

KRISTOL: I hope this conversation encourages people to read your book and other writings of yours and read generally American history, and serious debates. I couldn't agree. Real debates in political philosophy and understanding history and really trying to – The conceit today of the universities is they've never been more open, forward-looking. It's the opposite. There is nothing open about being totally blinkered in the way you think about history and the world.

KASPAROV: Challenging the First Amendment.

KRISTOL: Not a high-water mark for America. Thank you so much for participating in this conversation, Garry, and thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]