

Russian adventurism under Putin: Lessons from Ukraine and Syria

Title: Russian adventurism under Putin: Lessons from Ukraine and Syria

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Speakers:

S1 - Professor Wheeler

S2 - Jack Matlock

S1 Well good morning and welcome to this special [0.06] lecture. It gives me great pleasure this morning to welcome our distinguished guest, Ambassador Jack Matlock. Ambassador Matlock has been in the US Foreign Service over 35 years, served as Ambassador to the Soviet Union from '87 to '91, special assistant to the President of National Security Affairs and Senior Director of European and Soviet Affairs on the National Security Council staff between '83 and '86. During that time he was Ronald Reagan's key man for the summits in Geneva and Reykjavik. He also served as ambassador to Czechoslovakia from '81 to '83.

S1 He's also served in Vienna and Munich and [0.52] and Zanzibar and Darussalam. In his retirement he has taken up academic posts at the University of Princeton, Colombia and Hamilton College and Holyoke College. He's written a wonderful definitive book on the Reagan/Gorbachev era and he continues to lecture. There is no putting this man down!

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- S1 Today, he will be talking to us on Russian Adventurism under Putin, Lessons from Ukraine and Syria.
- S2 Thank you very much. You know, when I told Professor Wheeler that I'd be happy to come over today and chat with some of the students I had no idea that he was going to organise something like a formal lecture. I think of this more as a conversation and not something formal.
- S2 But so let me simply start by sketching out my view of the background of why Russia has been acting as it has, particularly in the cases most recently of Ukraine and Syria. Now, it was Professor Wheeler's word 'adventurism', there is an element of adventurism there but I would suggest that there is somewhat more than that and to think of it as just as adventurism is probably incorrect. A lot of it comes as a reaction to I would say the actions of the West, including and especially the [2.39] of the United States over the period of the last 25 years, that is the period since the Soviet Union collapsed and the Russian Federation became an independent state.
- S2 But let me go back even before that because I believe that our perceptions, by our I mean those of us in the West, our perceptions of how the Cold War ended, how the Soviet Union broke up and the basic reasons for that are for the most part quite skewed. How many have heard or believe we won the Cold War? That, you know, is the most common in the West and it really began when President Bush, the elder, when he was running for re-election and felt that he might be losing, he for the first time started saying we won the Cold War. President Reagan never said that. In fact, President Reagan had warned us early on when we began negotiating if we achieve something we must not call it victory. And indeed, we ended the Cold War by negotiation in the interests of all the parties there were no

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victors. Or you could say everybody was a victor including the Soviet Union.

- S2 Second thing is too many people in their minds conflate the end of the Cold War with the end of the Soviet Union. That should not be done. The Soviet Union broke up not because of Western pressure, not because they lost the Cold War but because of pressures within the Soviet Union. They broke up from within and precisely because the pressures of the Cold War had ended. The pressures of the Cold War and the arms race had kept the Soviet Union together just as the walls of a pressure cooker will keep the steam in. You take those pressures off and it explodes because these were internal pressures.
- S2 So the idea, which became very common first in the West and then in Russia particularly, because the nineties were a terrible period for most Russians, when the Soviet Union broke up and I think there was great cheering with the breakup of the soviet -, there was great cheering with the end of the Communist Rule, I would put it that way. However, many Russians thought that suddenly if we throw off Communism we would very quickly be living like people in Western Europe. Even America.
- S2 And of course that was not to be because turning that system they had in the Soviet Union into an efficient market economy was analogous to turning a submarine into an aeroplane, keeping it operating the whole time and having the same crew. I mean, if anybody can figure out how to do that, well they have my admiration. The fact is none of us, East or West has any clear idea of how you compete, how you transform that totally state controlled system. No private property and means of production, state owned everything. It was a misnomer to call it socialism or communism, it was state monopoly capitalism, all capital was owned by the state. And even the state did not control it, the

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communist part controlled it from behind the scenes, the way a criminal gang might control a neighbourhood you might say.

S2 So one has to understand what happened to Russia in the nineties when suddenly, you know, what they had learned before they were now being told the opposite, meanwhile they had something close to chaos. We have often heard that well with Putin they have been backtracking on democracy. Wait a minute, they never had democracy, what they had in the nineties was something close to anarchy and chaos, widespread crime, protectionism by say protection rackets which suppressed any effort at entrepreneurship on the local level. Great poverty, many of the people when sometimes wages were not paid for months and anybody who travelled to Russia during those early years of the nineties it was really pathetic to see elderly women, you know, standing not bagging but trying to sell something pitiful from their things just to get something to eat.

S2 Well the Russians outside, we said 'oh they're on the road to democracy' and the Russians said, many of them '[*speaks Russian* 8.27]', 'that's not democracy', '[*speaks Russian*]', crude word, 'shitocracy'. Now one thing that Putin has done, when he took over Russia had been in formal bankruptcy, the whole financial system, since he has been the leader they have come back economically helped greatly by rising oil prices, which is their main export, to be sure, but there was more to it than that because he brought a degree of stability and up until the general financial crisis that began around 2008 steadily rising living standards. That means that even those who are very disturbed by his I would say increasing control of the mass media and restrictions and a number of freedoms, nevertheless most Russians after what they went through in the nineties and the whole heritage of revolutions that turned things around but left them worse off than they were before, going back certainly from the Bolshevik Revolution through all of the things that happened in the thirties to the

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Second World War, this is a country which has gone through, almost in every generation, enormous challenges and they had a leader under Stalin who had probably killed more people than were killed in the Second World War, even before they went into it.

S2 So one has to understand that most Russians don't look at the world the way those of us who are in countries that despite its many problems have had a greater deal, a greater measure of security and predictability about our lives. Now I could go on and on about this particular problem but I just want to put the attitude and when people wonder why Russians seem to approve of President Putin and the things he is doing, not all Russians of course but an increasing number, then I think one has to understand something about this past and about the fact that the end of the Soviet Union and the end of communism for many brought for a long time misery. Although almost all Russians, except some of the elderly, will concede if they remember that they're living better today than they did under the Soviet Union, particularly in its last days.

S2 As far as freedom is concerned, however, the Russians have probably never been freer in a sense than they were in the last year of the Soviet Union. And this gets us to another I think widespread misconception, that is that the breakup of the Soviet Union was a good thing for everybody. Actually and the perception in Russia and to some degree in the West is that oh it was because they lost the Cold War and the West and particularly US forced the Soviet Union apart. That again is the opposite of what actually happened.

S2 I was still Ambassador in Moscow in 1991 when the Soviet Union was falling apart, certainly American diplomacy and the diplomacy of the British government, of the French government, of the German government, but at that time was doing our best to persuade Gorbachev and Yeltsin to work together and to preserve a union of the

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Soviet Republics all except the three Baltic countries, which we had always considered different and illegally part of the Soviet Union, we wanted the other twelve, if they could, to develop a voluntary federation and, as a matter of fact, President Bush, the elder, made a speech in Kiev, August 1st 1991 to not only the Ukrainians but we told the press on background 'look this is for all the non-Baltic republics of the Soviet Union' and what Bush said he recommended that they join Gorbachev's voluntary federation, he also said I thought very perceptively independence and freedom are not synonymous, you must choose freedom and he also warned beware of suicidal nationalism.

- S2 Now he didn't have Ukraine in mind at that time, he had Georgia in mind because even under Soviet times Georgia had started attacking South Ossetia which had been an autonomous area in Georgia and the Georgian government had already withdrawn the autonomy and was beginning attack on the non-ethnic Georgians that were there, the Ossettians and beginning to drive many of them across the border into North Ossetia. So there were also military attempts very early in Georgia's independence to attack the parliament in Sukhumi in Abkhazia. So we were seeing as the Soviet Union broke up the assertion of nationalism in many of the republics. So there was not I would say a reasoned debate about where the borders should be if the Soviet Union broke up, there was a very, very general revoltion against the Soviet Union and against communism but you didn't have votes as to what areas would be where, because many of the borders had been drawn up mainly in the twenties but also later in the thirties and some of them even after World War II with the idea in mind that you divide and rule. You put people together that have trouble getting along and this helps rule from Moscow. This was designed not by a Russian but by Joseph Stalin, a Georgian.

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- S2 So, you know, people who, and today, you know, will say things like 'well Russia's always been expansionist' for example, well what is Russia? I mean, the Russian empire is one thing, the Soviet Union quite a different thing in terms of state structure, although the majority of its people at the end, a bare majority, were ethnic Russians, but both were multinational empires but in the Soviet Union, Russia was one of the subjects of that empire because it was an ideological empire, an empire of the communists.
- S2 And then now once it broke up, there is a problem which still has not been resolved among Russians is what does it mean to be Russian. And we have, you know, oh we're naturally an empire, did we lose our empire when the Soviet Union broke up or did we regain ourselves and our sovereignty. And, you know, a person may wake up in the morning feel one thing and then the evening feel something different. This is something that is going on within many Russians trying to find a sense of identity. Now of course Putin has tapped into that under things and has gone increasingly in his actions toward a more extreme Russian nationalism. In fact when he says that the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the age was the breakup of the Soviet Union, he explains that's because so many Russians woke up in the morning and they were in a foreign country.
- S2 On the other hand, Russia is still multinational in the sense it's only about 80% Russian and the other 20% are largely Muslim and there of course are many other nationalities, many are Russified, Armenians, Georgians, others who have stayed in Russia rather than going back to their original countries after the break up. So Russia is still multinational, whether you call it an empire or not, the fact is if the Russian [18.07] emphasises too much the centrality of being Russian, it is going inevitably to offend those who are not Russian. So in a sense, in that direction, Putin is somehow setting a time bomb in his

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own country in some of these reactions. But that's only one aspect to it.

S2 Let me shift from these things to how western policy developed after the end of the Cold War and how that has affected the Russian reaction and I will eventually get to the cases of Ukraine and Syria. You know, when we ended the Cold War and the Cold War ended at least two years before the Soviet Union ended. I can testify as an American diplomat that by 1990 and 1991, Russia in many respects was cooperating with the United States on more issues than some of our former allies were. And the Cold War was genuinely over. Because the Cold War was basically about ideology and obviously based on that ideology, we had an arms race and we had geopolitical competition but the reason for it, the underlying reason was the ideology and when Gorbachev in effect rejected the international class struggle, the [19.46] class struggle is the basis of [foreign] policy, which he did formally in December 1988, that was the ideological foundation of the Cold War and instead they were going for to turn the country into a market society and [] democracy. That as the goal.

S2 Obviously democracy is something that requires very extensive institutional development as all of our countries have learned over time, it's something that it is always a work in progress and it's not something that can come on overnight thought that's something that a lot of people didn't understand. But our goal and the goal, and when I say our goal, I mean that of the United States, its NATO allies, was to create a European whole and free, that was the description and that was genuine. We really believed that you end the Cold War, you end the competition, then you could have a Europe with free borders and developing.

S2 Obviously the East having been plagued with communism and other things was going to take some time to catch up but we were going to

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do it together. Now, one of the first I think errors was the decision late in the nineties by entirely different governments in the West to begin expanding NATO to the East. The reason this was wrong and many of us, myself included, argued strongly that was not the way to do it, was not because we didn't think the East Europeans needed protection and assurance, of course that was needed, but if you use what had been a Cold War mechanism and simply expanded and if you leave Russia out, eventually you're not going to have a Europe whole and free, you are going to develop a feeling of competition and particularly if the Russians are feeling that they're being treated as a defeated nation, you lost the Cold War, the Soviet Union broke up and because we brought down communism, all of that is not right. They brought down communism, you know, Gorbachev, the leader of the communist party, did more to destroy communism, the communist control, than anybody on the outside could have. So the idea that the Cold War, you know, that this was a western victory is simply not historical.

S2 But these things count psychologically and if at first you are saying to the Russians, you know, we're going to live in a Europe whole and free, you let the East Europeans go free and make their own decisions, they won't be enemies, they'll be friends. And to the East Europeans, well yes we know, we understand history, so let's have assurance through such things as the partnership for peace with NATO, rather than full membership.

S2 The decision was made rather than developing a security organisation that included Russia, which would have been I would say the fundamental prerequisite truly for a Europe whole and free, under a number of pressures that I don't have time to describe, the decision was to begin expanding NATO in full to the East without any guarantees that might be put in place. Historically we can think back at the negotiations of German unity that took place in 1990 and in general almost all the Western governments told Gorbachev that if he allowed

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Germany to unify and stay in NATO because the first requirement at first the Soviets insisted that if Germany unites it has to leave NATO. We didn't think that was a good idea. Among other things we didn't think it was a good idea to free a united Germany from the ties and the integration of the military into the others that NATO provides. So we thought it was very important to keep NATO and keep Germany in it. But we did say at that time an implicit reference to the territory of the German Democratic Republic that there would be no expansion of NATO jurisdiction, but often the [sentences 25.05] did not explicitly refer to the GDR but were very general.

- S2 And when we finally negotiated what they call the Two Plus Four Treaty on the unification of Germany, it was provided that also the territory of the GDR would in fact be part of NATO jurisdiction because you couldn't make part of one country not under the jurisdiction, there would be a commitment that no foreign troops, no non-German troops would be stationed there. Now that is a legal commitment which has been observed.
- S2 If we had decided then that we really needed to expand NATO, one of the ways we could have made it more acceptable to Russia in the long run would be precisely to make that same provision, yes they're members of NATO, they'll come under NATO protection, but there won't be foreign bases there and particularly American bases. But when NATO began to expand first with Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary and then increasingly with others, many of us said 'alright, you know, we can start but at some point you're going to have to stop' because there is no way any Russian government, no matter how liberal, no matter how Western oriented is going to allow NATO to expand to Ukraine or to Georgia, these former republics of the Soviet Union that for centuries had been part of the Russian state.

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- S2 I mean, anybody who understands Russia understands that. This is not an abstract problem, it's a very practical one. And we say 'how are you going to justify that, don't you really need a structure that includes Russia under which NATO can continue to exist but Russia play a part in'. Now of course there was a NATO Russian agreement but it was one that fell into disuse because the Russians found that they were not really having any real influence on NATO over the time.
- S2 So this was something that started, it didn't make that much problem at first but then the second thing that happened in the late nineties was the decision to bomb Serbia because of the prospect of mass atrocities in the province of Kosovo without any approval of the UN. Well we couldn't get UN approval because Russia and China, two of the permanent members, were unwilling to vote for it. One of the reasons Russia wouldn't vote for it was we had begun to expand NATO to the East against their position.
- S2 But the fact is that we violated an important international law when we substituted a military alliance for the UN. After all, although every country has the right of self defence if they are attacked, you only have the right to intervene in matters for example humanitarian or otherwise if the security council authorises it. And as we expanded NATO at first we explained to the Russians you don't have to worry, of course you're not going to attack these countries and NATO is a totally defensive alliance. It is constitutionally incapable of offensive territory and yet for humanitarian reasons, and these were powerful, it was decided that well you had to bring Serbia to its sense and bombing started, which is an act of war without the approval of the security council.
- S2 Subsequently by the way, and as far as Russia was concerned, even worse by 2008 the United States and about two thirds of its NATO allies recognised Kosovo as independent. Now that violated an agreement that had been made back in 1975 I believe in Helsinki,

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where it was agreed that if there were changes of borders it had to be by mutual agreement and Serbia, to this day, has not agreed to that change. So instead of leaving it as sort of in a legal limbo, by pushing ahead with recognition we set a precedent which, by the way, President Putin is using in part to justify what he has done in the Crimea.

S2 So we started doing things that set I would say unfortunate, very unfortunate precedents. Also of course the invasion of Iraq without [30.26] approval was an even more egregious violation of international law and one that actually has not turned out very well for anybody. Then as far as Russia specifically was concerned during our second Bush administration, the United States pulled out of the ABM Treaty, this has been a treaty signed in 1972 which had been fundamental to most negotiating most of our arms control agreement. It was one agreement that made -, it treated Russia, and before it the Soviet Union, as an equal partner in dealing with the nuclear weapons problem which, by the way, you don't hear much about but is still potentially one of the most important problems that we face and particularly the students here, your generation will face if it begins to get out of hand again.

S2 But so from the Russian standpoint they were being treated as a defeated power and that increasingly the United States and its allies, and they do look at NATO as simply an American organisation, it is not, it is not under total American control even though there's an American commander and, in many cases, their fear is I think unfounded, but their perceptions were we were treating them as a defeated nation, we were insulting them, we were not taking their interests into account and by 2007, Putin made a speech in Munich where he made his various complaints quite explicit.

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- S2 And I must say when I looked at those various ones, it occurred to me there was not a single thing that he objected to that we really had to do, that is we in the West. In many cases it seemed gratuitous. Well we had our reasons and many cases these reasons had nothing to do with Russia but they were interpreted by the Russians as hostile and, you know, in politics, perceptions are everything. It's one thing to say 'well your fears are unfounded', in many cases I think they were, but if those fears are there that's going to be the political basis on which others operate.
- S2 Well then to continue, we went through a period also in a number of the successor states of the Soviet Union, a period of demonstrations and political change forced by demonstrations. We call them the Colour Revolutions: Rose Revolution in Georgia, Orange Revolution in Ukraine, there was one in Kyrgyzstan. Now these demonstrations and revolutions, at first they did bring about a change of government leadership. They were -, people were protesting genuine, absolutely genuine concerns and abuses, but what was happening was in most cases an unconstitutional change of power and the main thing that as far as Russia was concerned was that they began to look at these as inspired by the United States and its NATO allies.
- S2 Now I think that the West made a real mistake in being actively involved its representatives in the demonstrations. I don't think for one minute that these were created by the CIA or by Western intelligence or so on. They were real demonstrations regarding real abuses. There's no question in my mind about that but, again, when you have your officials or Western finance organisations out actively trying to encourage people, that is going to leave the impression that outsiders are behind it. And you combine that with the threat of continuing to expand NATO and you get from the Russian standpoint a rather explosive situation.

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- S2 Throughout all of this gradually the rhetoric changed. Throughout the nineties, despite the things that were developing, we still had formally good relations with Russia and we were cooperating formally with Russia in many respects. Even the Bush administration got along very well with Putin early on and particularly after the attacks 9/11 when Putin was the first foreign leader to call Bush and indeed provided a lot of help to the United States and its allies when we took the war to Afghanistan to try to root out Al Qaeda there. So from their standpoint, they were cooperating and we were the ones treating them -, rejecting and treating them as a defeated power. And that began to create a very emotional reaction.
- S2 I could go on with other things but to get to the basic point, I was trying to describe the environment when finally we had the Ukrainian crisis upon us and now currently -, which continues of course in many respects, and currently Syria. How are we to look at these? First of all, the demonstrations in the Maidan that began in Ukraine were very much the result of a very corrupt, in fact thieving, Ukrainian government. Yanukovich administration, I think he personally may have siphoned off two or three billion US dollars' worth of wealth and it was, you know, corruption is very widespread in Russia, it was even worse in Ukraine. They both had been struggling with their heritage from the Soviet Union.
- S2 So this was a genuine attempt to change the government and to get real reforms in Ukraine. They had placed their hopes on signing an agreement with the EU. I think with most Ukrainians, they sort of thought this means almost membership in the EU. It didn't. In fact, that agreement, if it had been signed, almost certainly would not have solved their problems because it was going to require reforms that I think Yanukovich knew he couldn't carry out. In fact, many observers feel that the reason he didn't sign it was not Russian pressure but the fact that he knew he couldn't carry out what it required so, you know,

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the people on the Maidan thought of the relations with the EU as their saving grace. The irony is that even if that had been signed it almost certainly would not have been enough.

S2 But here again, the involvement of Westerns, including Americans, including high level officials such as our Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, who were cheering on and passing out cookies to the demonstrators, it gave Putin at least the propaganda material to say 'look this is a CIA plot', it wasn't, he probably knows it wasn't, but at the same time he did know that the people who might come into power and in fact did come into power as a result of what turned out to be a revolution eventually, were very anti-Russian and then there was the prospect if they do apply for NATO membership and Ukraine becomes a NATO member, what happens to the Russian naval base at Sevastopol. And I think that explains more than anything else why he decided to take Crimea.

S2 Now he would have said 'well actually don't you people believe in self determination'. There was a referendum and they voted overwhelmingly to go to Russia. Well there was a referendum but it was under in effect Russian occupation so one obviously shouldn't consider that illegal and it was quite proper I think for the western countries, in fact all of the countries, not to recognise this annexation. And no country has. Ni important country that I know of including, and this is important, the other ex soviet states.

S2 But the fact is, if we look beyond the surface of what undoubtedly was an illegal act on the part of Russia, there was not only the matter of the referendum can't be considered properly carried out, there was also the principle that there shouldn't be a change in borders without neutral agreement, the one that goes back to, as I mentioned, a precedent that we unfortunately set regarding Kosovo and Serbia. But there was also commitments in addition to the general ones, a specific commitment to

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the UK and the United States in the Budapest Memorandum that Russia would respect Ukrainian territorial integrity. This was in connection with an agreement in which Ukraine returned nuclear weapons on their territory to Russia actually for destruction under agreements we had with the Soviet Union. So this was undoubtedly a breach of that agreement.

S2 Are there other aspects here? Well the fact is that almost certainly a majority, not 80% or 90%, but a majority of the people in Crimea did want to be in Russia, they had never been asked whether they prefer Russia or Ukraine so, you know, under other circumstances one can make a case that if they really preferred to be in Russia we should take some account of that. Second thing is Ukraine politically is better off without Crimea. Yanukovich would have never been elected without those votes in Crimea.

S2 Of course it's a matter of pride for Ukrainians. You've taken part of our territory. But, as I say, these things, you know, get very conflicted when you begin to look under the surface. To what degree was this adventurism? Yes it was adventurism. It surprised me quite frankly that Putin did what he did. I thought what he was going to do was to encourage a local leader to have a vote asking for union with Russia and then to have that turned down at least temporarily and use it to negotiate with the Ukrainians for greater autonomy. This was one of these territories, Crimea was one, which should have been relatively autonomous because of the different population, but Kiev had been trying repeatedly, that was sometimes autonomy, sometimes not, but generally there had been an attempt by Kiev to exercise direct control and this had been a problem.

S2 So certainly to use that as a lever to encourage the Ukrainians to adopt a federal system because they are a very divided nation and they had been ruled by a winner take all system. The president gets the

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presidency in Ukraine under its previous competition. He named all of the governors, East and West, although often you would have 90% of the people voting for one part in the West and 90% of the people in the East voting for another party. Deeply divided and yet not federal. This is one of the fundamental problems we had in Ukraine.

S2 So I think probably in my judgement, Putin acted very unwisely in terms of long term Russian interests. And then to make matters worse of course he clearly encouraged, whether he actually created or simply encouraged the breakaway in Eastern Ukraine, that is in the Donbass and [45.03] and [Donetsk] [], he certainly supported the separatists there and we've had of course a war there. Fortunately, there is a general ceasefire and there seems to be halting moves toward working this out, but the Western reaction was one not only to condemn it but to e [], he certainly supported the separatists there and we've had of course a war there. Fortunately, there is a general ceasefire and there seems to be halting moves toward working this out, but the Western reaction was one not only to condemn it but to exert a number of economic sanctions on Russia.

S2 The problem with these sanctions in my view is no.1 they're not sufficient to cause a change on something that the Russian government feels is a matter of national security and national honour. You don't do that, you don't change in those categories, no-one does, just because of a bit of economic dislocation. The fact is that Russia's economy has been affected much more seriously by the lower oil prices, which their economy is very dependent upon, and the cost of supporting this insurrection in the Eastern Ukraine and supporting Crimea. Crimea is a deficit area economically, very large numbers of pensioners and now that Russia has to pay those pensions and also supplies and so on from there, it is going to be very costly. Some Russian economists have said it's going to be \$30bn/\$40bn just over the next few years at a time when they're very strained.

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- S2 But the problem politically with the Western sanctions is that the Russian people, instead of blaming their own policy for most of their economic difficulties, would blame the West and think it is a matter of national honour to stand up to it. So they paradoxically have actually a negative effect. On the other hand, Western leaders, and particularly the American president, has been under great political pressure to provide military support to Ukraine. And that I think would be almost disastrous. Russia will not allow this to be solved militarily. And they have the means to do it. There's no way the US or NATO can protect Ukraine from Russia if Russia decide to take them. Russia's a nuclear power and though we've got the nuclear weapons down much more than they were at the height of the Cold War, there's still thousands of them out there and many of them are on alert and this is not something to be played with.
- S2 We made an agreement early on 30 years ago when Reagan met Gorbachev that a nuclear war cannot be won, must never be fought and that means there can be no war between us. And that was a statement of fact, it was a statement on which we were able to end the Cold War. So the idea that somehow the US or NATO would come in and support the Ukrainians militarily in the hope that they could prevail over Russia in an area where Russia is clearly militarily superior, well it just defies.
- S2 So I think President Obama and our NATO allies have been absolutely correct in refusing to supply more than you might say passive defensive equipment to Ukraine. That would simply enflame things more. And I'm sure they thought of the sanctions as something better than military and it's certainly true, that is true. But the fact is now we're stuck with the sanctions. And now let me turn to Syria and I'll come back with just a sentence or two on Ukraine.

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- S2 Meanwhile of course the whole situation in Syria has been developing over the last several years. This was a case in which with the -, first of all when the civil war broke out within Syria, the United States took the view that Assad's rule had been so brutal towards his own people that the only way to settle this would be for Assad to step down. And the Russian reaction was 'look you take out Assad, you take out any structure to defend against the extremists'. We've seen over time ISIS to come in and establish themselves there in Syria and Iraq.
- S2 What is happening now I believe with the shock, particularly the shock of the bombing of the Russian aircraft, the shock of Paris, has been that there is a recognition now that we all have to cooperate against ISIS. And that means it's more important at the moment to preserve at least some capability on the part of the Syrian army to do things. I think that the friends of Assad, that is Russia and Iran, need to pressure him to some real negotiations, the end of which would probably mean his removal but maybe not immediately, whereas the others that are supporting the opposition have to encourage the responsible opposition to first of all for a ceasefire on both sides and for some sort of coalition government that could bring elections and the elections would decide what happens to Assad.
- S2 Basically we need to unite against ISIS/ISIL, which is an enemy of all. But the problem with outsiders like the United States and Russia and our European friends is that this is being fuelled internally in the Middle East with Saudi Arabia and Turkey on one side, Iran and Lebanon, at least Hezbollah in Lebanon on the other, and in effect we're getting ourselves in the middle of a fight which is not ours. There's a great humanitarian interest here. I think we're moving toward more cooperation there and my hope also with Ukraine is that it's not a matter of it just going on the backburner but as the fighting diminishes, as it has, that there can be peace there and there can be more cooperation on Syria and any other areas –

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S1 On that -, I'm afraid [53.00] finish it there if we can, OK.

S2 Alright, that's –

S1 Well thank you very much, [] presentation, proper locations there and I'll leave you with that, we have the room just until a minute ago, so I'll just say thank you very much for coming, Ambassador Jack Matlock.

S2 Thank you.

[Applause]

END OF RECORDING