

# CARNEGIE COUNCIL *for Ethics in International Affairs*

## Winter is Coming: Why Vladimir Putin and the Enemies of the Free World Must be Stopped

Public Affairs

Garry Kasparov, Robert G. Kaiser, Joanne J. Myers

### Transcript

#### Introduction

**JOANNE MYERS:** Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, director of Public Affairs programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council it is my pleasure to welcome you to this breakfast program.

Our guests are the legendary chess master Garry Kasparov and the widely acclaimed *Washington Post* journalist Robert Kaiser. The focus of their discussion is Mr. Kasparov's book, *Winter is Coming: Why Vladimir Putin and the Enemies of the Free World Must be Stopped*. Together they will be discussing the views put forth in this very provocative new book.

Before we begin, I just want to spend a few minutes in providing a context for this discussion.

In coming to the Carnegie Council this morning, I wondered how many of you were thinking about what turns a human being into a legend. Is it a question of personal excellence, exceptional charisma, intellect, or strength; or is it another directed gift, an unusual capacity to engage the hearts and enlarge the dreams of admirers; or, perhaps, a combination of all these traits?

Garry Kasparov didn't become the world's top chess player for 20 years by chance. Besides natural talent and relentless work in order to develop decision-making abilities, strategic thinking was always a critical part of his success. Talent scouts had already recognized his chess genius at preschool age, and in 1985, at age 22, he became the youngest ever world champion chess player. He held this position for 20 years. In 2005, while still being ranked as the best player in the world, he retired from competitive chess.

What is less well known about him is that for the past decade he has had a second career in politics, dedicating himself to "pushing back against the rising tide of repression" coming from the Kremlin. He was active in the anti-Putin marches until a relentless crackdown curtailed open opposition. After daring a presidential election challenge to Putin in 2007, one that was disqualified under murky circumstances and a number of what he calls "accidents," he no longer felt safe living in Russia. Fearing he would be stripped of his Russian passport, he went into exile abroad.

But this hasn't stopped his efforts to create an international coalition of dissidents and activists. In 2012, Mr. Kasparov succeeded former Czech president *Václav Havel* as chairman of the New York-based *Human Rights Foundation*. He now lives in self-imposed exile in New York City, but he insists it's only temporary.

Mr. Kaiser, who at the suggestion of *Peter Osnos*, publisher of Mr. Kasparov's book, graciously agreed to conduct this interview, we are grateful to you for doing so; and to you, Peter, for publishing this book.

Mr. Kaiser retired from *The Washington Post* in early 2014 after more than 50 years at the paper. During that time he served as managing editor, associate editor, and senior correspondent. He was based in Moscow in the 1970s. His award-winning books include *Cold Winter, Cold War* and *Why Gorbachev Happened*.

Although the title of Mr. Kasparov's book is *Winter Is Coming*, I think with the chill outside this morning, we can say winter is here.

Please join me in giving a very warm welcome to our two guests this morning, Garry Kasparov and Bob Kaiser.

## Discussion

**ROBERT KAISER:** Your book is full of passion, and very rewarding, I should say, to read, not least because it compels its reader to grapple with some very serious and very big questions. You don't let the reader off the hook. Your devastating portrait of [Vladimir Putin](#) is an important contribution, I think. I read it thinking, "Jeez, I wish [Donald Trump](#) would read this." [Laughter] But I'm not holding my breath.

You've had some very enthusiastic reviews in this country and elsewhere, and also some critical ones, notably by [Serge Schmemmann](#), an old friend of mine and former Moscow correspondent of *The New York Times*. I've got a question or two about Schmemmann's review, which I'll come back to in a few minutes.

But first, since we're sitting in the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, I thought we might start by discussing your powerful call in this book for a moral foreign policy, particularly from the United States and its Western allies. "A moral policy is necessary," you write, "if we are to prevail against authoritarian and terrorist rivals and enemies."

Maybe we should start with definitions. What is a moral foreign policy?

**GARRY KASPAROV:** First of all, I hope Trump will not read the book, because he might find it compelling. [Laughter]

I have been trying, as a former professional chess player, to look back, to analyze the moves that were made in the game that the free world has won, the *Cold War*. I believe it was not just because of economic or military factors, but most of all because of the moral values, because of the core values of the free world that were compelling to people who lived like me, born and raised on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

I was trying to demonstrate in the book that while from the end of *World War II* to the end of the Cold War, from [Harry Truman](#) to [Ronald Reagan](#), the United States' foreign policy was fairly consistent. There were some fluctuations, but it was in the range, because both Democrats and Republicans, presidents from both parties, recognized that there was an existential threat from communism and, working with the institutions built by the Truman administration in the 1940s, they followed this path.

What happened in 1991–92, instead of being consistent, U.S. foreign policy worked more like a pendulum, swinging from one side to another. So [Clinton](#) did little, [Bush 43](#) did too much, [Obama](#) has been doing nothing, and it created a very dangerous vacuum in the world because American allies and friends or foes were quite puzzled, of course for different reasons. Expecting U.S. foreign policy to make a U-turn with a new president, with a new master in the Oval Office, is quite challenging.

I think that it was already time in the early 1990s, but now it definitely is time, to come up with another—you may call it a doctrine, if we go back to the mid-1940s—to build this doctrine with a vision

of the future, with a strategy. It is not thinking "What we will do now, now, now." It is a bit to understand how actions today could contribute to a better, safer world, prosperous world, peaceful environment, two, three, four, five years from now.

**ROBERT KAISER:** Define a moral policy. What would it consist of?

**GARRY KASPAROV:** A moral policy is if we are talking about moral issues—for instance, I believe that even dealing with long-term allies, like Saudi Arabia, the United States cannot refrain from harsh criticism of the human rights record. So it is very important that the new world order—if we can use these words, although I understand it could be quite tricky—should be based on the values that are fundamental for the free world.

I believe these moral issues will resonate well with people who live today in the unfree world. There are still billions of people who live in totalitarian or non-democratic countries, and many of them have a fundamental mistrust of American foreign policy because they could see business and short-term interests, not a strategic vision that could benefit everybody.

**ROBERT KAISER:** I made a note of Saudi Arabia also in thinking about this question. Is it moral to be an ally of a country that doesn't allow women to drive cars, for example?

**GARRY KASPAROV:** That's the least of the problems in the long list of concerns about the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia, but an important one.

**ROBERT KAISER:** But is it okay for us to call ourselves their ally, or is that a moral mistake?

**GARRY KASPAROV:** It depends on the evaluation of the international situation. When the United States and Great Britain had to fight [Hitler](#), they had to deal with [Stalin](#). At certain points when you are facing an existential enemy that is threatening the very existence of your world, you have to make unholy alliances.

I don't think that we live in a situation where you have to build coalitions based on an immediate interest without respecting the interests of the people who live in the region. I think that is what actually helps Islamic radicals and all sorts of thugs and terrorists, because they can easily turn the table around, pointing at America as a supporter of these regimes, like in Saudi Arabia and—you can name many of them, from Pakistan to Egypt. It always feeds the frustration. It's like a vicious circle, because the kings, dictators, in these countries know that they have to keep radicals and terrorists as being a sort of counterbalance that will secure support from the United States, and unfortunately from other countries in the free world, because it's all about the lesser evil. So I think we have to move into a world where the lesser evil will not be the best option.

**ROBERT KAISER:** You used the term in the book and again this morning, "existential threat." It seems to me that one of the differences between the world that I covered when I was the Moscow correspondent of *The Washington Post* in the early 1970s and today is that the nature of the threat is quite different. There really was an existential threat in the 1970s, in the sense that we knew that both sides were in a state of high alert, ready to launch nuclear weapons at the other on a moment's notice. We later learned that it almost happened [by mistake in 1983](#), that terrifying episode. I'm not sure we have that kind of a threat today, and I'm not sure that public opinions in the West feel threatened in the way I certainly, and I think Americans, felt threatened in the 1970s and 1980s. Give me your view of that.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** Yes, I agree that the existential threat that the United States and the free world faced 70, 60, 50, 40, maybe even 30 years ago but less so, is no longer there. Though, of course, we have a paranoid dictator in Russia—the country now today is a full-blown one-man dictatorship—that

was not the case in the Soviet Union. But I always say that for those who are making arguments about the dangers of confronting Putin these days, remember, say, 1948, when Josef Stalin decided to [take over West Berlin](#). Not for a second did I believe that Stalin was a lesser threat to the free world and to the United States. The Truman decision, as far as I know against the advice of the Pentagon and the State Department, to supply West Berlin for 11 months with an airlift was not a real challenge to a dictator who was far more powerful than Putin today.

Naturally, Russia under Putin is a pale shadow, economically and militarily, of what the Soviet Union was. Once, speaking at a CNBC show on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, I said that from this room the United States could do more damage to Putin's Russia than all the presidents from Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan could do during the Cold War. So Russia today, of course, is much more vulnerable.

But as you said correctly, the nature of the threat has changed. If 30, 40, 50 years ago the United States faced the Soviet Union as a leader of the global coalition against the free world, today there is no leader. Of course, Putin is the most powerful enemy of the free world, but there are many other groups that do exist, and they could inflict damage, not as big as the Soviet Union could or Putin can today, but still it could be extremely painful and tragic.

Let's not forget that on the tragic day of [September 11 in 2001](#) that 19 terrorists killed more Americans than the entire Japanese fleet [60 years before](#). Now, 15 years later, an even smaller group hacking into computers could cause even bigger damage.

What I tried to explain in the book is that while the world is getting smaller thanks to the technologies, it created communications and it also created an illusion that it means progress automatically. But this device is agnostic; it is neither good nor bad. It simply helps us to transfer information. It can help us with business, with finance, with social/cultural exchange. But it also helps terrorists. They know how to use social networks.

The problem is while the world is so small and we can learn whatever is happening in the world within a split second, whether it is an earthquake in Pakistan or a tsunami in Indonesia or elections elsewhere, in Argentina, the guys on the other side of the fence have no choice but to keep going with this open conflict with the free world because otherwise they cannot justify their political existence. What else can they offer to those they oppress, they govern?

So it's not accidental that Putin's domestic policy is based entirely on anti-American propaganda. If you switch to Russian talk shows, you will not find anything about Russia. It's about [Ukraine](#), it's about Georgia, it's about Estonia, it's about [Syria](#), and of course it's about America. It doesn't matter whether America is trying to be friendly and offering a reset button. At the end of the day, it's all about finding enemies. The same with Iranian mullahs, the same with other thugs and terrorists; they need a big target, they need the free world as an enemy, and of course America as a looming target, because without it they will have to compete with us in innovations, technologies, ideas, and they know that this competition is lost from the beginning to them.

They know they have one competitive advantage over us. It's the value of human life. For us each loss of human life is a tragedy. For them sacrificing millions is just a demonstration of their strength.

**ROBERT KAISER:** I'm intrigued by your use of the word "us." Which "us" do you belong to now?

**GARRY KASPAROV:** Moral values do not belong only to those who were born on the west of the Iron Curtain.

**ROBERT KAISER:** Well said.

One of the big differences between the Cold War era and today in this country is the great decline of confidence in America, in the American government, in American institutions, etc. But this is echoed all around Western Europe too. Western European public opinion is not enthusiastic about supporting military establishments or about supporting foreign military adventures, just as is the case in this country.

You prescribe in your book a pretty forceful, sometimes even aggressive, policy. But how are you going to get public support for that policy? How are we going to overcome this rising skepticism in the Western world about the utility of government and the functionality of government?

**GARRY KASPAROV:** I think it's a normal process. There are always tides—it goes up and down. So you had [Eisenhower](#) after Truman; you had [Nixon/Kissinger](#), who untangled the overextended [U.S. intervention in Vietnam](#); you have Obama who followed Bush, so it's very much anti-Bush. That's why I said it's more like a pendulum.

Again, in the '50s and the '60s and the '70s there was the Soviet Union. Still, even with all the changes, there was a clear threat that could not relieve the public's fears.

Today I think it is very important for people to understand that, even if we believe we are done with war, war is not done with us. Certain things will continue. The [San Bernadino attack](#), many believe could be an accident, but it will continue because for the [ISIS's](#) (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) of this world—I say ISIS, but it could be [al-Qaeda](#), it could be ISIS—at the end of the day, the way these terrorist organizations build is, again, they are not competing with the free world in economy or even in ideas; it's all about demonstrating their brutality and terror.

By the way, the Soviet Union after Stalin's death became a country with a communist dictatorship but with a collective leadership. As China today, we can see that any collective leadership is far more stable than a one-man dictatorship, because even if you have 10 bad guys making decisions, they will always look for balance. That's why you could expect the Soviet Union, with this global competition and with many proxy wars, still trying to be reasonable and to follow the international regulations. You could hardly expect Soviet leaders not to respect their own signature, as Putin did several times already.

I hope that the American public now will start recognizing that two giant oceans are no longer offering protection against these threats. America is the most globalized economy in the world. If you expect to benefit from global trade, from global exchange, the global labor market, social networks, you can't pretend that you are no longer part of global affairs.

Without the United States—maybe this is the greatest lesson of [Obama's presidency](#)—without the United States playing a key role in some of the most exposed regions, what happens is the vacuum is being filled by other guys. So if America walks away from the Middle East, it doesn't mean there will be lasting peace there. It means we are now facing a potential war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Even to be more precise, it is already a proxy war between these two countries. We already see hundreds of thousands of people killed, [millions of refugees](#). And things could get only worse.

Nobody likes to hear stories about the global policemen now. But do you want to live in a neighborhood without police?

**ROBERT KAISER:** We could have a good discussion about that, but we won't this morning.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** I would like Syrians or other people to participate in this discussion.

**ROBERT KAISER:** Sure. I understand. But I think your assumption that we, the United States, have

the capacity to fix things up in these countries or in that region—I would dispute this.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** But fixing doesn't mean that—it's not about a full-mounted assault. So I think it's a mistake to think that we have choices between George W.'s aggressive approach and Obama's appeasement policies. Between war and appeasement there is a vast territory called leadership.

I believe that many things can be done if you are in the position to make a credible threat. Ronald Reagan hadn't used much force, but he achieved certain results.

So it's about restoring the credibility of the Oval Office. I think that the last two presidencies contributed dramatically to the destruction of this credibility. If you send troops all over the place, it's not a sign of strength. If you take them back without any conditions and declare that you want to disengage from the most explosive regions of the world, that is also a sign of weakness.

**ROBERT KAISER:** I don't fully agree with you, but I'm not going to argue with you this morning.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** Well, we're in a free country. We're not in Russia.

**ROBERT KAISER:** That's true.

Your goal, as you write in the book, is the democratization of authoritarian regimes, among other things. I'm not sure how we do that. I want you to talk for a minute about China, which you mentioned. If our goal starting tomorrow was to democratize China, how would we do that?

**GARRY KASPAROV:** Did I say China in the book?

**ROBERT KAISER:** No. I said China.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** I'm not an expert on China. I think it would be quite foolish to think that you can inspire the changes in China by some very aggressive proactive policy. I mean China is China. It's much more powerful than Russia in every term today.

But speaking about Russia, which I know a bit better than China, the book actually argues not for providing any support for Russian opposition. The book argues that America's faulty policy, accompanied by the European powers, was to provide support for Putin's regime at the very beginning. It was very difficult for people like me or [Boris Nemtsov](#) to talk to the very limited Russian audience that we could reach in, say, 2006–2007 and tell them about the true nature of Putin's regime, when even for those who liked us and wanted to believe us, they had Channel 1, Channel 2, Channel 3, showing Putin hosting the G8 Summit, having Bush, [Blair](#), [Berlusconi](#), [Merkel](#) I think at that time, [Chirac](#), [Harper](#). So who to believe? Putin knew how to build his reputation as the democratically elected leader of Russia.

What happened over the first eight years of his rule—I don't use the word "presidency" because even when technically somebody else was there he was still in charge—and even today, we hear voices saying that we had better deal with Putin because Putin is the best we can get in Russia. Putin knew and he knows how to play this game of political poker, how to use even his weak hand, but to bluff, to raise the stakes, and to get concessions he needs.

Today, he doesn't need friends as he did 10 years ago, he needs enemies, and he does it extremely well by creating an image of an invincible leader who can defy the free world, especially the United States.

So I have to say that some of his PR (public relations) coups staged—one of them actually was here in New York in September—were masterpieces. When he just arrived here for the United Nations

General Assembly, he was here officially to deliver a [speech](#). *The Wall Street Journal* asked me to write an [editorial](#). I said I could do it in advance because I knew that the whole trip was not about the speech but about meeting Obama, and he was here actually not to discuss anything but actually to make a picture.

You probably all remember the picture of Putin's reluctant [handshake](#) with Obama. I bet you he spent a few hours in front of the mirror actually practicing this. He knows the power of the image. This is the image that goes back to Russia. Everyone could see Putin reluctantly shaking Obama's hand because he had no choice but to go to New York, the belly of the beast, to the General Assembly of the United Nations, meet the U.S. president. The next day Russian planes [bombed](#) American backed-opposition in Syria.

So all I believe that is to be done is just for the United States and the free world to actually stop pretending that the counterparts, like Putin, are part of the civilized world. So I say you have to deal with them as you dealt with the Soviet Union, but please don't provide them credentials that they need so badly.

**ROBERT KAISER:** You imply here again this morning, and elsewhere, that Putin is in a strong position at the moment. It seems to me that Putin is in a terribly weak position.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** Did I say he is in a strong position?

**ROBERT KAISER:** It sounded like that.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** No, no, I didn't hear that. I said he is trying to substitute his economic weakness—and by the way, I said Russia today is a pale shadow of the Soviet Union, militarily and economically. But Putin knows how to substitute it with these sort of PR images. This is a virtual reality that he created. That's Russian propaganda today.

My mother still lives in Moscow. She's 78. She was born and raised under Stalin. She heard all sorts of Soviet propaganda, from Stalin to [Khrushchev](#), [Brezhnev](#), [Gorbachev](#). Now she keeps telling me that the difference between Putin's propaganda machine and what she heard when she was younger is that Soviet propaganda contains some elements of the positive future. It was still the idea that one day, with all the sacrifices, we could reach our shining house on the hill with communism, brotherhood.

Putin's propaganda has no positive images. It's like a cult of death. It's all about conflict, it's about confrontation. So it's very dark. That's the way Putin ruled the country. With the further economic decline in Russia, with the deterioration of the socioeconomic conditions, you could hear more and more aggressive propaganda on a 24/7 basis.

And again, it's not a sign of strength, but, unfortunately, it is desperate. He could do desperate things. If oil goes down to \$20, I'm not sure that the NATO borders will stop him.

**ROBERT KAISER:** Schmemann writes something in his review that I would love to hear your response to. He says this: "The real problem with *Winter Is Coming* is with its presumption that the United States is somehow responsible for what Russia has become or for what it should become. The question to be posed is whether even the most aggressive Western stance toward Putin would make him less dictatorial or Russia more free. That change must come from within."

How do you respond to that?

**GARRY KASPAROV:** Let's say that Mr. Schmemann and I have quite a long history, starting in 1990, when he was a big fan of Gorbachev and didn't like anybody who supported [Yeltsin](#). So there is a personal element in this article. And he was, of course, for many years a Putin apologist, if you read

his writings from 2003 to 2010 approximately.

We can go back to the 1940s, to the 1950s, to the 1960s, and you can see the disregard for U.S. foreign policy as a factor to help democratize the non-democratic countries, the proletarian countries. I suspect we disagree on the role that Ronald Reagan played in this.

**ROBERT KAISER:** We do.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** Yes, we do, okay. I grew up there. In my book, without Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan's contributions to history, I would still be playing chess under the Soviet flag. It was under Reagan when Gorbachev was forced to start opening up. Again, it's another long discussion. We can go on and look at certain details.

But it was after Reagan's categorical refusal to accommodate Gorbachev at [Reykjavik](#) that Gorbachev called [Sakharov](#). There was no [perestroika](#) and [glasnost](#) before Reykjavik in October 1986. This is a story of my country. I know it quite well.

Gorbachev's first two years in office were not about [perestroika](#) and [glasnost](#). They were about acceleration. It was a desperate attempt to stop the "[Star Wars](#)"/SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative) program because—and this is about credibility—ironically, the Soviet Politburo believed the U.S. president, without any scientific background, rather than their own scientists who kept telling them that SDI was a fake, it was just fantasy. But still, Reagan's credibility was so high that Gorbachev and the Politburo believed that it was a real threat. And, after Reagan refused to exchange SDI for nuclear disarmament, Gorbachev came back and one month later called Sakharov, and then in February 1987 we heard the words openness, [glasnost](#), [perestroika](#). That was the beginning of the process that led to the [demise of communism](#) in Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War.

**ROBERT KAISER:** I wrote a book about Gorbachev. I have a different sense of what happened. The first speech he gave in April 1985, a big speech to the Central Committee, was a confession that the old system had failed and that we have to find a new way to approach the failures. I disagree about Reykjavik.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** No, no, this is my native language. The key word there was "acceleration." Gorbachev talked about rearmament. He said "Yes, it has failed. We have to find new ways of competing with America." That's what he said in 1985 and that's what he repeated in 1986.

**ROBERT KAISER:** We won't debate this morning. I think it's time for others to have a shot. Thank you very much. That was good.

## Questions

**QUESTION:** Thank you. James Starkman.

You were born in Baku, Azerbaijan. That is the Houston, Texas, of Russia. You must fully realize how weak an economic hand Putin is holding. It is a petro-state. There are very few exports to the rest of the world from Russia except for natural gas, which they hold as a "[sword of Damocles](#)" over Europe, and oil.

The other factor, I think, limiting his hand is the advent of cyber-warfare. We could take down the Soviet electric grid with the flip of a few switches, if he invaded the Baltics, for example. How powerful do you think those two factors are in limiting his both international and domestic strength?

**GARRY KASPAROV:** Thanks for reminding me about my birthplace. In America I often say that I was born and raised in the Deep South right next to Georgia. [Laughter] That is factually correct, as

Azerbaijan borders the Republic of Georgia and it was the Deep South of the USSR.

Now, you are absolutely right in describing the economic situation in Russia. When you look at all the numbers of Putin's 16 years of rule, you will find out that it became much worse. In the year 2000, the share of oil and gas and refinery products of Russian exports was 40 percent. Today it is 70 percent.

When you look at Russian roads, for instance, we built in 2014–2015 four times less than in the year 2000. So all this money that has been accumulated—we're talking about probably trillions of dollars—they were not invested in rebuilding the Russian infrastructure but rather making a new class of billionaires. By the way, in the year 2000 when Putin took over there was no single Russian name in the *Forbes list of billionaires*. Now there are nearly 100, and I believe that there are many more that didn't make it there for some official reasons.

**ROBERT KAISER:** Putin himself.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** Putin is probably a trillionaire. It's a different list. So he is off the list. I believe that he, even today probably, but definitely a few years ago, controlled more money than any other individual in the history of the human race. You can look at the Russian budget, at the Russian hard currency reserves, at the oligarchs, and you would probably end up with something like a trillion dollars that he could move one way or another.

Now, speaking about economic weakness, being right on explaining the situation in Russia, I'm not sure that you are reaching the right conclusion. Yes, Putin is weak and he knows that there is no way that he can improve the situation. But he also has burned all the bridges. There is no way for him to retire. It's like a golden cage. So the only response could be to start another war.

You are talking about America being able to cause huge damage—that's what I said. Absolutely. There's no doubt that the United States and the European allies could do terrible damage to Russia.

The problem is you haven't done it. You could stop [Crimea](#), you could stop [war in Eastern Ukraine](#), you could do many things, but nothing happened. The way Putin sees it, it is not about power, it is about will.

He has a weak hand, yes, he has a pair of fives, and Obama has a full house. But it doesn't matter in poker. This is not chess. It's only a transparent game when you can see what you have and what your opponent has. It's about the will.

I said at the beginning of the Ukrainian Crisis and annexation of Crimea that the Europeans were looking for any excuse not to be aggressive by defending the borders, which again has been a pillar of European and global security since 1945, because they have a very different view of potential damages. So if you cut your finger or you do *hari-kari*, there is blood in both cases, with different outcomes.

But it seems to me that Putin is betting on lack of political will. That's what I am trying to encourage. I want to see, for instance, bipartisan debate here in this country, to talk about comprehensive policy, to send a message, because sometimes with a message you can reach more than with sending troops.

The problem with demonstrating weakness, with a policy of appeasement, is at every new cycle of the crisis you have to employ stronger measures. My fear is that Putin may misread these messages. And if he feels desperate, as I said—and check with Estonians or Latvians—he can decide that he can start a hybrid war in Narva or elsewhere.

Just to give you the flavor of the spirit of Eastern Europeans, a very short story. I spoke at the Nordic Business Forum in Finland three months ago. Huge audience, 5,000 people. Earlier that day, in the

morning, I spoke to a smaller group and I talked about Putin and Russia. They were listening. I wanted to make a joke in front of 5,000 people, 60 percent Finns, 10 percent Estonians and other Eastern Europeans, and guests from Nordic countries.

After saying it's great to be here in Helsinki, Finland, I said, "Oh, by the way, last night Russian TV called Finland a northwestern part of greater Russia." Not a single laughter in the audience. I was stunned. I said, "I apologize because, looking at your faces, I am afraid I caused you heart attacks."

**QUESTION:** Ron Berenbeim.

Listening to the tenor of both of your remarks, the question that arises, at least in my mind, is, how do you manage Soviet decline? In my opinion—and I have voted democratic most of my life—Reagan deserves a high place in history, not for his toughness but for his skill in managing Soviet decline. The same with [George H. W. Bush](#). We have lost our way when it comes to managing that decline since then, and we've got to find our way back. Can you give us some thoughts on that?

**GARRY KASPAROV:** I would still separate Ronald Reagan from President George H.W.'s [Chicken Kiev speech](#). That was actually the beginning of this very pragmatic approach at a time when it required a long-term strategy buildup.

I used the word "doctrine." It reminded me of the [Truman Doctrine](#) of 1947. I think it is the time to start looking for new institutions.

The United Nations served this purpose because when it was created in 1945 it had to prevent an open conflict between the USSR and the United States. Actually it worked. But the whole idea was to sort of freeze conflicts, not to solve them. Now, trying to appeal to an organization that was built as a geopolitical freezer, looking for solutions, looks quite odd to me.

The United States today should look at the experience of the 1940s, where the Truman administration built these new institutions. There were quite a few of them—National Security Council, CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), Voice of America, NATO, recognition of the states of Israel and West Germany—facing a much bigger enemy and much more uncertainty. So we have a lot of experience of the past that could help us to actually look into the future.

Again, I want to see the bipartisan consensus on how American foreign policy will look in this changing world, recognizing the fact that the threat that was there in the Cold War and [disappeared in 1991](#) is of a different nature but it is here today. We pretend that we are dealing with separate accidents. That's why I called the subtitle of the book "Vladimir Putin and the Enemies of the Free World."

I want this country to understand that unless somebody takes a leadership position, there will be no strategic solution that could help us to move into a brighter, more peaceful, and prosperous world.

**ROBERT KAISER:** May I just digress on a personally favorite theme of mine? I hope this isn't just an old man talking. We've suffered in this country a dramatic decline in the quality of the people who are in charge of managing foreign policy, in Washington particularly. The Congress of the United States contains remarkably few members who speak a foreign language, have studied abroad, traveled, read books about foreign countries, etc., etc.

Senator [Corker](#) is now the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee in his second term in Congress—no seniority, no experience. He's a nice guy. I know him. I said, "Why are you the chairman? What happened?" He said, "Oh, when I came into the Senate 10 years ago, I was the only member of the freshman class in the Republican Caucus who volunteered to join the Foreign Relations Committee." He quickly became the ranking member and then the chairman when the

Republicans regained control. This is a metaphor for me.

The State Department has no Soviet/Russian experts, compared to the old days when we had giants—[Thompson](#), [Bohlen](#), on and on—great people. We don't have anything like that now.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** [Scoop Jackson](#).

**ROBERT KAISER:** Scoop Jackson was a good senator who really cared. We have so few of them now. This is a very big problem for the country. Nobody talks about it.

You watch one of these Republican debates. There was [one](#) devoted to foreign policy. It made me shudder. These are [Know Nothings](#). These are all people who have no experience in foreign affairs, every single one. It's quite alarming. It's a big problem.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** You mentioned debates. I recently watched the [Nixon-Kennedy debates](#). It's quite amazing just compared to what you see today. You can hardly imagine them in those debates saying "I agree with Vice President Nixon" or "I agree with Senator Kennedy."

It's interesting. People have said that they disagreed on means, not on goals. These were two Americans thinking about the way to move the country forward. I rest my case.

**ROBERT KAISER:** Also, two Americans who had done a lot of thinking.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** Absolutely.

**QUESTION:** John Richardson.

I have a question about your moral foreign policy or moral policy you discussed at the beginning. By way of background, I grew up learning about the [Crusades](#) and the [Thirty Years' War](#) and the [Napoleonic Wars](#) and the [First World War](#) and the Second World War, etc., etc. There are lots more of them.

But there is a debate going on in the scientific and philosophical community in which one side says that human nature is the biggest limitation on any real progress in science and technology and government, and the other side says, "Oh no, science can really help, and you can solve problems and train people, and maybe if we have robots doing most of the work it will be easier." But anyway, I'd like to have your views on that debate.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** It is, I think, quite apparent that technological progress is always way ahead of the sort of improvement of human nature. We saw heinous crimes committed by very civilized nations in the 20th century with very rich histories in culture and science and social relations.

But having said that, we still could see some progress. Undoubtedly, the free world now established certain rules that are being obeyed voluntarily by hundreds of millions of people because we know it's the way to move forward.

I think the greatest challenge that we see today is that, as I said, in the world that is getting smaller, and the interaction between the present and the past is inevitable, our resolve to work towards compromise, signed agreements, friendship, hugging, and negotiation is being tested by those who believe that this is all just a trick, that your counterparts, your opponents, are actually enemies.

I'm afraid that we have to find a way to balance, to protect our achievements. What you can see in today's Germany, for instance—you could hardly imagine a more pacifist country.

And also not to let those who are attacking our way of life change this balance from within. Unfortunately, we are now seeing the effects of these peaceful policies—for instance, accepting refugees and trying to solve problems through negotiation and economic supplies—eventually all benefit the most aggressive ultra-nationalist forces.

By the way, that's one of the outcomes of Putin's actions in Syria. By supporting [Assad](#), creating more [refugees](#), he indirectly helps his main allies in Europe, which are the ultra-nationalist groups that have been always admiring Putin and could be his fifth column—or Trojan Horse—that will help to relieve sanctions.

So it's a complicated process. But I think that under no circumstances can we risk our values. It's those values that made us successful, the core of our civilization.

**QUESTION:** Allen Young.

If the Russian army marched into Ukraine today, would you recommend that the United States go to war?

**GARRY KASPAROV:** I never recommended the United States to use force, to use boots on the ground, in Ukraine. What I said, and I am saying now, is that Ukraine was a very important test for the resolve of the free world to defend the existing world order.

Unlike Estonia, Latvia, or Poland, Ukraine is not a member of NATO. That's why the United States has no direct obligations to send troops to defend this country. But if we're talking about moral foreign policy, if we're talking about credibility, we should not forget that in 1994 the United States, together with Great Britain, forced Ukraine to give up its nuclear weapons back to Russia in exchange for the territorial borders of Ukraine to be guaranteed.

There was the [Budapest Memorandum](#) signed by Bill Clinton, [John Major](#), Boris Yeltsin, and of course the Ukrainian president as well, [Leonid Kuchma](#). It was a rational move because after the collapse of the Soviet Union the Soviet nukes had been distributed in four former Soviet republics (Russia proper, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan) and it was logical to make sure that all those nukes eventually were only in Russia to facilitate new agreements to stop proliferation of nuclear weapons. There was the signature of the U.S. president.

Very few people remember what was the size of the Ukrainian nuclear arsenal at that time: 2,000 warheads. That was more than China, England, and France combined. So for those who say it was a memorandum, it was not obligations, yes, you are right. But it's about the credibility of the office.

I believed from the very beginning that the United States could offer more to help Ukraine. I think it's a shame that this administration—actually, it's not the administration; it's one person, the president of the United States, who acted against the advice of bipartisan support in Congress, against the advice of the State Department, and against the advice of his own [vice president](#)—and I'm not going to mention the Pentagon—to provide Ukraine with lethal weapons. I saw the list of those weapons required by the Ukrainians. It's a very small list. One U.S. base could actually provide it without even noticing.

It would be more of a psychological move to send a message to Putin and to Russian generals, because at the end of the day it is the Cold War mentality, which unfortunately we're living through this now. It was about your psychological readiness to stand your ground and to demonstrate resolve.

By showing weakness in Crimea and in Eastern Ukraine, I believe that the West is provoking Putin to take further actions. If Putin moves into Ukraine, of course more help will be needed. But the Ukrainian army is pretty strong, strong enough to inflict damage beyond repair to Putin. He knows. The reason

he stopped in Eastern Ukraine was not because he turned into a dove out of a hawk. He just calculated the damages and he knew that it would be devastating for him to see thousands of body bags coming from Ukraine to Russia.

He expected that the ethnic Russians in Ukraine would be embracing Russian tanks and Russian soldiers. Contrary to his expectations, the overwhelming majority of ethnic Russians in Ukraine sided with the Ukrainian army, not with the invading force. What actually we saw in Eastern Ukraine was more like a Russian civil war. Most of the people fighting on the Ukrainian side were ethnic Russians because they knew what Putin's Russia was and they didn't want to live in this country. So it was a conscious choice of Ukrainians and Russians living in Ukraine to stick with Europe and not to go back to Putin's Golden Horde.

**QUESTION:** Krishen Mehta from the Aspen Institute.

Mr. Kasparov, if you don't mind, can I ask a question to Mr. Kaiser? I would welcome Mr. Kasparov's comments too.

I wonder to what extent Mr. Vladimir Putin is the result perhaps of some of the Western policies after the break-up of the Soviet Union—for example, the economic isolation of Russia that took place; the expansion of NATO, which became quite a threat to Russia; the cut-off of Russia from some of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) financing which was critically needed by Russia; some of the neo-conservative views of Mr. [Rumsfeld](#) and Mr. [Cheney](#).

I wonder to what extent the Western actions also take responsibility for the emergence of a nationalist leader like Mr. Putin and if, on reflection, as Ron has pointed out, in managing this process the West could have taken a more judicious view on the post-Soviet developments so that Putin would not have been a natural outcome, as it did happen.

**ROBERT KAISER:** That is a good question that's impossible to answer, in my opinion, for the following reasons to begin with.

Who gave us Vladimir Putin? Well, a very slimy oligarch named [Berezovsky](#) gave us Mr. Putin, who was very close to Yeltsin and apparently persuaded Yeltsin in 1999 that he should appoint Putin prime minister. This was the key step, I think, in the sequence. It's a very important moment, and we had nothing to do with it. America played no role in selecting this particular guy.

Peter Osnos, the publisher of this book, and I—Peter was my successor as the Moscow correspondent of *The Post*—he very proudly published a [book](#) of interviews with Putin in 2001, a very clever propaganda operation that was done for the Russian market to try to humanize Putin. It was translated and published by the same publisher who has published Mr. Kasparov now.

I reviewed it in *The Washington Post*—harshly. This was my first personal exposure to Putin and his thinking and I was very turned off by it. I said: This is a very strange man who decided that he wanted to make his future inside the KGB in the late 1970s, after the KGB's colors had been fully revealed to every young Russian like him. He knew what he was doing. We can't have much confidence that this is a good future for Russia with this guy. That is just one example.

This is a long, complex sequence. We did not isolate Russia economically. We made Putin a member of the G8.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** Yeltsin. Putin inherited it.

**ROBERT KAISER:** Yes, exactly. I beg your pardon.

We sent a great deal of expertise and money at various times to try to help Yeltsin. The Yeltsin regime was chaotic in many respects. Boris Nemtsov, a friend of both Mr. Kasparov and of mine, a great Russian figure, in my view, was enormously frustrated by his boss Yeltsin, who in the end picked Putin over Nemtsov, which was a tragic mistake. Life and history could have been very different had he picked Nemtsov instead at that moment. And so on.

The expansion of NATO is one of the most interesting questions for intellectual debate that I know. When it was being proposed, its main advocates—and they were very eloquent and politically very effective—were Polish, both Polish from Poland and Polish-Americans. They created the Expand NATO lobby.

I used to ask the question in Washington: "What is the question to which the expansion of NATO is the answer?" The best answer I ever got to my question was, "This is the best way to reassure the Poles, the Czechs, the Hungarians, and later the Estonians and Latvians, and so on, that we welcome them into our world, that they can be part of a normal European world."

In fact, in my view, that function would have been much better performed by the European Community. If the EU had offered membership of some kind much earlier to the Eastern European countries, the expansion of NATO would have been unnecessary in some fundamental way. The Europeans were not ready to do this. This was historically, I think, a big mistake.

NATO, in my view, is not an anti-Russian institution. But it's understandable to me why many Russian politicians and military people consider it as such, because they grew up that way, that was their reflex.

So symbolically it was difficult and complicated. I don't think it was morally wrong, to invoke Mr. Kasparov's category, but it was difficult.

I'm sorry I can't give a simple answer to your question. But it's a good question.

**GARRY KASPAROV:** I have to add that I am always appalled to hear these kinds of questions that basically disregard Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Poles, Ukrainians, as second-class citizens. They have their own countries and they suffered. It's not about reflexes, it's not about emotions. They suffered under German and then eventually Soviet occupation. They had reasons to fear a resurrection of Russian imperialism. Unfortunately, they were right.

And by the way, the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations were very friendly to Russia, to Yeltsin's Russia and to Putin. The [George W. administration](#) made no moves that could be translated as unfriendly to Russia, until [Russia invaded Georgia](#). There was pretty good cooperation since George W. [discovered](#) Putin's soul between his eyes in 2001.

Unfortunately, I have no doubt—and all my friends in these neighboring countries—that if Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania would not be members of NATO, Putin's tanks would be today in Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius.

I believe that calling Ukraine a "buffer state" is an insult for 45 million people. This is not the 19th or the 20th century. It is the 21st century. Whether a country is small or big, it can decide its own future.

I am appalled to hear [comments](#) from the Russian [foreign minister](#) about Montenegro, a nation that is so far away and doesn't have a common border with Russia, that joining NATO is against Russian interests. I don't understand how you could dictate to nations that have democratically elected governments for making a choice to join NATO, to join the EU, or to do whatever they want with their foreign policy. You cannot force friendship. You can bring people in, you can embrace people.

I think we are very lucky that NATO moved that far east because it saved us from a much bigger war in

Eastern Europe.

**JOANNE MYERS:** I want to thank you both for a 21st-century discussion on 20th-century history. Thank you.

### **Audio**

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### **Video Clips**

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