

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

BILL KRISTOL:

Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome back to *Conversations*. I'm very pleased and really honored to be joined today by Tom Tugendhat, a member of Parliament in the United Kingdom, from the wonderfully named constituency of Tonbridge and Malling. Did I pronounce that correctly? I doubt it.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Tonbridge, Tonbridge—

BILL KRISTOL:

Tonbridge, what was I thinking? Tonbridge. It looks like Tonbridge, so I figured it couldn't be pronounced Tonbridge. Anyway, it's Kent, I believe. And Tom has been in the Parliament, been a Conservative member since 2015, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, which you've used as a real, not just a bully pulpit, but really a place to help shape policy, I think. And before that very involved in foreign affairs, foreign policy debates. That's how we met. You served in the British Army in Iraq and Afghanistan, and really gave a wonderful speech people should go back and look at, almost a year ago. I was thinking about this, we're two weeks on from a year on our pullout from Afghanistan, and a very moving speech, really on the floor of the House. Anyway, Tom, thanks so much for joining me today.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Bill, it's good to be with you again.

BILL KRISTOL:

I should also have mentioned Tom was a candidate for Tory Party leadership, which would in turn make one prime minister and did better than everyone expected, but was eliminated in one of those rounds. It's such a complicated system, I'm not even sure how that works. But it seems to me you made it a round or two longer than everyone expected.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

I made it several rounds longer than anybody expected, [inaudible].

BILL KRISTOL:

Okay, well even... That's good. So we want to talk about Ukraine, which you've been following very closely and had been an outspoken advocate of a strong Western stance on. And I think were, earlier on, also worrying about Putin and calling attention to the dangers. But I think you were just there a week ago, so we're speaking just on August 31st, so just to locate people when they see this in the future, but you were just there on Ukraine's independence day in Kyiv, if I'm not mistaken?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Well, yeah. And I went to Ukraine for their Independence Day, actually. And one of the reasons I went is because some people, I think you are one of those nations, seem to value your independence day very highly. You got your independence off some very, very fine

people, but the Ukrainians got their independence off a totalitarian dictatorship and have quite rightly valued it very highly. This was their 31st anniversary, and it's an anniversary that's marked with quite a lot of darkness as well, of course, because it's the six month anniversary of the latest round of invasions. I say the latest because of course Russia has been intervening in Ukraine ever since their independence 31 years ago. And of course, most famously in 2014 actually invaded Crimea and the Donbas, and so has been there.

But most famously, this year, on the 24th of February, so six months before the Independence Day, Russian troops tried to encircle and capture Kyiv, and thank God, failed, not just down to their own incompetence, although that was an important element, but down to the extraordinary courage of the Ukrainian people and some fantastic leadership by President Volodymyr Zelensky. So it was a hell of a thing to be there for their independence day this year, as you can imagine. And it was very moving to be with some very, very brave people.

BILL KRISTOL:

And what struck you about their mood, their sense of what they've done and their prospects? And also say a word, I want to look present forward mostly, but I think people forget how close run a thing it was shortly after February 24th, or maybe not. But I feel that everyone has of settled into a kind of, "Well, of course they beat back to the Russians and now it's a kind of tough slog," but that was not an "of course" was it?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

No, not at all. And I have to say, I mean, I don't think I'm alone, in fact, I know I'm not alone, because I spoke to a lot of my military friends who are still serving, and we firmly expected the Russians to win in a matter of weeks. I know the American military did as well. So this was a pretty universal view. In fact, so much so that you may remember President Biden offered a helicopter to go and get President Zelensky out. And he very famously responded, "I don't need a lift, I need ammunition." And thank God he did because his courage solidified the defense of Kyiv. And in solidifying the defense of Kyiv, he solidified the defense of the whole country. And he's been quite literally, personally, quite literally on the front line of freedom ever since. And so it's been quite remarkable.

So I don't think it was a foregone conclusion at all. There are various reasons I'm sure would come to them as to why the Russians failed, partly their own fault, partly the courage to the Ukrainians and partly, thank God, people like Ben Wallace who's our defense secretary who got weapons into Ukraine when a lot of people were either saying, "There's no point they'll be defeated so quickly they won't count." Or, "It can all wait, don't get involved." And that's just people in our own system, let alone in other countries.

And so it's been really quite something. And I think being with them this year, being in Ukraine this year, being in Kyiv this year was really quite moving as well, because of course it's been a long time since your independence day was marked by anything other than fireworks and celebrations. Well, this year in Kyiv, the gun powder was real. I found myself waking up on independence morning with the air raid sirens going off in Kyiv at five o'clock in the morning and going downstairs into the bomb shelter and then feeling the earth shake. So it's not like the 4th of July, I can tell you that much.

BILL KRISTOL:

And the mood of their government and military and citizens?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

I mean the resolve is complete. I mean, there's the old expression, armies don't go to war, nations do. Armies just fight battles. Well, the whole of Ukraine is at war, in the sense that if you go anywhere you'll see unbelievable resolve from people. Grandparents and

grandchildren are stitching camouflage netting together. Young people are either actually on the front line fighting or they are mobilizing for it. Members of parliament are fighting two days a week, sitting in parliament five days a week, organizing soup kitchens, organizing any number of different logistical elements to make sure the war effort continues. Individuals are going around Europe quite literally at their own expense and voluntarily, but under instruction from the government to drum up support and look for help in various different ways. I mean, to say it's a whole nation effort is to understate it. It's a whole nation plus a lot of committed allies effort and it's really inspiring to watch.

BILL KRISTOL:

So how's it going? How do we stand, do you think? We're just about six, well, it's almost exactly six months. We were on a conversation together about two and a half months ago, and you were worried about the summer, obviously that Ukraine didn't make real progress and if we didn't do more to help them, they could be in not so great shape now. And then really looking at a winter where things, and we'll talk about this, can get tougher, both in terms of their own situation and their allies. But are you a little heartened? Are you worried, concerned? What heartens you? What concerns you, et cetera?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Well, I mean on one level I'm heartened, there's been huge numbers of weapons deliveries to Ukraine. The Ukrainian Armed Forces themselves have expanded from, well, depending on how you count, some two, 300,000 people at arms to what's now, I mean, depending on who you ask, anywhere between 700,000 and a few million in various different ways. I mean, these numbers, for very obvious reasons of national security, the Ukrainians aren't advertising the figures, and of course it depends whether you count things like border forces and reserve battalions and how you count them and so on. But basically the Ukrainians have mobilized their entire nation very effectively. The weapon supplies are coming through from many allies, not all. There's a few notable exceptions that are pretty famous. And the Ukrainians are in a better position than they were when we spoke, whenever it was, eight, 10 weeks ago.

The reality is they've just launched their counter offensive in Kherson, an area in the Southeast of the country. I tell you my thoughts and prayers are with their soldiers. I hope very much that they achieve the ends that they need. But the reality is this is a hard slog, and... Although I think there's no great doubt the Russians have lost. And what we're now seeing is the pain of defeat for the Russian Armed Forces inside Ukraine. Sadly, that pain is shared and too many Ukrainians are being killed in the process as well. I have no doubt that the end result is clear. The courage and commitment of the Ukrainian people means that Ukraine will not and cannot be a Russian satellite or a Russian colony again. And now what we need to do is to make sure that the trauma of occupation is ended as soon as possible.

BILL KRISTOL:

And this counter offensive, it seems kind of impressive, both in its conception and, well, certainly it's a couple of days in, its execution, but it's unlikely you think it will result in a route of the Russians where somehow the situation is solved in six weeks.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

I mean, I'm not close enough to the frontline and close enough to the military elements to comment on it, I'm afraid. And you'll forgive me as a former professional soldier, I know how easy it is to get false impressions from TV reports or from reported gossip. So I'm not going to comment on that, because I just don't know. All I can say is it's clearly well prepared. I can say that because it's got many fronts and they seem to be coordinating effectively at this point. But again, as I say, I'm not there, so I don't know. But look, let's hope, right? I mean, the faster

this war is over, not only the more Ukrainian lives are saved, but actually the more Russian lives too. So both sides should want this war over as quickly as possible. And now that the Ukrainians have demonstrated that the war will not be over by them surrendering, they've made that extremely clear, there is only one other alternative.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, victory, right? So what about us, what about you and the UK and the US and the West in general, are we doing all that we could and should doing, most of what we could and should be doing, both militarily? And then we can get to some of the economic questions as well.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Well, I mean, look, we're doing a lot more than we were doing a few years ago. I mean, you touched on the fact, Bill, that I'd spoken about Putin before. I mean, I took over the chairmanship, I was elected to chair the Foreign Affairs Committee in 2017. And one of the first reports that we started work on, we published the report in May, 2018, I think it was, it was called Moscow's Gold, in which we exposed the threat of Russian corruption in the city of London. Now we're talking about the city of London, actually, you could talk about many other jurisdictions, sadly, including your own where dirty Russian money flows through financial institutions.

And it's not a threat in the sense that it's a huge amount of money that could bring down the US or UK economy. That's not the threat, the threat is that it spreads poison throughout it and it corrupts all that it touches. It corrupts business people, it corrupts banks, it corrupts politicians who get involved with it. It corrupts just all of it. And the reality is we know that Putin has been doing this for 15 years, but sadly, when I started calling it out five, six years ago, what was it, yeah, about five years ago, many people around the world thought this was some sort of anti-Russian paranoia. And that this was, frankly, it's minor, it's nothing and Putin's not that bad really.

And I kept pointing out, this is a guy who in 2007 launched a massive cyber attack on Estonia, in 2008 invaded and still occupies Georgia, and at various points in recent years has shot down a civilian aircraft killing nearly 300 people over Ukraine. I mean, this is a guy who is quite literally a mass murderer. He has actually murdered many, many people around the world. He's assassinated several people in the UK, including using a chemical weapon on the streets of Salisbury, a chemical weapon which his henchmen was so cavalier about, they had it in a perfume bottle, had that liquid got into the drains and got into the water supply he could have killed quite literally thousands of people. And he clearly had absolutely no care about it at all. And we know that he's triggered explosions in ammunition depots in Prague. We know that he's tried to assassinate the Deputy Prime Minister of Montenegro, amongst other people. This is a guy who has behaved like a mafia don on a global scale.

It's quite extraordinary how violent he's been and yet how ignored he's been as well by so many. It's been seen as a distraction or as noise. It's not, it's a genuine threat by a person who has been at war with us for the best part of 15 years. And we've been treating it as though he's a mosquito buzzing around the room. He's not, he's actually trying to bring down our system, he's trying to undermine our democracy and he's trying to erode our freedom. And we've been ignoring it. Well, I've been calling it out for five years and it's only in the last six months that I finally got the level of support that I think has been necessary throughout. And so I'm very sorry it has required the invasion, of the attack on Kyiv to do it, but I'm very glad that we've finally woken up. So I think that this is a huge change.

BILL KRISTOL:

Well, let's talk about that for a minute and get back to Ukraine itself and the situation on the ground, but that's important. I mean, how much of a mugging by reality has there been? Or

are people understanding, though, coming grips with it? My father used the phrase, "Neoconservatives and liberals who are mugged by reality." And a friend of his said, "Well, there's an awful lot of liberals around who," this was 30, 40 years ago, "who sort of understand that they've been mugged by reality, but don't want to press charges." Which I thought was a nice way of capturing a certain kind of, "Well, yeah, Putin's worse than we thought. Who thought he would do this? I predicted he wouldn't, ugh. But on the other hand, we can't really go crazy and we have to work with him and energy and other things. And it's a big country, and China's more of a threat." And so where do you think we are on the sort of Putin question generally, as you would see in terms of what you would take to be a sound understanding of it, of him and of it?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Well, look, I mean your point about they choose not to press charges, of course it depends where you are. I mean, if you're in Estonia, your decision as to whether or not you wish to press charges is very different than if you're in Germany or France or Washington, right? I mean, each mile you get further from the Russian border, your confidence grows.

BILL KRISTOL:

Right.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

But the reality is, in recent years, it was about a decade ago, the Russians kidnapped an Estonian border guard whose offense was to be guarding the Estonian border and being on the Estonian side of it. But he was kidnapped and he's still held in a prison in Moscow. I mean, it's absolute, it's criminal kidnapping.

If you look at what's going on in Ukraine today, thousands of children, quite literally thousands of children are being taken from Ukraine to Russia and being adopted, given up for adoption, and their pasts being hidden and masked so that these young children will grow up not knowing where they're from or who they are.

I mean, these are acts of barbarity the like of which we haven't seen since the Second World War. I mean, it's absolutely horrific what we're seeing. So your perception on whether or not you're willing to respond to it I think depends very much on where you see it.

And for me, the various wake-up calls were seeing not just Russian corruption in London, but seeing the corruption spreading to some UK institutions, seeing some banks, some lawyers, some accountants, some estate agents tolerant of a corruption that frankly is incredibly, incredibly damaging to our democracy and to our freedoms.

And I'm afraid, it's not my business, but I could point to parts of the United States and say the same thing there. And it brings me no pleasure to say it. Quite the reverse, it brings me nothing but sadness because the reality is that crime festers in the dark. And at the moment, we're seeing too much darkness.

BILL KRISTOL:

And do you think that's now much more broadly perceived though in the UK and throughout the West? And are we willing to come to grips with the Russian threat, so to speak? I'm curious about what your perception is for France, Germany, some of the major... The Central and Eastern Europe seem, they see what they see pretty uniformly.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

They get it.

BILL KRISTOL:

They get it. I guess Hungary doesn't... Well, they get it, they're just sort of half on the other side maybe at this point, but—

TOM TUGENDHAT:

I think Hungary gets it. They're just choosing—

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. Fair enough. Yeah. But what about, because that would be, I mean, I want to come back to Ukraine itself because that's so important, but it's certainly been a major effect, don't you think? Of the invasion and of the re-invasion or secondary, well, not secondary, but second invasion of February 24th to really change, seems like at least, change perceptions throughout NATO, change the membership of NATO. I mean, how big is all that or is that a temporary thing and it kind of subsides and?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

I think no, I think it's more than temporary. I mean, look, the fact that Finland and Sweden have abandoned neutrality, Finland's neutrality has been a thing for about a century, a little over a century. Sweden's has been something for about 200 years, right? I mean, these are not sort of recent fads. These are very, very deep parts of the national identities of both countries.

And the fact that both countries have decided funny enough at the same time, the time has come to abandon that position, I think is a recognition that, look, you're under threat the like of which you haven't seen before. And there is a real danger to the Swedish people, to the Finnish people and to the whole of Europe, and a change in policy is required to face it.

And you also see, by the way, the same thing in responses by some of those who've been working with Russia. I mean, very famously, Gerhard Schroder was chancellor of Germany of course, and is now very, very close to Vladimir Putin. He's been working with [inaudible], he's been working with various other people.

And one other person who had looked like they were going to be joining the same sort of racket as him was the former French prime minister, François Fillon. And I named them both in parliament as people we should consider sanctioning on the grounds that they are enabling the erosion of freedom in Europe. And in fact, personally, I'd describe them both as traitors to themselves and to their countries. It was very interesting that very quickly François Fillon dropped his connection to the various Russian companies.

But I think we should be looking at our own people, not just at Russian corruption, as in oligarchs, but we should be looking to our own people too and seeing who's frankly betraying the United States, who's betraying the United Kingdom, who's betraying France, Germany, whoever else by enabling this erosion of democracies, this erosion of freedom and this violent war of aggression against the Ukrainian people.

BILL KRISTOL:

Of course, there's a middle ground between betrayal, which is awful and staunch willingness to stand up and take some pain, so to speak, economically and in other ways to help the Ukrainians fight back.

And where do you think the big countries in Europe, Germany is obviously crucial in this and has gotten the most attention, are on this? Are you reasonably confident about the next three, six months in terms of the NATO countries holding together in a reasonably strong posture?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Yeah, I am. Look, I mean, forgive me, but the UK has quite clearly been in the lead on this. And many people will know I've not always been-

BILL KRISTOL:

We expect no less, Tom.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Yeah, I know you do, but—

BILL KRISTOL:

...we Anglophiles, you know?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Well, look, I've not always been full of praise for Prime Minister Johnson, as you know, Bill.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yes.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

We've had our division. But on this one he's been absolutely right. I mean, he has been important in building up that resolution to face Putin and to support the Ukrainian people. And I think he's been absolutely right on this.

Ben Wallace, as I said, our defense secretary, was one of the first people to really see the danger and to respond to it. Our foreign secretary, who's very likely to be our next prime minister, Liz Truss, has been absolutely essential to building up the coalition of sanctioning entities and working with other countries, predominantly the European Union, but actually others as well around the world and making sure those sanctions work.

And so actually, the UK has led very effectively on this. And other countries that have been ignored or rather not been noticed as much have been very important as well. Countries like Australia have been really important in supplying weapons and support to Ukraine.

So there's been countries around. And of course, the US has supplied more money, more ammunition, more of everything than anyone else. And I hope that the United States will continue to not only do that, but to do more. So I don't think we should belittle any of those that have done so much.

Other countries haven't been noticed as much, but France has done an awful lot. France has supplied huge amounts of artillery and large amounts of advanced weaponry, which has been really important.

Other countries have been a little slower, and the obvious one in this is Germany. And there's various reasons for that, which are pretty obvious, but there's some changes there too. I mean, Scholz leads the SPD, as you know, as well as being the chancellor.

And he's managed to get German foreign policy changed pretty radically in recent months. His *Zeitenwende*, his sort of time of change as it were that he spoke about in February means that he's pledged 100 billion euro to German defense spending, which is, it's not nothing. That's a hell of an increase. And he's speaking about different ways of helping the Ukrainian people as well, so that's not nothing.

Although, I did read recently that a Polish minister was referring to the end of *Ostpolitik* and the beginning of "lost politik." And there is a tension now between some of those countries that border Russia or near border Russia, like Poland. I would say it borders Belarus

rather than Russia. But those bordering states, near bordering states, and those that are further away, and there's a certain resentment between them and the level of commitment that some are showing and others could.

BILL KRISTOL:

And they'll have to show commitment at home, right? It'll be cold in the winter and energy prices will go up a lot and they may be, I don't know, rationing and so forth with gas and they let themselves get dependent on Russia.

Unfortunately, we didn't do much to help them the other way, I will say, to be fair to them. Everyone beats up Germany, but it wasn't as if we were saying... We had our own issues and our own priorities and haven't helped as much as maybe in the last year I think we could have in terms of some crash efforts to help them find substitute sources of energy. But you think if we have this conversation in March and it's getting warmer again, we'll have come through the winter okay, the German government will have come through okay, the German public will have held, the winter stock will have held, so forth?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

I think so. Yes. I mean, Germany's been refilling its energy stocks, as you know. I think they're up, I'm going to get this wrong, but I think they're up to about 80% of gas storage for winter now. So they're getting ready, which is normally I think they'd be at about 40, 50% at this point in the year. So they're filling up very quickly. They're making sure they've got the supplies in. I mean, Russia is still playing.

But the gas supply, as you know, Nord Stream 1, that gas pipeline that connects Russia to Germany is apparently going through another few days of maintenance, which seems realistically to be an excuse for Russia to sort of play with the gas supply.

And yes, of course there's more that the United States can do, but let's not pretend the United States is doing nothing. The United States is doing a lot. I hope very much that you'll supply more gas, particularly in liquefied natural gas, which you have done in the past. You need a bit more capacity from your terminals, but I hope you'll be able to grow that.

And countries like Canada I hope will be a very, very important part of the energy mix in years going forward, because we've got to make sure that we work together. If you like, this is one of those moments where we've just realized that for 70, 80 years, we were going towards a sort of greater globalization.

But the reality is, the nation state is back. And the nation state is back in ways that I don't think we, or other, not everybody expected. And nation states need to recognize the reality that this has implications for all of us.

And part of those implications are even if you're the strongest nation state like the United States, it doesn't mean that you can stand on your own. It actually means that you have to help in ways that are perhaps not as traditional as they once were. Energy supplies are now relatively high in quite a few countries in Europe. Germany's now stocked up some 80-odd percent of their gas storage. I mean, that doesn't mean that prices are going to come down as dramatically as I think many would like, but it does at least mean that we're less likely to have complete cutoffs.

But Germany is also preparing, German ministers are also preparing the German people for supply shortages, for energy-saving measures and many other things. So I think it's right to say there's concern, but people are getting prepared.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, that's good news I think, and a little more optimistic. Maybe the people here there's a little bit of glass half empty, I'd say. Thinking among some of my friends here in DC, that every

time there's a little hiccup or some German politician says something that's not 100% robust, they go, "Oh my God, the Europeans are falling apart."

But I've got to say that they've done less falling apart and more hanging tough, and obviously pushed on by their neighbors, by the Eastern Europeans and Central Europeans and by you in the UK that they've hung tougher than I would've expected. So maybe there really is a pivot in Germany.

Again, there's a certain amount of skepticism here, I'd say, about the *Zeitenwende* and is it talk and is the money going to be real and so forth. But you seem to think it is pretty real, right?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Well, I mean the money's real, the words are real, supplies are real. Let's now see more of that going to Ukraine. I mean, the Ukrainians are, it was one of the things that really struck me was how mocking Ukrainian politicians and individuals were about German military support, which I can understand. But at the same time, let's not forget 15, 20 years ago, Germany would've offered no support to anyone at all.

So this is a change. Is it as much of a change as I'd like to see? No, but it's a movement. And I hope this means that Germany is being more realistic about the threats they face. It's interesting, actually, I mean, I'm purely, and forgive me this as a politician, on a purely political point, how the German Green party has been one of the leading advocates of this because of their commitment to human rights, and how a lot of the defense of Ukraine has come out of Germany's very, very long tradition now of very strong defensive human rights. And I think that's a very positive thing to see.

BILL KRISTOL:

Well, on that note, I was going to get to this at the end, but I'll raise it now since you broadened the discussion here in a very good way and a interesting way, I think.

Am I crazy to think that this could be a moment where a kind of Cold War, center-left, center-right coalition accepting our responsibilities for leadership on behalf of liberal democracy around the world and certainly against brutal aggression against liberal democracies, however much fostering it in other countries is slightly a different question, but am I crazy to think that this could be a moment that we'll look back on as a kind of 1948, '49, '50 type moment where the old coalition comes back together or a new coalition partly comes together to deal with the threats in a kind of clear-eyed way and principled way? I feel like this could be a pretty big moment 2022. Or is that fanciful?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

No, I think you're right. No, I think you're right. I think it is a big moment. Look, I mean think whatever element of support you think that we, you, anyone else should be giving to Ukraine, it's perfectly obvious that you can't ignore Putin anymore. You can't ignore Russia. You can't pretend that autocracies aren't really threatening violence against liberal democracies. You can't pretend that China's threats against Taiwan are just performative anymore. They look preparatory in the light of Ukraine. You can't... Do you know what I mean?

There's a whole number of issues that even six to 12 months ago, you could have said, "Well, a major state on state conflict is so unlikely. A real invasion? Sure. They may try to undermine, they may try to corrupt, they may try to infiltrate, but they wouldn't invade would they?" And a lot of people were saying that on the 23rd of February. In fact, some Ukrainians I was talking to were saying that on the 23rd of February. I don't think anybody's saying that now about any country.

The reality is that state on state warfare, I'm afraid, sadly is a reality again, and I think that's a big change because I think it's a huge wake up moment for even those who thought that we

should be doing deals with dictators in various different ways are now realizing that actually, that may be harder than they thought. It's been a while now that some of us have been calling out the fact that you can't feed the crocodile, the crocodile gets hungrier with the eating. And the reality is, that's what Putin has done over the last 20 years. That's what Xi would do. That's what plenty of other dictators around the world would do.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, the other crocodiles also see the success of one crocodile and that has its own implications. You mentioned the UK's leadership and Australia and others. One, I'm just curious as a somewhat more, not a technical question really, but I'm struck that on the one hand, this is a success story for NATO, I think you'd have to say, that's come together quite well and admitted to new members that will be excellent contributors, I think.

But it feels to me, and I talked to someone from one of the countries who said, this there's a huge amount of coordination going on, but a lot of it's going on in informal groupings or sub... All the 30 members of NATO. I mean, it's not as if Brussels is the center, I don't think, of... And that may be a good thing, incidentally, that it's sort of what happens when you're in a new historical moment. New things, new people get together, and maybe it's not formalized at first, and it could be formalized. Am I right about that though? Is it sort of...

TOM TUGENDHAT:

I go back to the joke in Moscow. At the moment, it's being told in Moscow where Putin goes and sees generals and says, "How's this war against NATO going?" And the general says, "Well, we've been at war for six months. We've lost 20,000 soldiers, a thousand artillery pieces, a hundred aircraft. We are being pushed back on various fronts and it's costing us hundreds of men a day." "And what about NATO?" "Oh well, NATO hasn't entered the war yet." And I think it's actually a huge success of NATO that what NATO is enabling is an enormous amount of bilateral cooperation, none of which is actually direct NATO versus Russia conflict, which means that at no stage can Russia claim that this is a NATO operation because it isn't. It's a Ukrainian operation enabled with bilateral support that happens to be supplied by NATO member states.

What NATO has done is it means that if you get a French artillery piece, you can fire German ammunition through it. If you get an American machine gun, you can put British ammunition into it. So, it's the interoperability that NATO has prepared, which means that the level of support we're giving is a multiplication of the efforts of individual nations. And I think NATO has done a really good job on that. And I have to say, contrary to some other multilateral organizations, NATO's caution in putting itself front and center, but instead enabling others, I think has demonstrated an extreme adeptness of touch by Jens Stoltenberg, and I think has been really very impressive.

BILL KRISTOL:

And that's sustainable. There's no reason NATO qua NATO has to be on the front line?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Well, NATO is enabling organization to prepare others to enable us to operate as allies across different areas. I mean, the only specifically NATO element is the NATO Article five that was only ever once invoked, and that was after 9/11. Other than that, NATO can coordinate intelligence sharing, but actually, quite a lot of that we're doing directly. It can enable cooperation in different ways. It means that, of course, we don't need a special agreement or you don't need a special agreement to fly weapons and ammunition over French and German and British airspace, or Dutch or Danish airspace to get it into Poland.

You just do it. You're a NATO ally. You can do it. No problem about it at all. And the Ukrainians and the Poles can sort out the delivery from there. So, NATO is enabling a lot of things. The fact that it hasn't put a stamp on it and claimed it, I think, demonstrates frankly a rather mature attitude to the alliance rather than need to posture forward, and demonstrates the strength and the capability of the alliance too.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah and the government official I was talking to from a central European country said there's a ton of multilateral, it's neither bilateral nor NATO, but multilateral cooperations of like-minded or like-positioned or neighboring nations in terms of coordinating arms deliveries, whether that you guys take the lead on this, so we'll take the lead on that. The kind of healthy coordination and multiplication of efforts that's neither, let's have another meeting at the NATO headquarters with 30 people sitting around a table on the one hand, or entirely just bilateral Ukraine to Poland, Ukraine to Czech, Ukraine to [inaudible]. So that's impressive if that's the case, right? For all the talk of, "Oh, Europe's terrible, and NATO's terrible. It's all falling apart" and all, it seems like it's pretty robust here, and pretty intelligently robust, if you know what I mean?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Yeah. Look, I think this is a mature way of dealing with an alliance. Some alliances feel that unless you put the brand of the organization on everything, you are not doing anything. Well, I think in a mature relationship, you don't need to own it. What's the old... Was it Harry Truman? I can't remember. One of your presidents who said it's amazing what you can get done if you don't care who takes credit, and I think that's one of those great lines.

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah. Don't you think also that the example of countries working together under this broad rubric might be applicable to many other situations and also elsewhere in the world? I mean, 20 years ago—maybe you were involved in some of these conversations—there was talk, "How can we really confront China without an Asian NATO?" But maybe we don't need an Asian NATO. What we do need is a lot of cooperation between key nations, which can be done under different rubrics and different coalitions of the willing, I guess.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

I think that's right. I wouldn't undermine or belittle what NATO's doing either. I mean, NATO has created the norm and established the diplomatic agreements, which mean that all these things are interoperable. And that's not nothing. That's—

BILL KRISTOL:

Yeah, that's important, right?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

That's really important. That's been going on for over 60, 70 years, so that is important. Do you need to do those? Could you do those in different ways? Sure. Yeah, you can, but it is important. I think what's interesting is, as I say, it's this change from the very obvious multilateralism of the 1950s and '60s and '70s to a return to a form of nationalism. And I don't want to overstate that, but to have a form of identity with the nation state, that means that international organizations, the good ones, are more enablers and the bad ones are the ones that seem to be trying to replace nation states. And bad, I'm not trying to make a moral term, I'm trying to make... The ones that are more successful are the ones that are enabling, and the

ones that are less successful, the ones that are challenging the nation states, or the nation states feel are challenging them.

So, it's interesting how NATO has maintained its legitimacy by being an enabler, not an actor. And I think that's a very powerful thing to do, and one of the things that we are going to have to think about over the next, take your pick, five, 10, 20 years, is seeing how we think about that again. Because it's worth remembering that these organizations, when we first created them, when the WTO or the IMF or whatever it was were created in those postwar days, they were created in many ways as partnership organizations, as enabling organizations. Democracies, free countries, and rule of law states to work together. And they were set up quite deliberately as responses to the communist block in its various different guises as the common internal Soviet block or whatever it happens to be in whichever guise it was.

And they were created not to replace the nation states. They were created to enable countries that had very often only recently rediscovered their liberty. Countries like France initially didn't join the World Trade Organization in order to be subsumed into a greater hole. They'd just literally fought for their independence against an occupying empire. And I think finding ways in which nation states can work together and have enabling organizations is going to be the real challenge of the next 20, 30 years of our diplomacy. And how the United States, how the UK, how Canada, but also how countries like Nigeria and Indonesia sit within that is going to be hugely defining.

Because at the moment, the challenge is, we're either seeing the sort of Putin-style imperial colonialist project, which is what he's trying to do in Ukraine and Georgia, and to a certain extent, in the Baltic states, or we're seeing a form of debt trap diplomacy from China. We've got to respond, and we've got to respond in a different way. And I think the way we respond best is by recognizing, as we do in Ukraine, that actually sovereign people want sovereignty. They want freedom. They want exactly the same things you guys fought for on a couple of occasions against us, and that we fought for in order to protect our own freedoms in the last century. This is not unusual, and other countries around the world want it too, quite rightly.

BILL KRISTOL:

You know, I think... We look back and we think that NATO was more homogeneous, and that those kinds of international organizations wish to be more homogeneous than they did. I mean, some people wanted them to be more, but of course, NATO... We thought we were the only nuclear power. The whole point of NATO was, "Don't worry, Britain and France. You don't need nuclear weapons." "Well, thank you," but Britain and France decided, "You know what? I think we just prefer to have our..." France, of course, just went off. Yeah, it will take. France, in the sixties, then of course famously with de Gaulle, but also many others. Germany had a very different situation because of the war, because of its history, in terms of its military commitments to NATO, West Germany, at the time. Then France, and then Britain. And so, I think this kind of intelligent, I don't know what you'd call it exactly, nation state specific multilateralism has always been there among the better thinkers in the West and better practitioners really. And you're right, it's a good way of formulating it that gets us out of the trap of either everything has to be UN-like. I don't know what everyone agreed on. I mean, it's fine if 180 nations do want to agree on some things, and some things you should have. The World Health Organization would be so much better if you could have common... And all kinds of things like that. But in other cases, the more these regional and ad hoc approaches seem, especially in national security, I would say, right to be more—

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Right, but I'd say not just in national security. I mean, the interesting thing is, of course, the underpinning of national security is the economic freedoms, the economic strength that we get, frankly, through freedom. There's a reason people fight for freedom. It works. It just does. And it's perfectly clear to me that when we fight for economic cooperation, for free trade, for

the kind of things that we embedded into the early days, very early days, we embedded in an embryonic state into the World Trade Organization. It's absolutely essential for growing freedom. We didn't grow the WTO in order to make Western Europe and the United States and Canada rich. We did it in order to guard our freedom against Soviet encroachment. It was a national security project, the WTO. Initially, I mean, and then it became something else. But in those early days, that's what it was.

And I think that we should be looking at economic cooperation in the same way, as ways of extending the bounds of freedom, extending economic liberty as part of personal liberty. And so I think when we look at things like CPTPP or when we look at different forms of ways in which I hope that we are going to be doing trade deals between the United States and the United Kingdom, we shouldn't be looking at it as a sort of zero-sum game. It's not. If we get it right, not only do we both prosper in economic terms, but we both prosper in the sense that we defend our own liberty more deeply.

And when we bring in countries, and I'll use the same two just as examples, Nigeria and Indonesia, we're not just helping three, 400 million people in Nigeria and similar, maybe more in Indonesia to prosper, we're actually ensuring that the principles of the rule of law, the principles of personal freedom, the principles of liberty that we value are embedded more deeply in other parts of the world and that it effectively extends the bounds of freedom and guards the British and American people more strongly.

BILL KRISTOL:

And that's well said. I'm sure you will continue to say that and say it even more visibly and across borders, because I think Putin's invasion and the reaction to it has done a lot of well-earned damage, in my view, to a kind of America first demagoguery here in the US. On the other hand, I would say the Biden administration hasn't... They've got a lot of other things to worry about, though they've behaved quite well in this crisis. They haven't really articulated what you just articulated. And in fact, on some issues, because of politics and other things, they haven't been as forward-leading, I would say, on trade at all. They haven't removed most of Trump's trade tariffs, even on Europe, I don't think, right? Kind of crazy that we have tariffs against our allies who are all trying to help Ukraine and same in some other areas of immigration and so forth.

So, I think articulating the kind of vision you just did is not something that President Biden has particularly done, as sort of unlike Truman and Acheson, I suppose, and Marshall famously, but—

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Your father was not in any way anti-American, but his anti-protectionism was indeed a form of America First. He wouldn't have put it that way because of the loaded context to those words, of course, but it's a pro-Americanism. And you know, I represent a community in West Kent, right? I represent about 80,000 electors, about 100,000 souls who vote left, right, whatever, for the advantage of Kent, the United Kingdom, and their family across the world. And the reason that I am an advocate for this level of cooperation is quite literally because I think it is fundamentally in the interest of the British people, you know? And I do put my country first. I think that is the job of elected representatives, actually. I mean, I do think it is my job to champion my community and my country first. I think that is literally what I've been elected to do. But I think I do it most effectively when I expand the bounds of freedom. It makes us safer, you know?

I mean, it's a huge luxury for us. It's an even bigger luxury for you, but I mean, you guys have an ocean on either side. We have about 20 miles of sea between us and France, right? But what NATO has done, what cooperation has done, what free trade has done is it's pushed the boundary of British liberty thousands of miles to the East and thousands of miles to the South.

Now, at the very least, the very least, that's a hell of a warning, that's a hell of a tripwire, right? I mean, if you're setting up claymores to guard your perimeter, you've pushed your perimeter out a hell of a long way. But actually, it does more than that, because actually, it deepens the economic strength of your country. It means that you're better able to defend yourself, and... You know?

I don't think that free trade is an act of generosity. I think it's an act of selfishness, actually. By building up liberty, it's a bit like building up public health. You know, you don't want people dying of pandemics on your border. It's just bad for you, you know? It's really bad for you.

BILL KRISTOL:

And to be a little more forward-leaning perhaps, than you're being, I mean, you don't want to live in a world where even if you could somehow put up fantastic barriers against the pandemics, and just watch people die on your border, that is not attractive. It's not sustainable, ultimately, and it's not worthy, really, so no, I think that you've said this very well, though. So let's come back, maybe, to Ukraine, and the situation short-term, but that was, I think a very helpful, though, digression on what [inaudible] on—

TOM TUGENDHAT:

All right, yeah.

BILL KRISTOL:

...how we should think more broadly. Because I really do think... I mean, some of us have tried to articulate it a little bit, in articles and so forth, and perhaps just conversations, but no one politician here is really... If John McCain were still alive, honestly I think he would be saying what you're saying, and trying to say that—

TOM TUGENDHAT:

He's [inaudible]

BILL KRISTOL:

That's good, and trying to say it in speeches, and a more formal way, to really get the doctrines out there. I'm sure you can pick up his mantle. But more concretely, what should we look for the next three, six months? What worries you the most? If you saw something you would say, "Oh my god, we really need to... We're not doing what we should be doing," what are the opportunities perhaps? Just give us the short-, medium-term prospect.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

The reality is that the only country with the industrial base capable of sustaining this level of weapons consumption is the United States, so we need to make sure... Forgive me, but I mean, you know—

BILL KRISTOL:

I'm not so confident that we have that base that we quite once had, and people talk our weapons are wonderful, I guess, and they seem to be helping a lot, and it's great that we're sending them over, but I've talked to people here, experts here, you know them too, that are a little worried that we're actually... We don't have the Cold War type, multiple... let alone World War II type, multiple lines of production and so forth.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

But you'll have production lines that put every other country in the world to shame, frankly, so—

BILL KRISTOL:

And you think they're okay? I mean, they're sufficient? We're not going to be—

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Look, I'm not going to go into the complexities of the US military-industrial capabilities, but you have the capabilities to maintain the war supplies that Ukraine needs to maintain its liberty, and therefore to guard our borders, so you know, frankly, you matter, and you matter an awful lot. Secondly, I think it's worth thinking about a few other things, right? I mean, a country can't stay at war like this and maintain an economy. I mean, you just can't, right? And so, those countries that aren't able to supply weapons should be thinking very seriously about loan agreements.

We paid off our martial debt, I think I'm right in saying, under the Blair administration. It took us 70 or 80 years to pay off the debt that we accrued to you in the second World War, but I have to say, I was very glad when we paid off the last penny, and it was money well spent. And I'm sure the Ukrainians will feel the same, and we must make sure that where we can, we're generous, and where we can't, we make the loans as long as possible, because I think that's really important.

But look, I also think the next thing to do is to help in other ways, because the reality is that the Ukrainians have gone from literally sending every person to the border to guard, to fight, to now going into a stage where they need to sustain operations over a much longer basis. That means changing the way that you do supplies, and repairs, and training, and any number of different things to go from an army, to being a sort of best effort engagement, to a sustainable engagement. And that's difficult, right? I mean, that means that I think the next stage that we need to make sure we're helping with is logistics. It's training. It's those elements that turn a quick fighting force into a sustainable army.

And that's difficult to do. It's difficult to do because it requires very, very hard decisions and prioritization, that we can't make for them, but President Zelensky has demonstrated huge capability in strategic thinking, so I'm not concerned about that. What we need to be there to do is when people want to be trained, when they're looking for assistance in different ways, we're offering to do it. Now, the United Kingdom is already doing a lot of it in Salisbury, as you may know, on Salisbury Plain, so there's not... We can demonstrate that we can do it, but there are other countries that should be helping too, and I hope they'll step up.

BILL KRISTOL:

And so when you mentioned President Zelensky again, I feel like he got a huge amount of attention, deservedly, in the first two or three months, and now it's become sort of more routine, but I feel like people haven't quite appreciated what he did, and maybe I'm... I mean, is it not... You're a student of political leadership, and I mean, is it not a pretty extraordinary example for us, and are there... Would you say a word about if I'm right, are there... What lessons do you take from it?

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Well, look. You don't need me to tell you, there is a long history of leaders of countries who, when the country comes under pressure, they jump on the first plane out with their families and a couple of million dollars, and are never seen again. I mean, the most recent example is Ashraf Ghani, the one-time president of Afghanistan, who basically fled before a Taliban army that, much weaker than the Russian army that faced Zelensky, and Zelensky didn't run. You

know, Zelensky would very reasonably have been terrified that his family were going to be killed, and he himself would have been killed, you know?

We know that the Russians had sent in death squads to try and catch and kill various members of the Ukrainian leadership team, including Zelensky and his family, and for those first few weeks and months, probably still today actually, as far as I know, I mean for all I know, sorry, he was having to sleep in snatched moments, and move around the whole time, and with bodyguards who he trusted, and be very, very careful never to be caught anywhere, you know? But he still did it. He stayed, and he demonstrated something, and I think you mentioned him, but Senator McCain and others have demonstrated at various points, President Reagan demonstrated it, various others have demonstrated it. Courage in leadership matters. It can be game-changing. It can be inspiring, you know?

Winston Churchill demonstrated it for us, most famously, and others have demonstrated it at other times, but it really can be game-changing, and President Zelensky demonstrated it. I think we underestimate the importance of President Zelensky's courage to the shape of the world as it will be in 10 years time. If we don't recognize the effect that having Putin victorious in Ukraine, and Belarus, would have had on countries like Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, and the pressure that that would have put on NATO, and therefore on European liberty. I think we underestimate that at our peril.

BILL KRISTOL:

No, I think that's very well said, and I mean, the courage plus competence apparently, in leadership.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Yeah, totally.

BILL KRISTOL:

And a high level of competence. That's awfully important to people. Like I mean, it happens, and then of course, when things swell, of course, that's how it was going to go, but it didn't have to go that way. No, and you're... Maybe we'll close on this. You were such a critic of the withdrawal from Afghanistan. I mean, think of what the world looks like if Ukraine falls. You know, Zelensky just doesn't make the right decisions, or the Russians make better decisions, and they take the airport near Kyiv, and then it goes, and the whole thing [inaudible] —

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Or we make the wrong decisions and we don't support it.

BILL KRISTOL:

Very much so, so I mean, what does a world in which we've pulled out of Afghanistan and watched the Taliban take that back over, and then six months later, Ukraine goes under, or part of it, a large part of it, let's say, to a brutal invasion from Putin. I mean, that's a very different world from the one we're looking at now, where unfortunately, Afghanistan still is in terrible shape, but maybe Afghanistan was the end of a period of weakness and retrenchment, not the harbinger of our future, right?

I mean really, when you think about it, I kind of come back to the degree to which 2022 could really be a pivot point, not just for Ukraine, though most importantly obviously for them, and they deserve most of the credit and most of the... All honor to them, but really, for all of us. Don't you think? I mean, think of what it looks like if Afghanistan is followed by a bad... Both failure there, but you're absolutely right to... But what if we just don't step up, and we're sort of still desperately trying to negotiate with Putin three weeks after he's started the war and so forth, yeah.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Look, I mean, Bill, the point I was making in that speech I gave in August last year was that it's not just Afghanistan, right? The fall of Afghanistan led countries like Russia to believe that we weren't serious anymore, which is one of the reasons he invaded Ukraine. He didn't think we were serious. He didn't think we'd do anything. He didn't think we'd react. And had President Zelensky not demonstrated that extraordinary courage, and had Ben Wallace not got the weapons in early, so that the Ukrainians were able to defend, I think he might have been right.

I mean, that's the scary thing. He might have been right. As it turns out, he was wrong, thank god, but he was wrong, and because he was wrong, instead of countries around the world looking at Afghanistan as they did, and thinking, "Hang on a minute, why do a deal with the Americans? Why do a deal with the Brits? Why do a deal with the free world? Why not just do it straight with China? Why not do it straight with Russia? They're going to win anyway. You know, the guys in Washington and London aren't serious. They're soft. Might as well go for the guys who actually mean it, who'll stay, who will endure, who will stick by you, who may punish you, but who will at least be with you," you know? We could have done that, but instead, what happened was that the Ukrainian situation meant that people are now looking and saying, "Actually, maybe these guys are serious."

So I think it's worth remembering that nothing succeeds like success and nothing fails like failure, right? I mean, and it's... Ukraine's success means that we're in a very different position today than we would have been had this not happened, and I think for countries around the world, countries we're not talking about, the erosion that that could have brought into the stability of a Western alliance, and I use that term very broadly. I include countries like South Korea and Japan in it, but you know, liberal alliance if you like, but it doesn't mean the same thing in American as it does in English.

BILL KRISTOL:

We're going to revitalize the word liberal here too. That's our next project here.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Right, it doesn't mean communist, it doesn't mean socialist. It's to do with freedom, hence the word, hence the origins of the term. But you know, the alliance of free states, maybe. That's a better way of putting it, would have been eroded. Maybe not in the heartlands, maybe not in places like Canada, but in places on the edge, places that are teetering, places that are trying to decide how to shape their policies for the next 10, 15 years, to make sure that their people are safe and able to survive, I think the erosion of liberty in Europe would have been a hell of an indicator of failure. So I think we shouldn't underestimate the extraordinary courage that Zelensky showed, but also the extraordinary debt that we all owe him as free people, you know? We as free people owe to the Ukrainians.

BILL KRISTOL:

That's a good—

TOM TUGENDHAT:

They're fighting for us.

BILL KRISTOL:

...note to end on, but a very appropriate one, because I think you really helped in addition to obviously very helpful analysis of the situation on the ground, really pulled the camera back so to speak, pulled the aperture back, and whatever the metaphor is, and opened it, and really in a very concrete and, I found helpful way, really, to show what's at stake here. It's not just the rhetoric about, "Oh, you know..." Obviously, we should help them. They're being treated...

The Russians have been, and Putin's army's been brutal and so forth, but really, that this could be a real moment for the 21st century, and not just for Eastern Europe, and Ukraine, and Russia. So, Tom, thank you for all you've done in Britain, but thank you for joining us today, joining me today.

TOM TUGENDHAT:

Bill, it's always a pleasure to see you. Thanks for making time.

BILL KRISTOL:

No, my pleasure, and thank you all for joining us on *Conversations*.