

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Anne Applebaum

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I: The Roots of the Conflict (0:15 – 16:13)

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm very pleased to be joined today, though it's a worrisome and sad day in many ways, by my friend Anne Applebaum, I think the leading commentator on and analyst of Russia, Ukraine. And here we are on what is it? Thursday morning, February 24th, 12 hours after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. You can Google Anne and read her excellent articles recently in The Atlantic, she's been consistently correct, actually in analyzing I think what Russia might do, what Putin might do to. What a wonderful article last night, actually about Ukraine and excellent book on democracy and authoritarianism recently, previous books on the Gulag and on Russia's war in Ukraine, Stalin's war in Ukraine, I guess, many years ago, but seems of current importance as well. So anyway, it's a great pleasure to be joined by Anne. And as I said, great to have you today, but not a happy day.

APPLEBAUM: Thanks, Bill. No, it's not a good day and I'm afraid I didn't sleep much last night and so I'll do my best, but —

KRISTOL: That will be better than others can do anyway. So your piece last night was terrific, which I recommend, on Ukraine itself. And before we get to the deeper analysis, the liberal world order and US policy and so forth, let's say a word about Ukraine, a country you've visited many times whose history you've studied in depth. They're on the front lines and we should recognize them for a minute I think before moving on to discussing Putin, which is important, and all the other things that we need to talk about.

APPLEBAUM: So yes, I actually wrote that piece in response to Putin's very, very strange speech on Monday in which he essentially said Ukraine doesn't exist, it's not a real country. And in fact, he came up with a theory about Ukraine that I'd never heard before, which is that it was invented by Lenin.

KRISTOL: Right.

APPLEBAUM: You don't want to even know what he was talking about, but it was very convoluted and weird. And I thought, I of course, as you say, I wrote a book about Ukraine, I've spent a lot of time there, I know a lot of Ukrainians and I, of course, assume things about them, then I realized that people don't know. And so I wrote something that said, who are they? Where do they come from? How was their identity composed?

In some ways, their story is no different from any other European country. They emerge out of a medieval empire. There was a medieval empire Kievan Rus, which was based in Kiev, and which was

the ancestor of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. They were then essentially a land colony of other empires for many years, much like the Irish were a land colony of the English, or the Slovaks who were a colony of the Hungarians. So it's not an unknown way to have spent the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. But one of the things that means is that Ukrainian-ness was always a kind of identity associated with anti-elitism, anti-establishment sometimes anti the cities. It was an identity that was kind of preserved in the countryside at a time when there wasn't a Ukrainian state. It sort of has this kind of built in, again, all the national heroes or partisans or rebels or people who led uprisings against the czar or against the Polish Kings.

And so it has almost kind of built into it this kind of rebellious streak. And also of course it has built into it a historical memory of kind of grassroots and civic organization. This, again, actually it has in common with other countries. A lot of other European countries before they had states, they had national movements and this is true of the Italians, it's true of the Germans, it's true of actually most European countries with just a couple of exceptions like England and France. So there wasn't a state in the 19th century, and so they created kind of Ukrainian clubs and schools and Sunday schools and charitable organizations. And that's how they expressed this identity.

They were very, so unlike other nationalities, they were very brutally repressed by the Russian czars, by the Imperial empire, which immediately saw them as a kind of threat. Here we have a kind of empire in which we're trying to Russify everybody and these Ukrainians are a problem for it. And so there was brutal repression then. At the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1918, they then revolted, they tried to create their own state at the time. Remember a lot of other European states were recreated or created then too: Czechoslovakia, Poland was put back together having been partitioned. So it was not an unusual demand or request, but they failed. They lost to the Bolsheviks. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks understood how important they were and how important they were nationally when they gave them kind of a special role in the Soviet Union. Stalin came to resent that. One of the effects of that was the Ukrainian famine, which was an artificial, organized famine designed to repress the peasantry and to eliminate them, was accompanied by mass arrests of Ukrainian intellectuals and artists and so on.

Fast forwarding to more recent events, one of the longer term effects of this was that Ukrainian-ness in the late 20th and 21st centuries also became caught up with the idea of democracy and democratization. So saying, "I am Ukrainian," in the year 1993 meant that you were in favor, you were anti-Soviet, you were in favor of integration with Europe. And that actually grew stronger with time. So the Ukrainians were pro-European, pro-democracy, pro-Western, and they were fighting against a post-Soviet, pro-Russian, I'm exaggerating a little bit, but kind of a corrupt establishment. So anti-corruption, democracy and so on. They staged multiple street battles and demonstrations in order to get rid of these kind of post-Soviet kleptocrats. They did it twice, 2005, again in 2014.

And I think actually it was the success of 2014, when the president of Ukraine, if you may remember fled the country, that has set the stage for the current events. So Putin, like the czars and Stalin before him, perceives Ukrainian-ness and its links to democracy and to the West and to democratic ideas as a personal threat to him. So he sees it as the kind of revolution that took place in Ukraine in 2014 is exactly the kind of revolution that he's personally afraid of, that he's afraid of that happening in Russia.

And so the need to eliminate Ukraine or destroy Ukraine, he's actually been talking about it for a decade and you could hear it in his voice on Monday. It's not just saying, "we're mad at them, we're going to eliminate them." And there's a really worrying kind of genocidal old tone to that, that we're going to physically eliminate these Ukrainians. That makes me worry. But that is the true source of this conflict. It's not about NATO. It's not about geopolitics, it's about that.

KRISTOL: Yeah, no, I think that's very important. I think that one reason you've been so right the last few weeks, and it's not worth re-litigating these debates, true, honest debates about what Putin's intentions were, and maybe he would just do a small thing or try to gradually strangle them as opposed to long-term major war. I think you saw earlier on the extent of Putin's fear and of his ambition, I guess you could say also, and of his paranoia; and we've ended up where we are. It is striking how much, it just occurred to me the other day, we old anti-communists used to complain that the Soviet Union had three votes at the United Nations which seemed a little weird. Why did they get three? Didn't matter, who cared in the

General Assembly, but they had three votes. And the reason they had three votes is that the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was even in the Soviet Union in a funny way considered an actual nation. It was a nation, the conceit was, that had voluntarily joined this wonderful union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

But it is interesting that even then the Russians sort of acknowledged, you might say, that it was a nation in and of itself. And of course they voted overwhelmingly for independence very, very early on. And we'll get out of the history here in a minute, but they also gave up the nuclear weapons which were stationed on Ukrainian soil in an agreement in 1994, in which we and Russia and Great Britain, I think guaranteed in effect the sovereignty, the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

APPLEBAUM: That's right. And so, yes, you're right. So 1991 was the effect, again, of one of these grassroots organized movements. It was called ruch, that means "movement", that was created in the late 80s. It led to a referendum on independence in 1991, which was overwhelming, actually including in Eastern Ukraine, including in the Russian speaking parts of Ukraine. And Russian speaking Ukrainians are Ukrainians. They're not Russians. And yes, in that moment of pleasure at their independence and trust in the people around them, and actually their close historical links with Russia, they did give up their nuclear weapons. They did sign that document. Unfortunately, it's not really a binding treaty or any guarantees in it, but there is a piece of paper that says Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity are guaranteed by America, Britain, and Russia. This is something Putin never talks about, he never brings up. In his account of the '90s that he occasionally gives, he always leaves it out.

KRISTOL: Yeah, no, it is striking. Say a word about Zelenskyy, President Zelenskyy who I knew nothing about beyond the typical newspaper headline sort of, former comedian who kind of weirdly becomes the president of Ukraine, defeats the Russian backed candidate, but he's been awfully impressive, has he not, the last week or two? Those speeches really seem pretty extraordinary to me.

APPLEBAUM: His speeches have been excellent. The only thing that I'm disturbed about was whether he took the American warnings of this seriously enough. And I fear that he didn't. I was actually in Ukraine in Kiev in late December. I met his chief of staff there and they didn't think — They had all kinds of theories about what might really be happening, and it was a bluff, and it was pressure and so on. And I am not sure they took it seriously. And we won't sort of know much, we won't understand, we need sort of the long light of history to make that judgment because we're going to see how the Ukrainian armed forces and the Ukrainian population act in the next few days.

But Zelenskyy, actually, is a totally interesting character for a lot of reasons. Okay. First of all, he's Jewish. And the fact that that's not a big deal and hasn't really been an issue is very interesting, because the popular conception of Ukrainian nationalism is that it would be ethno-nationalism, and it would be anti-Semitic, and it would be against — And actually, Ukraine, without anybody ever telling them about civic nationalism, I doubt anybody who voted for him even knows that expression, they do have something like that. In other words, meaning that, you know, anybody who lives there is a member of the nation or of the state, and it's not about pure ethnic identity. That may come from the fact that they're bilingual. Everybody speaks Russian-Ukrainian. Everybody has kind of mixed origins. Lots of people are intermarried with other people. And maybe that's the source of that kind of tolerance.

And the other thing is —

KRISTOL: If I'm not mistaken, I think part of the speech, he gave in Russian, when he spoke a couple of nights ago.

APPLEBAUM: Oh yeah, no, no. On the night of the invasion last night, he spoke in Russian and addressed it to Russians.

KRISTOL: Yeah. And in that, he mentions that his, I think, grandfather fought in the Soviet army against the Nazis after the Nazi invasion. He doesn't mention, I guess, I think another, maybe a great grandfather, who I think died in a concentration camp before. At least he had close relatives, I believe, who were sent to concentration camps because they were Jewish. So it is an interesting. I think that was maybe less necessary, or politic to mention in that speech, maybe less relevant in a way.

APPLEBAUM: I think he mentioned it because, in Putin's announcement of the war, which was a very bizarre statement, Putin said, "This is about de-Nazification of Ukraine."

KRISTOL: Yeah.

APPLEBAUM: And so Zelenskyy felt it was important to say, "Not only am I not a Nazi, my family died in the Holocaust." I don't know if they died in camps or if they were shot in a forest, which is mostly what happened to people from the Ukraine.

KRISTOL: Yeah. Yeah. Anyway, that's just a side thing, but he's been —

APPLEBAUM: But the other interesting thing about him is that, yes, he's a comedian, and this is a not unknown phenomenon in our culture, to have TV personalities suddenly become leaders —

KRISTOL: They got a better one though. They got one who believes in democracy. So I mean, you should —

APPLEBAUM: It can work out, or it cannot work out, and we can —

KRISTOL: We should not look down on them. We're the great democracy, but our TV personality is not pro-democracy, and theirs is, you know?

APPLEBAUM: At the time that he was elected, I watched several of the programs of the — There's a famous television series called *Sluha Narodu*, it means "Servant of the People", which is the series in which he plays a school teacher who is accidentally caught on video by one of his students ranting about corruption. He goes on a kind of tirade, you know, "I hate these people," da, da, da. And the student captures the clip and then the clip goes viral. This is in the series. And because of that, there's a presidential election, and without campaigning or anything, he accidentally becomes president.

So he's a school teacher. I mean, a kind of post-Soviet, like he lives in some apartment with his mother, and he's divorced, and he's kind of sad, you know, everyone's rude to him. And then the next day, when he becomes president, suddenly everybody's obsequious and they suck up to him. And he makes fun of, you know, it's poking fun at the Ukrainian elite, but also poking fun at this sort of attitude to power that Ukrainians have. And it's funny. I mean, it's genuinely funny.

And I think what Ukrainians were voting for when they chose him was, of course, that, like, "We want a president like that, who is anti-establishment and who is an outsider and who's from a normal family and is a normal person."

So while it's a little bit weird that he was chosen president, and there are some who feel that his lack of experience shows, not just in the preparation for the war, but in other things. And he's become a little paranoid in recent months about bad press and so on. I mean, he's just not used to it. But Ukrainians wanted that kind of — I mean, again, it connects back to their history and this kind of rebellious, anti-establishment, anti-elitist traditions. And Zelenskyy is really a product of that.

And you're right; in his speeches, I think, in the last few days, he's really risen to the moment. He's tried to speak to Ukrainians and he's tried to speak to Russians. I saw him speak in Munich a couple of days ago. It was a very bitter speech actually, kind of directed at the Western leaders who were there, saying, essentially, "What have you done? Nothing." But generally, in the last 24 hours, he's been very impressive.

II: Putin's War on Ukraine (16:13 – 43:47)

KRISTOL: Yeah. So let's ... Not go into the history. I feel, at this moment, Churchill's guidance shortly after Dunkirk, I guess, in June of 1940, that, you know, we can't re-litigate all of the fights we've had about understanding this stuff over the last five, 10, 20 years. We need to sort of think hard about where we are and the, I think, pretty unprecedented, not totally unprecedented, but new moment we're in.

I do think that one thing I've been struck by, reading up a little bit on history of wars, including the Gulf War even, in 1990; things change. Wars really change things. They change things internationally, they change things domestically. Things happen and governments make decisions that, a month before, you would've said, "No way."

You know, in 1990, I was in the White House, we're trying to manage the victory in the Cold War, the unification of Germany; a million things going on. If you had said, "Saddam Hussein's going to invade Kuwait," a little country we had no treaty relationship with; "Within three months, four months, we're going to have 500,000 troops in Saudi Arabia," a country that had never had US troops; "We're going to have a war, but they're going to stop short of Baghdad ... " I mean, the whole thing would've been so ...

But it happened. And in those cases, I think those were most of the right decisions, but, you know, it happened because one thing leads to another and the world changes. More than one thing, I guess, is my – So stipulating that, that it's therefore hard to predict where we'll be, where are we more broadly in terms of Russia and Putin, in terms of central and Eastern Europe? And then let's go to the broader question of the whole kind of European and international world order, or the US role in it, and so forth.

But maybe first focus ... I mean, it's a very big moment, isn't it?

APPLEBAUM: It's a very big moment because it's shown the extent of Putin's ambition. You know, if he's ambitious enough to want to take all of Ukraine, which it seems that he is, I mean, there's bombardments all over the country, there are troops going in in the north and the south, and according to US intelligence, he has a plan to capture Kiev and execute the leadership of the country. Of course, we don't know whether that's going to all happen, but the extent of his ambition means that you have to consider that the ambition would go even farther.

And the idea that there might be a spillover of this war into Poland, you can imagine. I don't know, if there's a Ukrainian resistance, it being armed from Poland; you could imagine that creating a conflict between Poland and Russia.

Also, you know, I have to say, this sounds a little bit weird, but it's worth remembering, I was at actually another Munich security conference several years ago, sort of seven or eight years ago, when Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, stood up. He always makes these awful speeches, and he stood up and made a speech. And one of the things he said was, "Well, you realize that German reunification was illegal." And of course, being Munich, everybody laughed.

And I heard that and I thought, "I don't think that was a joke." I think they believe they can pick apart everything, and that they want to pick apart the entire post-Cold War order going right back to the unification of Germany.

Remember, Putin himself remembers personally when there was an enormous Soviet headquarters in East Berlin. I've been to it. It's a huge thing. He was a member —

KRISTOL: He was there, right?

APPLEBAUM: And he was there. He was a part of the Soviet occupation force in East Berlin. And he may want it back.

I can't tell you right now exactly what form that would take or how they're doing it, but certainly, Germany has been a special focus for him for a decade. You know, he has used contacts and money and influence, and he's essentially —

I don't think the AFD, which is the German far-right political party, I don't think it would exist without Russian influence and Russian disinformation and Russian financial support. And so, he's had designs on Germany and has been trying to shape German politics in different ways for a long time.

I mean, the fact that a former German chancellor, this is Gerhard Schröder, essentially works for him, he

works for Gazprom, which is the semi-state/semi-private Russian gas company that essentially funds a lot of Russia's foreign policy projects, means that they're very ambitious when they think about Germany.

So the first thing that it means is that there is imminent and immediate danger to NATO and to actual members of NATO, which of course, Ukraine is not. I would include the Baltic states, but I would also include Poland, I would include Romania, and maybe someday Germany.

KRISTOL: Yeah. And the takeover of Belarus has really moved the border literally to the level of a puppet state to the Baltics.

APPLEBAUM: Yeah, that's worth mentioning actually, which is that another thing that we've learned in the last few weeks is that, essentially, Belarus is now a part of Russia, which was not the case before. There are now Russian troops based in Belarus. So that means that the Russians have a border with Poland, they have a border with Lithuania, and from Belarus, you're, I can't remember what the number is, but a few kilometers from Belarus.

And so they now pose a kind of danger to NATO that they did not previously. And that is going to have to, I think, immediately affect how we think about NATO, and how NATO thinks about troops, bases, arms, strategy, when and how to conduct exercises, what to be prepared for.

I mean, all kinds of questions that we thought we have not thought about since 1988 immediately become important again, including, by the way ... You know, one of the other insane things that Putin did when he launched the war yesterday, or last night, was he made a kind of veiled threat about nuclear weapons. He said something about, "Nobody must interfere in this or something will happen to you that's never before happened in history," and that's was taken to be an illusion to nuclear weapons. And so suddenly a topic that had really completely disappeared from European politics and strategy, I think it will now come back.

KRISTOL: Yeah, no, I mean, I remember that US Doctrine was that we would use, because it's amazing in retrospect, tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, if necessary or at least had the options to do so. Why? Because it was very hard to defend it conventionally against overwhelming Russian numbers on the front in Germany, or further north, or elsewhere throughout Europe, the Cold War front. So yeah, no, I mean all kinds of questions get raised that we thought had been put to bed.

I was in Munich at the Munich Security Conference, not to dwell on that too much, in 2007. When Putin gave this famous notorious speech, that was not his first, but maybe his first real declaration of hostility to the West and to the post Cold War liberal order. And I remember at the time, we were in this beginning of the surge in Iraq, but Iraq had been of course the topic for the last three, four years. And most of the people I was with were anti-Iraq war, some of the Europeans, and there was a lot of, "Well see, this is what Iraq has done, it's provoked Putin to this point."

And I remember at the time I said, "Well, look, you can disagree with me on Iraq. Maybe you're right, maybe I'm wrong, but I think it goes beyond Iraq." And of course we had President Obama and we got out of Iraq. And we made clear that wasn't the kind of foreign policy we sought. And obviously, neither with Obama nor Trump.

And in that respect Putin — I mean, Putin's a gangster, right? Say a word about this. And Gary Kasparov always stresses, I think this is useful, that one shouldn't give Putin too much respect in the sense that he's not some deep thinker who's studied Russian history and yearns for that world of the middle ages, or Peter the Great, who's the opposite of the middle ages, but whatever. He's a gangster, thug, and a kleptocrat, and so forth. But I agree that if you were... This is where most of the analysts then said — I think contrary to you and to me, I followed your lead on this — that "Well, that's why he'll be cautious. He's a gangster, mafia, kleptocrat. It's just the way they cut a deal, that you don't want get in over your head. So you control the heroin trade in New Jersey. You don't try to take over New York as well, it's too hard, right? That he will be cautious in what he does."

But he's somehow both combination of a mafia kleptocrat, but also the ambition is pretty grand. And I

guess he sees the upside of making Russia great again with Belarus and Ukraine, maybe they'll join Russia in two or three years if he conquers them, right? They'll have "referendums," and suddenly he's the guy who put it back together after all these decades.

APPLEBAUM: Yeah, no. I mean, so as I said, part of his motivation is this fear of democracy, which he identifies with Ukraine, and in particular, he's very paranoid about street demonstrations that lead to a collapse of power. Because that's what he saw happen in Germany in 1989. He was in Dresden at the time the Berlin wall fell. And that's what happened in Ukraine in 2014.

And he thought that might happen in Russia in 2011. There was this — the mass demonstrations across Russia then. And at the time he became very emotional, and he made a very emotional and angry speech about how Hillary Clinton had organized these demonstrations in Moscow. And God bless Hillary Clinton, but she is not capable of organizing demonstrations in Moscow.

KRISTOL: Nor is the US government, unfortunately.

APPLEBAUM: Nor is the US government, whatever our ambitions are, we could have never done that. But the fact that he thought that, or that he said it, I don't know whether he really believed it, but he does identify this demand for justice, and the demand for freedom, and the demand for the right to vote, he identifies that with Western powers and Western influence. And in that sense, he's of course sort of right. I mean, that is what people want, people do want Europe. And in 2014 in Kiev, they waived the European flag. And they would describe themselves as wanting to be a normal European country, and by normal they mean democratic with integrated borders and so on. And so his resentment is partly that.

And then the second piece of his resentment is this revanchist anger at the breakup of the Soviet Union, which was the great trauma of his life, and this he has said in interviews and so on. And he's described, and others have documented what happened, he was in the KGB headquarters in Dresden and there were mobs outside, and they had to burn all their documents, and they made a phone call to Moscow asking for reinforcement, and no reinforcement came. And this is the moment when he knew that the empire was over, and he resents that profoundly, and he resents loss of power and territory profoundly.

And so he's still talking about it in a way that, by the way, I don't think younger Russians do at all anymore. Most Russians under 40 think Ukraine is a foreign country, and they don't think it's part of Russia. But his generation, especially his generation of Soviet apparatchiks and KGB, might still have that longing to recreate the empire. And these things put together, this revanchism plus his hatred of the democracy that Ukraine represents, I think those are the things that help explain why he became so obsessed with this idea.

KRISTOL: I mean, that last point does suggest we shouldn't give up at all though on the Russian people, and on hoping for a post-Putin, or working for a post-Putin Russia. Because if it is him and some slice of Soviet era nostalgists plus just kleptocrats who are benefiting from the current situation, this is not built... It reminds me of the Balkans, "Oh, this is an historical hatred, it can never go away." It's, "You know, you're crazy to think you could have a peaceful situation," but that's not the case, right? I don't know, do 45 year old Russians and 45 year old Ukrainians think they can't live side by side, with a lot of cultural intermingling and national independence? I don't know about that.

APPLEBAUM: So again, there isn't really any polling now in Russia, because if you call up a taxi driver in Krasnoyarsk, and you say, "Hello, I'm from the Polling Agency. Do you like the president?" What are people going to say? I mean, they'll say yes. This is a dictatorship, so nobody's going to tell somebody that... There are other kinds of indications that there's a lot of dissatisfaction, a lot of interest economic. Probably there's support for him too. And Soviet apparatchiks is a large number of people. And people with nostalgia may be enough, if they are in control.

But yes, so I don't believe that any country is ever condemned to be the way it always was. And there are plenty of examples of countries that have changed themselves. I mean, actually Ukraine is one of them. Or have tried to transform themselves and have succeeded in becoming different.

And I still believe that Russia could be a much different place. There is a liberal tradition in Russian history, there is a fine tradition of Russian democrats and democracy activists. To my mind, the most brilliant and most interesting democracy activist in the world actually is Alexei Navalny who's Putin's main rival. He's in prison now, but he essentially invented a whole different way of doing democracy agitation. And his group does these big investigations into corruption, and then they make films out of them, which have high production values, they're very funny, Navalny himself starred in them. And they're very pointed and they find information about... I mean, for example, they did one about Putin's vast palace that he bought on the Black Sea and built on the Black Sea. And they get 200 million, 300 million views on YouTube. I mean, I don't think there's anybody else who can get that kind of audience anywhere else in the world.

And so they're very creative, they're very sophisticated, and they're a large group. I mean, I don't think right now they're in a position to overthrow the government. But as one of the Navalny people said to me a few days ago, "We're just here because we know that sooner or later there will be a crisis. And when the crisis arrives, we would like to be ready." So it's not [inaudible].

I mean, of course the other route to change in Russia is some kind of palace coup, or people around Putin becoming dissatisfied with him. And that I'm not intimately connected enough in the Russian elite to be able to tell you whether that's possible or who it would be, but, but there is long tradition of that in Russia, too.

KRISTOL: Yeah. And foreign wars are often occasions, where if they don't go well, that leads to that coup, which then can lead to more of a real move towards democracy.

I was at a dinner with one of Navalny's top aids here in Washington, a couple days ago, maybe it's the same person you talked to. And yeah, it's interesting talking to them, but they are very... And the maturity, the patience, the notion that, "Look, we're not going to snap our fingers, and things will suddenly change there." And they're in exile, of course. Well, Navalny's in prison. And he's an exile, and others are. But it is impressive.

So let's talk about the West for a few minutes and then I'll let you go, you're swamped. But I mean, what should we do? Not so much in the granular, probably day to day, hopefully the Biden administration has — Well, say a word if you want about what they should do in the even shortish-term. But more sort of, how do we now think about the situation here? And how far are we from getting to where we need to be, in terms of thinking about and dealing with this new moment?

APPLEBAUM: So your previous question actually was going in the direction that I think we should go, which is that we need really, aside from needing a new strategy for NATO, which I've said already, we also need a new strategy for Russia, a new way of thinking about Russia. One that is not reactive, that Putin does something and we react and we do sanctions. We need to think about what we want to have happen in Russia, and we need to then — I'm not giving you policy prescriptions right now — but what do we want to have happen? And then work backwards and think about how do we want to get there?

We need new forms of public diplomacy. We need ways of talking to Russians, we don't have that anymore. There is still Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty exists, but it's very, very small. It's very good by the way, it's very well run, but it's very small. It doesn't have the reach that it could have.

How do we reach people? Do we need to create a Russian language television station? How do we, not necessarily just through money, but how do we bump up support for Navalny and the other organizations that are working for change in Russia? And I don't mean necessarily revolutionary change, but just mentality change. How do we start thinking about that at doing that?

These are, as you know very well, these are things we could do in the past. We thought about them during the Cold War, and there's no reason why we can't begin to think of them again.

In addition to that, the process of rooting corrupt Russian money out of all of our economies, and I mean America, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, everybody, Austria, a big one, is going to be a

long project out of the banking system. Eliminating the money laundering that enables Russians to steal money from their own country and then park it in the Cote d'Azur or in Knightsbridge. That has to end. We need to be very firm about ending it.

I do feel that in Washington, there's a mood to do that. I don't know about everywhere in Europe. You can hear senators talk about it. There are bills kicking around. Biden has spoken about it in the context even of the democracy summit that he had a few months ago. So that's the other, I would say.

The third piece of it. There's a military piece that has to change. There's a strategy and communications piece that has to change.

Then there's lot of stuff for the Treasury to do and maybe Congress to do in terms of thinking really hard about how we eliminate Russian money and the influence that it buys actually, from our public life. You can see all over the airwaves that there is Russian influence in American media.

You can see it in parts of the business community. If you look at just exactly how it was that Donald Trump kept afloat during all those years when he was bankrupt, he and his sons have said quite openly that part of that was Russians investing in Trump family properties, buying apartments in Trump buildings, using shell companies or anonymously owned companies in order to do that. So they knew a lot of their money was coming from Russia all the time.

Trump wasn't particularly unique in that, but the fact that somebody like Trump could be made in part by Russian money — I'm not talking about 2016, I'm talking about a decade earlier — means that others were, and the Russians often did that very strategically. They invested in particular people in every country, whether it was Schroeder in Germany, or he's got a partner who's a former Stasi agent who Putin seems to have known in 1989. So there are people who have been invested in, and that has to also stop. We need to understand how that works better and become more serious about eliminating it.

I would say those are the three big things that need to be done medium and long term.

KRISTOL: Yeah. The extricating of Russian influence from the Western economies are, has been really much more even of course, in Europe where it's really so pervasive, and which has helped the economies in the short term. London real estate and so forth. But that's something people haven't really come to grips with. I think you're right. People are not talking about it in a serious way. "Hey, can't we seize their yachts that are here in the Caribbean?" Or something.

But that's a huge effort by itself, and then the weakening of the Russian economy through SWIFT and major sanctions, as opposed to the rather moderate ones we've done so far, and the soft power and hard power buildup we'll need to do. I would say that people —

Well, the shock maybe will cause people to suddenly realize that what if we have to increase the defense budget by 1 or 2% of GDP? It's way below Cold War still, that maybe is necessary in this new world we live in. It's not like China says to the US say, "Hey, okay, you're preoccupied with Russia now. We're just going to take a break for five years either." So we have two fronts at least where there are serious dictators thinking about doing things, or in Putin's case, having done something.

APPLEBAUM: Yeah. To some extent, I don't want to overdo the Russian-Chinese relationship. These are actually not countries that like each other. I think Russia is now very much the junior partner, and because of these events, is going to become much more dependent on China in a way that I think will be ultimately pretty negative. There are also big differences between them in the way they behave. I don't think China is at all excited about some kind of economic collapse, thanks to this happening or Europeans not having money to buy stuff from China. Nobody's going to like that.

But they do share now, and this is also something I've written about in the last couple months, they do share together with other autocrats, kleptocrats, around the world, a common set of values now. I don't want to dignify it by saying it's an ideology because it's not. Chinese communism and Russian nationalism and Iranian theocracy and Venezuelan Bolivarian socialism are different, but they share

certain things and they share a common ... one of the things they share is a common distaste for the West, for Western democracy, for the language of democracy.

They are willing to help one another when they get in trouble. So countries that are sanctioned will now — China will invest in sanctioned countries and Russia and China together will bail out Venezuela. The Iranians are talking to the Russians now. Those are not deep historical, and I don't know when before in history, Iran and Minsk ever had anything to do with each other. But now they sense that they have something in common. I think that should also be — realists need to acknowledge this as well.

People sometimes say there's this idea about Asia first. We really should be fighting China and not Russia. We don't get that choice. The Russians, they hate us for what we are. It's not because of something that we've done. Their interest in being close to China is not something that we can right now pick apart, at least not while we have this Russian leadership and this Chinese leadership.

KRISTOL: Yeah. Bob Kagan pointed out recently in the '30s, it's not as if Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany had close relations or liked each other much, or had much of a historic relationship, but they observed what was happening in each theater. They took advantage of moments when things were happening in the other theater and they ended up as allies, of course. So I think yeah, you don't need to posit some kind of mystical relationship among the authoritarians to be worried about authoritarianism on the one front.

Well, let's close with that. You've written a whole book on democracy and the Twilight of Democracy and The Challenge of Authoritarianism. You mentioned the piece you wrote last night, that Ukraine is now the front line of that fight. I would say a word about the broader, I don't want to say ideological fight, because it's a real fight. It's not just a fight of debates of ideas.

APPLEBAUM: It's not a war of ideas.

KRISTOL: What's that?

APPLEBAUM: It's not a war of ideas. It's a war.

KRISTOL: Yeah. It's a war between nations informed by different ideas, I guess, or war of aggression in the case of Russia. But say a word about, how do you think that stands? How confident are you in the resilience of democracy? How worried are you about the 21st century, contrary to what pretty much everyone would've thought, I guess 10, 20 years ago, could be a century of the rise of authoritarianism and very ugly kinds of authoritarianism?

APPLEBAUM: So I worry that we are in a struggle and we don't know that we're in the struggle yet. Or we haven't known at least up until now, maybe this will be the moment that changes it. That the need to band together as democracies to find ways to reinforce our democracies is not just a task for ... As of course, you and I could have a completely separate whole long conversation about American democracy and what's wrong. I'm sure that's what you talk to all your other guests about. You don't have to do it again.

But understanding that that's part of a wider and broader set of issues, that democracy and democracies are under challenge all over the world. Now as we see in Europe, but also in Asia, also elsewhere, and that they are under challenge, and that working together as allies is one of the ... I have a unprovable private theory that one of the ways in which we can help heal American democracy is by understanding and deepening our alliances, by having joint projects as democracies to fight the autocracy, that we have the attraction of it both outside and inside the country.

We clearly have Americans who are fond of autocracy too. Seeing that, identifying it and understanding that that's the struggle for the next decade is important. I hope that we're going to have the wisdom as a nation to see that.

KRISTOL: I very much hope so. I very much agree with that last point. I think there's a certain kind of

view that the fight abroad hurts democracy at home, but it's not historically the case.

APPLEBAUM: Not at all.

KRISTOL: Typically we've advanced democracy more at home, typically, when we've also been cognizant of and engaged in trying to defend it and advance it abroad. I don't think that's an accident actually, that people have — but it cuts a little bit against the notion that all this stuff abroad detracts from democracy. But now it's actually quite clear, isn't it? The anti-democratic forces in the US are friendly to the anti-democratic forces in the world. Trump admirers Putin, and they're so to speak allies, which means we should certainly be allies with democracies. I won't go on. I'll let you go.

Anne Applebaum, thank you so much for all the writing, the books over the years, the articles recently and forthcoming. And most of all right now, for taking this time to be with me on CONVERSATIONS.

APPLEBAUM: Thanks, Bill. It's always a pleasure to talk to you. Thank you.

KRISTOL: Keep up the good work and everyone should follow.

APPLEBAUM: You too.

KRISTOL: Thank you all for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]