BILL KRISTOL:
Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome back to *Conversations*. I'm very pleased to be joined today by an old friend, Frank Fukuyama, who really does need no introduction, but I'll give a very brief one. Senior Fellow at the Freeman-Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University, author of many very important books and articles. I guess most famously, *The End of History and the Last Man*—people always forget the last half of that title—in 1992. Political scientist, political economist, a broad thinker about politics and society, wrote a book called *Trust*, which I very much liked in 19... Shortly after *The End of History*. I think that was your next book, wasn't it, on social trust and how important it was to prosperity and to well-functioning societies, books on order and disorder, liberalism. You can look them all up. And been very involved in Ukraine in the last, what, seven, eight years, courses with Ukrainians coming to Stanford to study, and I think Stanford's done things in Ukraine as well.
So we'll begin. That's the focus of our conversation today, although I'm sure we'll go discuss some many other topics as well. So, Frank, thanks for joining me today.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Yeah. Thanks for having me on, Bill.

BILL KRISTOL:
It's—

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
I'm a regular listener to *Conversations*, so it's a pleasure to be on.

BILL KRISTOL:
Excellent. And you still agree to be on. That's good. Yeah. That's very surprising. That's great. Well, anyway, so thanks a lot, and let's just jump right in on Ukraine. As I say, well, I'm sure we'll touch on a million other topics and broader topics, but you've been writing a lot about the war. You were very early in predicting Putin's failures and Ukraine's relative successes. What is it, January 23rd as we speak, so almost exactly 11 months in. So where in your judgment do we stand, and what lessons do you take from it?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Well, I think that at the moment we're in a kind of dispiriting phase because the Ukrainian forward momentum that we saw at the end of the summer has slowed down. They're in the middle of a very cold winter. The Russians have actually made a few very marginal gains in Soledar trying to take Bakhmut. And we just had this Ramstein conference in which the Germans have basically continued to drag their feet on providing Leopard tanks.
And so I think that fundamentally, I still believe that if the West continues to provide a higher and adequate level of weapons, that the Ukrainians will be able to break out of their current positions sometime in the spring. And if they do, they can put the entire Russian position in Crimea in danger if they break the lines of supply from Russia to Crimea by taking Melitopol and some other cities in southern Ukraine, which is by the

way necessary if they're going to be a viable state because they need to be able to export, and unless they liberate those areas, they're going to have problems.
So in a certain sense, right now the ball is in the West's court. The US just passed another big aid package that is going to help, but I think for some reason we're always a little bit late and slow in doing the right thing. However, I do think that the fundamentals haven't really changed, that Ukraine just has a much greater advantage and motivation than Russia does. The recent fighting has all been done by prisoners, by criminals, that the Wagner Group let out a prison in order to become cannon fodder, and huge numbers of them have gotten killed. That might be part of a semi-intelligent strategy to buy time so that they can reconstitute and remobilize, but they've still got very severe manpower problems. All these young Russians have fled the country, whereas lots of young Ukrainians actually came back to Ukraine at the start of the war. And so I think the kind of fundamental morale advantages still remain on Ukraine's side.

BILL KRISTOL:
Let's take a couple of more minutes on the Russia, Ukraine situation, and then we can talk more broadly about the West and its response. You were very bullish on Ukraine's chances very early. You wrote a piece on March 10th, "Preparing for Defeat," which was preparing for Russia's defeat, Putin's defeat, which was not where people were then. What led you to what I think has been, as you say, despite some pauses you might say, fundamentally a correct analysis of, well, both Putin's weakness or Russia's weakness and Ukraine's strength in either order?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Yeah. Well, there are several sources of this. I mean, part of it is the experience I've had dealing with young Ukrainian... By young, I mean people in their 30s and 40s, kind of mid-career types that we've been working with over the years, and it's unbelievable their motivation. They really want to be Europeans. They want to live in a democracy. They really hate the kind of kleptocracy Putin has created, and there are a lot of them, very well educated, very talented, and I think you're seeing that come through.
Another factor really has to do with just the nature of the Russian regime, which is being demonstrated on the battlefield. If you remember back to the early stages of the war, you saw all those pictures of Putin sitting at a 30-foot table away from his defense minister, foreign minister, because he was so afraid of COVID. I think it gets to the heart of what's wrong with autocracy. You basically reduce decision-making to one single individual who's lacking in information, living in his own information cocoon. He didn't understand how Ukrainian nationalism had developed. He didn't understand the problems of corruption, the deep, deep problems of corruption in his own military. And so, in a way, it's not surprising that that kind of a political system produces very bad decision.
Then finally, so the thing that a lot of people don't understand about me is that I started my life as an analyst actually, of the Soviet military when I worked at the RAND Corporation for the first 10 years of my career, and the one thing I took away from that whole experience is that wars are won or lost by military logistics. And it seemed to me that the Russians were in a very bad position with regard to that. They don't pay attention to logistics. And sure enough, that's what led to their defeat around Kyiv in the early stages of the war. That's what led to their setbacks in Kharkiv and Kherson, and I think that's what's going to do them in ultimately in Crimea.

BILL KRISTOL:

One more point on Russia and then we can get to the more cheerful topic, I think, of Ukraine and hopefully of the West. But, I mean, you wrote way back in *The End Of History and the Last Man*, you had a couple of chapters on the weakness of strong states, and that became a sort of famous theme, I think, of people picked up on it a lot. Is that applicable to Putin's Russia? And then say a word about what that thesis is and why you came to it and so forth.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Sure. So there are different dimensions of state strength, and when we look at countries like China and Russia, we see one aspect of it, which is their ability to repress political opposition, to control the media, to control the many aspects of the lives of their citizens, but there are many other dimensions of state strength that are also important, like the ability to actually provide decent services for their citizens.
One of the facts that's come out since the Russian invasion is something like 40% of the Russian population do not have access to indoor toilets. That's one of the reasons they've been stealing toilets from Ukraine. And a lot of the soldiers that have fought there have come back amazed that the Ukrainians are living so well, they've got indoor toilets. And so this is a regime that can produce gazillions of tanks but cannot provide these basic goods for their citizens. And so, there's many dimensions by which a state can appear strong but actually is quite weak in the long run.
The other big weakness is obviously legitimacy. Now, Putin has managed to, I think, rally a lot of support on the part of Russians because of the war. So in that sense, he's managed to create legitimacy, but it's all dependent on the success that he sees on the battlefield. And if he is defeated, he doesn't have a reservoir of good will that's going to last him. We're seeing that playing out in China also, where so much of the Chinese Communist Party's legitimacy was built around this claim that they can actually get things done. And their handling of COVID was exhibit number one in how they were doing things better than western liberal democracies. And I think we've now seen that that is also wrong. They can do all this mass testing, but they don't have intensive care beds. They don't have adequate healthcare, especially for their rural citizens. And so, again, that's a state that appears to be very strong on the surface, but actually has huge weaknesses underlying.

BILL KRISTOL:
Yeah, that's so interesting. I mean, you were following this much more closely in the mid-80s than I was, but Chernobyl I guess did really a fair amount of damage to the Soviet regime and the failure there. And I was thinking about that. We've had our own failures, obviously in public health and other things, but somehow if it's a democracy, okay, there's a failure, you blame people fairly or unfairly in government or in high office and you change those people out or don't, but, I mean, there's a way in which there's more resiliency, I suppose, whereas no one else to blame in places like the Soviet Union or today's Russia or China. Is that right?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Yeah, I think that's a lot of it. Our democratic processes, it's true, they take a lot of time, they're slow, we often make bad decisions, but you at least have some prospect of changing the people at the top if they really screw up, and it's certainly happened many times in American history. So I think that's really one of the enduring strengths of living in a liberal democracy. Quite frankly, I think we made a lot of mistakes, American voters in the past few years, that have surprised me, and those mistakes have continued for longer than I had expected, but I think in the end, they are likely to be corrected.

BILL KRISTOL:
And Ukraine, conversely, I mean, I didn't follow it that closely, I've never been, and so I've had the vague impression of corruption and difficulties. Obviously 2014 was inspiring. But, I mean, was it a surprise to you how well they've done? Or I guess you were dealing with them quite a lot, but is it a success story in a sense of political development and of help by us or of their own efforts? Or just why are they doing so well, if I could put it that way?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
It's curious. I was actually surprised at the way the country came together and the extreme motivation and patriotism that was demonstrated not just by the kind of middle class elites that I deal with, but really by the whole society, including a lot of Russian speakers in the east who people had thought would be loyal to Putin and Russia, but turned out to be actually very Ukrainian nationalist. And I think that in terms of corruption, there's no question that the country had a really big problem. It was dominated by a group of about six or seven oligarchs that controlled the media, that corrupted parliament and so forth. But there's this thesis about war and state building that's associated with the sociologist, Charles Tilly, who famously said that the state makes war and war makes the state.
And I think we're seeing a demonstration of this, that in many respects, you can hire your cousin to be the chief of the general staff who's completely incompetent, until you actually get into a real war, and then you begin to realize that that incompetence is going to lead to your death and the death of your family and total catastrophe, and it makes you much more serious about the need to actually improve the quality of government. I mean, this has been demonstrated repeated... Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War began the war having to appoint all of these political generals and they kept losing battles, and that was the point at which they turned to a professional military. And so we've seen this process play out at a much faster scale in Ukraine because the emergency was so much deeper.
And the oligarchs, I think, are really on a back foot right now. The chief one, Rinat Akhmetov, who controlled all of those big iron steel energy resources in Eastern Ukraine, it's his properties that have been relentlessly bombed by the Russians. And I think in a future Ukraine, assuming that they do win the war, those kinds of people are going to be much less important. And the democratic future of the country, I think, looks a lot better because there is such a strong sense of national identity now. Putin, ironically, has become the father of the Ukrainian nation in a way that I suspect he never intended to.

BILL KRISTOL:
And how important do you think Zelensky has been? It's one of these endless debates of the individual versus, all the others could have done it. And no, Churchill was the only person who could have done it in 1940. Where are you on that spectrum in terms of Zelensky?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Oh, I think he's been extremely important. We actually hosted a rockstar who is considering running for president in the same election that led to Zelensky's election. And he's a very good guy. I mean, I like him a lot.
But I do think that Zelensky, just from his background, had certain talents and abilities, and also kind of strength of character, that I think was really critical. This not wanting to run away at the opening of the war was just an unbelievably important decision. And many other people would've taken a different one.

I mean, I can't believe, he makes a speech every single day. And he's been doing that almost for a year. And the amount of fortitude that is required to keep up that sense of determination and inspiration is just something that doesn't exist in many other people. So I really do think that he's been very important in crystallizing this Ukrainian national identity.

BILL KRISTOL:
No, that's interesting. I've sort of had that view from afar but didn't know much. But then I was in Berlin a week and a half ago, and Ukrainians were at these meetings I was in. And I asked them, and they sort of partly wanted to say, no—as they should—It's the people as a whole they were very proud of. They had relatives, husbands, and very close relatives fighting and some had died. And so they didn't want to make it about one person. But they did sort of say that, especially for that first few weeks, maybe first few months, it is a little like Churchill in 1940. At some point once the thing is going, maybe others could do a lot of the work and it's less dependent on one person. But at that key inflection point, it really was, he was remarkable.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
I don't think that admitting that takes away from the courage and determination of everybody else. This is obviously a big, collective effort.

BILL KRISTOL:
Yeah, no, absolutely. Absolutely. So what about ... I mean, certainly, it does seem like that strength continues. It hasn't either gone away as one. I think it would be after, as one might think it would, after a year of difficult war. Nor is it turned into something ugly. I do think it's pretty unusual, not unusual maybe, but a pretty impressive demonstration of sort of healthy patriotism remaining both patriotic and healthy, and both liberal and nationalist incidentally, for quite a while now. It could have veered in some other direction.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
I think that the one thing that's really impressive is the way that ordinary Ukrainians have held up under this bombardment of their cities by the Russians that has knocked out the electricity in Kyiv, and Lviv, and Kharkiv, and other Ukrainian cities. We follow this quite closely. We talk to our friends there.
Some of them have taken their children out of the country, but a lot of them are still there. And they have to put up with no electricity for 48 hours, and then it comes on and then there's another attack and it goes out again. And this sort of thing could have led to a lot of back-biting and criticism of the government.
But I think that it's fairly remarkable, the degree of solidarity they've shown under these extremely stressful conditions.

BILL KRISTOL:
And less remarkable and less impressive, I mean, because the Ukrainians have been so impressive, has been the effect elsewhere. So let's talk about that some. You and I have followed that both in Europe, in Asia, you're just back from Japan, I think. Also in the US. I mean Zelensky… could February 24th, 2022 be a moment with the reaction to it and the Ukrainian impressive Ukrainian performance subsequent to that, be a moment not just for Ukraine, but for Europe, for the West, for Japan?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:

Well if you recall a few years ago, the French president, Emmanuel Macron. said that NATO was brain-dead and completely irrelevant to the contemporary world. And I think that we've seen a demonstration of why that's really not the case any longer.
I have certainly been surprised at the overall Western reaction. I mean, I traveled a lot. I took four trips to Europe last fall in Spain, Portugal, Czech Republic, Germany, Netherlands, a lot of different places. Greece.
And in every single one, I was just amazed at the degree of enthusiastic support. Now, obviously we got a problem in Germany because there still is this lingering pacifism that especially affects older Germans that kind of have a more vivid memory of the war. Or at least the residue of World War II. But it has been a much more solidary response than I would've expected before the attack happened.
I think they've also been lucky. Well, it's not lucky. I mean, it's a combination of luck and resourcefulness. Because they took a lot of measures to store natural gas over the summer. The industries in Germany especially really did make big adjustments to deal with the energy shortage.
And they had luck, because it's been a fairly mild winter. And so they actually have higher levels of gas supplies now than they did a year ago. So altogether, I think the strategy that Putin was trying to execute of freezing the Europeans to death and freezing them into submission has been a complete failure.

BILL KRISTOL:
After all that agony over Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2, they've cut off Russian gas and seem to be doing okay, at least for now. And I gathered behind the scenes, I had sort of been worried that we weren't doing enough on the energy thing and they weren't doing enough. But it seems like behind the scenes, they've actually done quite a lot. And some people over there, when I was there about 10 days ago said, we've actually helped them more than people realize… LNG exports.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Well, I think what we did was we really boosted LNG exports, diverted a lot of them that were going to Asia and sent them to Europe instead. And to the point where some conspiracy-minded Europeans think that this is all a deliberate plot to make them dependent on our LNG. But it was, I think, the result of a pretty long-term policy that had a lot of foresight in it.

BILL KRISTOL:
And I was struck, you mentioned older and younger. I was very struck when I was there. And again, just a few meetings, so I don't want to generalize, but I will generalize from it. Which is, I mean, people in their thirties and forties seemed very much moved by, invested in in a sense, the success of Ukraine. And understood this was a moment, in a sense. This was their… the way they could… moment to shape the future. They talked a lot about the broader implications for liberal democracy and autocracy.
I think people who are older, and certainly you can see this I think in the Chancellor, is a certain kind of ... We have to be very careful. And some of them, of course, have business ties with Russia and others, or history of that. And then others, just a passivism and wish that this could be resolved somehow, and we could just move on with their happy post-Cold War world and so forth.
Yeah, I don't know. Have you been struck by that?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:

Yeah. Oh, no, definitely. So to broaden the perspective, I just got back from Japan. Where we had, I and a couple of colleagues from my institute, had a lot of talks with very senior Japanese officials.
If you put this in a broader historical context, Japan and Germany were the aggressors in World War II. They lost the war, and we imposed basically big constraints on their sovereignty. We embedded them in the NATO alliance in Germany's case, the US-Japan Security Treaty in Japan's case.
But basically pushed them to become pacifist, the Japanese constitution that was written by a bunch of Americans forbade them to have a military. And to conduct, actually by some wording, even defensive operations. And it's interesting because it led to this gigantic cultural change in both countries, where the people that directly experienced the war and its aftermath were kind of inoculated very, very deeply. Pacifism runs very deep in that generation. And I think that that's really, that accounts for the slowness of the current *Zeitenwende*, the change of era that Schultz has talked about.
I mean, you announce a change, but you still have a population, the older parts of which are still mired in these old assumptions about the dangers of German or Japanese militarism, and the destabilizing potential for that. And not fully recognizing that the world has really changed, and they're facing a very different set of circumstances.
So I think that really accounts for this generational gap, because young people really grew up under very different circumstances. I mean, a lot of German young people got really tired of being blamed for the Holocaust and said, okay, Germany should be a more normal country now. And I think something similar to that is going to happen in Japan.

BILL KRISTOL:
Yeah, it's interesting that it's having an effect all the way over in Japan. A lot of people have speculated about how much it changes Europe, and the relation of Eastern and Central Europe to Western Europe, which we should talk about for a minute, as you have been to all these different parts of Europe.
But people do underestimate that. I find this generally, I was in Japan myself about 10 years ago now, how much they were—this was Prime Minister Abe, but also other senior leaders—how much they were shaken by President Obama's decision not to enforce the red line in Syria. And I remember having a—I won't bore everyone with the story…maybe I've told it even before—but I just thought Syria? I mean this is like, Asia's got huge world of its own. China, our defense treaty. But it was really, one forgets that international relations is not divided into sort of area studies. These things do have an effect across areas.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
I think that all US allies in, no matter what part of the world they're in, face a common set of challenges by being dependent as they are. So that's countries of NATO, Japan, South Korea, Israel. There's a lot of states that we've supported over the years, and they look anxiously at our domestic politics. Because there's a perpetual worry that our willingness to support them is weakening based on some real changes going on in American politics. So it's not surprising.
But the impact of the Ukraine invasion in Japan is really, really remarkable. I think that the problem was simply that many people just could not visually imagine an actual military operation. And then all of a sudden, you saw these tanks rolling across the border, and cities being bombed, and refugees streaming out of a European city.

And this light went on in people's heads that said, yeah, actually the world has not changed. It is possible to have a major conventional military conflict in our modern world, and we've got to adjust to that.
So yeah. I think that it's also testimony to the power of modern communications. Because this has probably been the single most covered war in terms of just your ability to see what's going on in a very minute detail. Virtually every Russian tank that's been destroyed, you've seen pictures of on the internet. And so I do think that's had a big effect on many people.

BILL KRISTOL:
Yes. Say a worded about that. But you've also been written about and studied, I know at Stanford all the pluses and minuses of social media and all this. And this does seem to be an interesting, I don't know, case study. I'm not sure which way it cuts, but I'm struck by that myself.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Yeah. Well, I think it cuts in both directions. One of the things that was a big surprise was how much more effective the Ukrainians were at controlling that social media space after the invasion. Whereas, the Russians seem to be caught completely flatfooted.
They're continuing to make these ridiculous assertions about de-Nazification and this sort of thing. And the Ukrainians were actually building a huge amount of sympathy for themselves.
But I do think that one of the big problems that we have is that on the MAGA right, they basically are very open to anything that the Russians put out. And so anything disparaging of Ukraine, I mean the existence of Nazis, these various slanders that the Russians have put forward are repeated by Tucker Carlson and other people on the right.
And because they live in a completely parallel information universe, they believe that they're basing their views on empirical information. And so in that respect, we're still living in a very divided and polarized world, where the polarization has to be traced really back to the basic information universes that we live in.

BILL KRISTOL:
Yeah. And I guess, people had thought Russia had invested a lot in this kind of thing, and people were worried about their ability to shut down the internet and so forth. Seems like they've underperformed there. I don't know. Or maybe the Ukrainians are much more effective in defending against them very early on. I don't know.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
All of that stuff I think will be the subject of a lot of studies going forward. It turns out, much as Elon Musk has been, I don't know, a real troublemaker in recent months. His Starlink system has really been a godsend for Ukraine because it kept their internet working under all of these stressful conditions. And so there's a lot of dimensions to this that I think don't fully understand right now.

BILL KRISTOL:
That's for sure. Talk a little bit more about the different generations in Europe and Japan, but also sort of the relative strength, if I can put it this way, of the resurgence of sense of commitment to liberal democracy and that we need to band together to support liberal democracies and shape the future that way versus the kind of, I don't know what

you call it, either pessimism or fatalism before what has been for 15 years or so, something of an advance for autocracy?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Well, I think that there's a lot of different views expressed in Europe. There's still an undercurrent of anti-Americanism. These are the people that say the United States goaded Ukraine into this war in order to be able to sell LNG to Europe and keep us under American domination. And I think that there's a certain number that say, "Well, this simply isn't our business, or it's not worth the degree of commitment." But I do think that the populists have really taken a hit as a result of the war. Salvini had a Putin t-shirt and was very openly courting Russian influence. Marine Le Pen similarly had taken money, loans from Russia, and all of those people have had to backtrack very substantially. Giorgia Meloni, this new prime minister of Italy is a big fan of Mussolini, but she's been actually very good on Ukraine.
She's been very supportive and has kept up the Italian commitment. And so I think that although it's still the populists that are the kind of reservoir of support for Russian positions like the MAGA Republicans here, they've really been put on a back foot simply by the kind of daily bombardment of photographs of apartment buildings in Dnipro that have been hit by Russian rockets and this sort of thing.

BILL KRISTOL:
And it does feel, want to talk especially to younger people, but that includes, at this point, several leaders of European nations are in their late thirties, certainly in their forties as some of the more impressive leaders, I think.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Well, and they're also women.

BILL KRISTOL:
Yeah. I mean, it seems that...

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Sweden and Finland and Estonia.

BILL KRISTOL:
That does make one feel that maybe it's more... That's like I guess a big question, right? Is it a short term rallying to Ukraine because of Putin's barbarism and Ukraine's courage and sympathy for them? How much is... Or is it a lasting, is it a *Zeitenwende*? Is it a turning point or whatever the right way to translate that is, a new era, change of eras, and what would tip you off? And I guess what are you... I guess the most important thing is the resolution of the war itself, but what other things that, let's talk about that a bit. But then also what would you be looking for in the next year or two, and what could we be doing to encourage it being a bigger change than just a temporary averting of a horrible outcome?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Well, obviously the Ukrainians have to make further military gains against Russia. They've got to at least expel them from Southern Ukraine and get to the point where they can actually have a real negotiation. Whether that involves expelling them from all of the territories occupied after 2014, I don't know. They may not be able to do that, but they've got to be able to demonstrate that kind of success. If nine months from now they're still stuck in the lines where they are now, then I think you're going to see a bad

outcome because every time the Ukrainians slow down, all of these voices arise, including in this country saying, “There’s no way that they can win. We’re in a long war of attrition, therefore there’s got to be peace.” And that leads to pressure on Ukraine to basically give up territory in return for a ceasefire.
So a lot of the future is really dependent on the battlefield. Generally speaking, people don’t like to think of chief independent variable as being military outcomes, but in fact, in this case, I think it really is. And so we’ll just have to see what the outcome of the war is. If it goes well for Ukraine and Russia’s further humiliated, there will be, I think, big downstream effects because I do think that things do work in these generational cycles. And so we’ve had several different generations, the one that lived through the Depression, then the one that lived through the Reagan era, then the end of the Cold War that brought about very lasting understandings of how the world worked. And I think this one, if it does lead in fact to something that looks like a Western victory, then I do think that it’s not going to be just a temporary change, but we’ll have this important kind of shift in global attitudes.
There are many other complications though, because the other big player waiting in the wings is China. And in a way, if there’s actually a war in the far East, it would actually make Ukraine look pretty minor in comparison to, first of all, the amount of damage and risk that would produce, and the outcome is also very uncertain. It’s not clear whether we would be willing to stop a Chinese attempt to conquer Taiwan. And if they did that, regardless of what happens in Ukraine, I think that’s going to be a huge demonstration of authoritarian power. And if we can’t do anything to stop it or deter it, it’s going to be a big demonstration of Western weakness. So, you’d really have to answer what’s going to happen in that broader situation before you can really answer the question of how lasting a change this is going to produce.

BILL KRISTOL:
That’s interesting. That’s a good reminder. It’s not all Ukraine. You’ve studied China quite a lot and just back to Japan. So say a word about what lessons do you think they’re learning or not learning or could learn from this, and where are they in this?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
I think the idea that somehow they’ve learned to be cautious because of what happened to Russia and Ukraine is not right. That they’ve believed that they’re much more competent than the Russians, that they’ve done much more to train their forces, to equip them properly and the like. And I think that their decision to attack Taiwan will be quite independent of anything that happens on the Ukrainian front. But there’s a bigger thing that’s going on in China, which I don’t think people have fully recognized, which is their economic model is coming apart. Some of our Chinese economist friends in my institute actually believe that their growth has been negative over the last couple of quarters, which is really something because they haven’t had a recession since 1978 when they began their reform. There are huge vulnerabilities in this buildup of debt on the part of provincial governments in China.
And as one of my colleagues told me recently, the consequence of that is not going to be a Lehman Brothers type collapse of the economy, it’s just going to lead to something that looks like Japan, where for the next 20 years, instead of having even six, 7% annual growth, they’re going to have 1% or 0%. And under those circumstances, their whole model is going to look different. So what that means for geopolitics is very uncertain because there’s this Hal Brands kind of argument that actually countries become more dangerous when they’re on the downside. So if we’ve hit peak China and they’re now declining, maybe starting something in foreign policy will be a way of distracting attention from that decline.

On the other hand, it may just be decline, and they're going to realize that they've got a declining population, that they haven't taken care of their old people, and they need to focus on that rather than striking out on new foreign ventures. But we're definitely in a new era in the far East that is going to be also, I think, very, very important and in many ways more important even than Ukraine and Russia.

BILL KRISTOL:
And that's mostly driven by internal Chinese dynamics, not by us?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Yes, yes. I mean, we can affect things. That's really why we went on this trip, is to judge Japanese willingness to stand up to China in a scenario where China was not attacking them directly, it was attacking Taiwan. And whether they would regard that as a sufficient threat to their existence, that they would be willing to give aid to the United States in trying to help protect Taiwan. And that's very uncertain. It's just like in Germany, there's a lot of resistance to actually the idea of Japanese military forces taking part in offensive operations, sinking Chinese ships and that sort of thing. There may be a little bit more support for assisting the United States.
So we got this very important air base on Okinawa, Kadena, where the US Air Force operates out of. We got Marines on Okinawa, and these would be forces that would be very important in a Taiwan contingency. And Japan has to make a decision whether to allow us to use those bases to help Taiwan. And that's something that they have not figured out yet. That's a big internal debate like the German debate over the leopards, that they're only beginning to have at the present moment.

BILL KRISTOL:
I was going to ask about that. I'm struck, when I was in government ages ago, visited Okinawa and it was all fine. We were strongly in favor of the US-Japan Alliance and all that, but it was... Everyone took it to be symbolic in a sense, that it was very reassuring to them. It also kept them pacifist, which was probably a good thing for the rest of Asia and certainly other countries, including other allied countries like South Korea. We're happy about that. So it was sort like the US troops in Germany after '89, which we left there. It was not to stop anyone from evading, but kind of a reassurance of US resolve. But it feels to me that people are a little more, considerably more serious about the fact that troops are there also because they might have to fight, and our troops...
You feel like it's different now than it was?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Much different. I've been going out to USINDOPACOM in Honolulu. We've made several visits there over the last decade. And I would say the last time I was there was maybe the year before COVID, and they were starting to think seriously about a Taiwan contingency or a South China Sea contingency. That's completely changed now. They're deadly serious about that, and they're trying to work through different kinds of military scenarios. The Japanese are in the process of rethinking their whole strategy in very concrete terms. What kind of troops would you need to defend the Senkakus if you needed to range further out there? They're talking about acquiring counterstrike capabilities, which presumably would allow them to target targets in China itself. So that's a really big shift in mentality. And what I fear is that people here are not sufficiently aware that you could actually have a big war in Asia, and that that could actually happen fairly quickly and that we're really, really not prepared for it.

BILL KRISTOL:

Well, let's talk about that, and it's maybe a good thing to close on you. What about the *Zeitenwende* here in the US? I personally think the Biden Administration has done pretty well, better than I expected with Ukraine, but I don't know, is there a fundamental shift of understanding with respect to Russia and respect to... But then as you say to with China as well and sort of US leadership has become so evident how important it is from this crisis, and how much have we internalized this? What's your sense of our situation?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Well, Bill, you're in a better position to answer that question than I am since you follow American politics much more closely. I would think that we have had a *Zeitenwende* overall, but it's very troublesome that the MAGA wing of the Republican Party with every subsequent aid vote has gotten more vocal about opposing it. And the arguments are now in place on the part of people like Tucker Carlson, about why Zelensky is corrupt and we're on the wrong side. And it does seem to me that, at least in that part of the population, there's a growing active opposition. Now, given the very narrow Republican majority in the House, it does seem to me that their ability to actually affect, but this is something you should tell me. They can't just... I mean, that majority cannot just vote to cut aid to Ukraine, right? They would have to attach it as a rider to some other bill, like the debt ceiling, and as a condition for voting to raise the debt ceiling, something like that. And it just seems to me that that's a political loser.

BILL KRISTOL:
Yeah. And I don't think they could hold all the Republicans for that. So I feel okay about the next two years in the narrow sense that if the Biden administration wants to do A, B or C, I think they'll be able to do A, B or C basically, and it could be a little bit of more fighting than it was in the first year of the war, but that I think is not so concerning. I mean, what chunk of the Republican Party reverts to some form of Reaganism, what chunk goes to Trumpism is... I mean, it makes a big difference I think in American politics. If that's 70/30 one way or 70/30 the other way. It's not going to be 100/0. I mean, Trumpism isn't going away.
I don't think the Reagan... The Reagan strand is still somewhat alive and well among some people though, so, but it makes a big difference which has the majority, the '24 presidential campaign for Republicans would be important in that respect, and which way people who've been pretty quiet like DeSantis on foreign policy who want to sort of be the Trump heir but don't maybe quite want to be fully Tucker Carson-esque on things like Ukraine where they end up. So I think that's one big variable.
And then the other end you should talk about too, the Biden administration, which is actually in power, the Democratic Party. I personally am sort of encouraged that we have more Hubert Humphrey and Scoop Jackson type Democrats than I would've predicted a few years ago and the really dovish wing of the Democratic Party seems to have, at least for now, receded, but again, how deep that is, I'm not sure.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Yeah. Well, it was interesting that letter that Pramila Japayal put forth over the summer got pulled back very, very quickly because they saw which way the wind was blowing. So that's a hopeful sign. But on the left, you still have the Jeffrey Sachses and John Mearsheimers and so forth that are... I mean, it really does follow this cycle that every time the Ukrainians look like they're slowing down and they're kind of stuck militarily, those voices get louder and say, "Well, they're never going to win and therefore we have to have a settlement and we're just killing a lot of Ukrainians for our own purposes." And I think that we probably should not underestimate the degree to which

that kind of argument can come back on the left-wing of the Democratic Party in that kind of scenario.

BILL KRISTOL:
No. That's very important. And I was struck in Germany, again, just two days of meetings, but how much a couple of [inaudible] Germans who were a little more skeptical about going all in for Ukraine said, "Well, can you assure us that you'll stay all in?" And I said, "Well, I think the Biden administration's pretty committed. I myself would wish they'd been a little quicker and a little bigger on a couple of areas, but I think there's no... And there's pretty good support, has been in Congress." And one of them said, "Well, what if Trump wins in 2024?" And I said, "Well, that's a fair point." I mean, I guess this is the way it always is though. It's not as if there weren't opponents in 1947, '48, '49 to Truman. I mean, it's always a little dicier in real-time that it seems in history where, well, of course we just decided to fight 40 years to fight a Cold War. I don't know. Is that really as inevitable as it seemed? But there's a little bit of a catch-22 problem. If we look uncertain, it certainly weakens those in Europe who want to look certain, and I assume the same would be true of Japan and then vice versa, and so, yeah, I don't…

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Yeah. Well, I don't know. At this point, a Trump comeback just seems to me pretty unlikely. I mean, the guy has really gone crazy sitting there in Mar-a-Lago, and it's very hard to see that a lot of people are going to see him as any kind of... What was attractive in 2016 was he was new, he was offering something different. And I think people at this point kind of figured out what he represents and it's not something that's going to attract a lot of new support.

BILL KRISTOL:
Yeah. And then a foreign policy, a bunch of governors, what they say, and people who haven't had to speak up too much elsewhere, what they say about foreign policy will be very, I think, important for the future of the Republican Party. Since you mentioned Trump and you've written a lot about this, what about, I mean, the overall health of liberal democracy in your judgment? I mean, are you a little heartened, more heartened than you were a year or two ago?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
No. I'm very heartened. The most discouraging thing about the last few years is just the number of Americans that could vote for Trump and buy into that whole Trump narrative. I had always sort of thought that the American people could make a mistake, but then they correct it once they saw the mistake. And the correction has taken much longer than I thought, but I do think it is ultimately being corrected. And I thought the results of the November 8th election were very, very heartening. This very specific threat that many of us were worried about, that the Republicans would place these election deniers in these key roles where they could then manipulate the '24 election, that just didn't materialize. And I think voters, Republican voters, were onto this danger and they beat it back.
So in that respect, I was quite encouraged. And then I just think that the antics now of the House Republicans, I just think they're going to make themselves look kind of ridiculous. Maybe this is wish casting, but I just don't believe that Hunter Biden's laptop is going to be of such consuming interest to American voters going forward. So, in that sense, I guess I'm more optimistic than I was before November.

BILL KRISTOL:
And obviously, a lot would depend on, yeah, how healthy, so to speak, the Democratic Party looks and whether they can do a generational transfer or persuade the country we don't quite need one yet, and Biden can have another four years, whatever. It is an awful lot of variables at once. I mean, don't you feel this, that in 2023, between the world out there and an actual war, largest ground war obviously in Europe since '45, going on with an indeterminate result and American politics being more indeterminate than probably it's been in quite a while and *Zeitenwende* happening or not happening in Germany and elsewhere in Europe and as you say, who knows what happens in China itself and then of course in the neighborhood, in Japan. I mean, it does feel like an unusual moment in our... Maybe the most unusual since the most... I don't know. The widest range of possible outcomes maybe since '89. Is that right?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Yeah. No. It's great for pundits.

BILL KRISTOL:
Yeah. Or bad if you get it all right. A much, much greater chance of getting it wrong, but the fact that you got the Ukraine-Russia situation basically right is heartening, not just because it's nice that you got it right, but also because the reason you got it right I think so far seems to have been a certain confidence that liberal democracies would do better and as you said, the strong states, autocracies, in this case had disadvantages that people weren't fully aware of or cognizant of. I mean, that I think is heartening.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
I do think that the democratic pessimism, small D democratic pessimism, that a lot of people have felt over the last few years has been a little bit overdone. My colleague, Larry Diamond, has been writing about the democratic recession and he... You can be very selective. I mean, there's still bad things going on all over the world, but putting that in a broader historical perspective, I think there are also reasons for seeing the resilience of democracy. I mean, democracy in Europe I think is largely pretty solid at the moment and solid in Japan. South Korea's got its problems, but it's doing okay, I think. This new crop of left-wing presidents in Latin America are by and large so incompetent that... I'm going to go to Colombia next week, haven't been there in probably a decade or so, but this new left-wing president they have I don't think is going to be able to accomplish any of his agenda, because these countries are still democracies and you can't just order a complete reversal of policy because you narrowly won an election.
So I just think that in many places the world is actually more stable and doing better than a lot of us have thought.

BILL KRISTOL:
That's good, but 2023 is a big year. And you think particularly on.... to revert, get back one last time to the actual situation in Ukraine. Very different world moving forward if Ukraine is decisively winning, if not quite won, by late '23 as opposed to a frozen conflict and a sort of stalemate.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
I think the Ukrainians have to make a breakthrough in the south by the summer. And if they don't manage to do that and if we don't give them adequate support to do that, then I think all bets are off and then you could be facing another frozen conflict and a

lot of that Western support is going to disappear. So it's really, really important what happens on the battlefield in the next, I would say, six months.

BILL KRISTOL:
And important for us and Germany and others to... We can affect that outcome, right?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Yeah. Oh, it's crazy. It's so frustrating. These ATACMS that we've been refusing to give them would be so useful. They could target all of these Russian bases in Crimea, in southern Ukraine. Why we have not done this is just beyond me.

BILL KRISTOL:
Well, maybe the Biden administration will... For some people, they will be watching this and maybe this will spur them to action. And maybe the Germans, sounds like they're kind of going to get there in a week or two. And grudgingly, and you pay some price for the grudgingness, but I suppose ultimately all these turning points are a little less smooth than one thinks they're going to be or hopes they would be, right?

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Right.

BILL KRISTOL:
But '23, I mean, so we should really... Let's get back together on this in late '23 and really see... Let's hope we have a happy story to tell, but it seems like this is a big year. I guess 2022 Zelensky said was the year of Ukraine. Maybe it was... I think it was he who said it, but in a certain way, '23... I mean, it's fantastic what they did in '22 and it laid the groundwork for 2023 obviously, but 2023 really could be a year of Ukraine and beyond.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Yeah. Well, let's hope.

BILL KRISTOL:
Let's hope and let's work for it and let's get together in six or nine months and discuss it again.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
Okay.

BILL KRISTOL:
Frank Fukuyama, thank you very much for joining me here on *Conversations*.

FRANK FUKUYAMA:
All right. Thanks very much, Bill.

BILL KRISTOL:
And thank you all for joining us.