A NEW COLD WAR?

EXPLAINING RUSSIA'S NEW
CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE WEST

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What I want to do today is answer one really big question. If we have time maybe we'll get to the second question, but I want to answer one big question, because that's what we should do as academics. It comes from an experience I had right after I left government. I came home to Palo Alto, and one of my neighbors said, "Mike you should come over for lunch, we're interested in hearing about your experiences in Moscow." So I went over to lunch and we started talking, and my neighbor started telling some stories about his time in government. My neighbor is George Schultz.

George mentored me for three decades. Incredible career, fantastic person. Started telling me about his last two years in government. 1987, 1988: the

end of the Cold War. And he started to talk about this historic moment, the relationships he had with his counterpart in the Soviet Union: Edward Shevardnadze, Ronald Reagan, and Mikhail Gorbachev who was the leader of the Soviet Union, and he said "man we did some really good work in my last two years of government." And as I left, I thought to myself, "man what a disaster happened on my watch, my last two years of government." Because everything that George talked about, which we all thought, by the way, was going to be permanent. It's the end of history, it's the new era, it's the integration of Russia into the west. Suddenly, the last two years I was in government didn't seem so inevitable, on the contrary it represented the end of George's time. Think about the obvious facts about where we're at right now. Russia intervening in its neighborhood, annexing the territory, the United States portrayed as the enemy. I think we're up to 83% in terms of those who have a negative view of the United States.

To Putin, it's a zero sum struggle against the west, and it's not just about interests, but I would say it's about ideological things. And then our response also I think demonstrates that there's real sense of conflict, I won't go through the list: [Obama's U.N. Speech, Western Sanctions, NATO focused on Russia Threat again, Russia kicked out of G8, Debate of Arming Ukraine, Americans see Russia as enemy again, World (not just U.S.) views Russia

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as threat]. Things were better in the Brezhnev era, I would even argue. I think you got to go deep into the Cold War to remember a time when there was so much confrontation between the United States and Russia. And I would argue as I do at the last bullet point here: Russia and the West.

So what happened? Why are we in this mess of learning? And I really do think this is a mess; a really serious one, a scary one. So what happened? That's all I want to do today. If you leave today with an understanding of my answer to that question, that's all I aspire to be, and I'm going to use a lot of ways to build the argument. My BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front) is that I'm going to veer to this third argument just so you know where I'm going. But I want to march you through these others to add force and to add explanation as to why I think. Ultimately, this is why I think this is about domestic politics in Russia. For the Social scientists in the room, you'll see that my argument starts with looking at what we call structural theories and then I move through different levels of analysis until I get to individuals. And just to be very simple about this, structural arguments basically say that innate forces make history—balance of power, culture, geography—and that individuals just reflect those bigger structural forces. The other cartoonization is that people make history. They're shaped by these forces, but individuals matter. Their ideas matter, and

that shapes history to a greater extent than these structures. Now of course, there's somewhere in the middle, that I'm going to really hone in to the point about the role that individuals play and why I don't think these structural arguments do not apply particularly to the Russian story. You're going to see that I really focus on change in Russia, not change in the United States. And I'm not just doing that because I'm an Obama hack, though I am. I worked for him for seven years actually. But I really do think that this story is mostly driven by what happens inside Russia, not inside our country.

So let's start with the first argument. This argument is about the nature of politics, that has to do with the balance of power in the international system [shows a time-lapse of Europe which begins with Kievan Rus]. This starts at 835 now, and we're scrolling through European history. What you're seeing is that the borders are changing, countries are getting powerful, and countries are getting weaker. And so one explanation for why you see Russia changing the borders in Russia right now is this. This is the history for international politics that is true for a thousand years. Why would it not be true in the year 2014? So the argument here applied to the current Russian intervention in Ukraine is that this is just the natural order of things. Russia was weak after the collapse of the USSR, it had this interim of weakness, but now Russia's back in this kind of normal way, like

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you would expect. It is actually not a basket case country that you read twenty years ago, if you look at military capacity, or even economic capacity, Russia is not a super power, but a power, and is certainly rising in power, so we should expect these kinds of things to happen, when great powers rise up and press against weaker powers like Ukraine or Georgia or other countries in the neighborhood. So, I don't want to take on the burden of refuting those thousand years of history. What I'm about to say about Russia and other countries is not to say that I have one theory that explains all countries at all times. But, I have some problems applying that theory to the Russia that I knew, and the Russia that I worked with while at the White House and as ambassador.

First thing is of course not all countries rise up and accumulate power and attack their neighbors. There's got to be more to the story. Why did Russia do it at this time? Second one is counterfactual. Twenty years ago, one could imagine a more democratic Russia might have behaved differently. I want to focus on the third one. Does anyone remember Putin's speech, when he had to bring in all ethnic Russians from other countries and bring them into the Russian Federation? This is a trick question. He didn't give it in 2012, or 2002, or 2013. That's the point I want to make. He wasn't focused on that. He wasn't talking about the necessity for a great power to accumulate new

power and to bring in folks, [like] European leaders in the 20th century, before they came into power, that's not what Putin was talking about when I was ambassador. In fact, when I was ambassador, the most important foreign policy objective for Putin was probably something nobody has ever heard. Nobody was writing about it, nobody was thinking about it. It was the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union. Putin's response to the EU? He wanted to bring together all of the countries of the former Soviet Union into this economic union to balance the EU. Now some would say it's coercive, some would say it's not. That is not important to me. What was clear was that it was the focus of Putin's foreign policy. Not Iran by the way, not Syria, this was [the] big baby, this was his big project. To make it work, he wanted all of Ukraine, not just Crimea, all of Ukrainians to join the Eurasian Economic Union. Know why? Well, the other countries in the Union, Belarus and Kazakhstan, pretty small countries and small populations. Ukraine was the big prize in terms of having enough critical mass to lift off. Part of it by the way, is there's 40 million-plus consumers in Ukraine. And those consumers are actually some of the few consumers in the world who consume Russian products. They're [Russia's] not very good at that [producing], but there's one place in the world that'll buy made-in-Russia products; it's the Ukraine.

And therefore, Putin was ready to fight hard to get them in. In fact, in the struggle, In the EU and their accession agreement to Yanukovich, he [Putin] put on the table 15 billion dollars as an incentive for Yanukovich to join the union. So that's what he was focused on, not invading Crimea, not putting troops and proxies in the Ukraine, so something else has to be added to this story, to have a complete understanding of why this conflict is in the year 2014.

Two other small footnotes to remind you that even in 2012, 2013, and in the beginning of 2014, Putin was not talking about us [U.S.] being supporters of Nazis in Ukraine and an enemy of Russia. That wasn't part of his lexicon at the time. And even in a few small ways, he was still trying to signal that he wanted Russia to have some kind of working relationship with the West. When I was ambassador for example he let out Mikhail Khodorkovsky from jail, he was a Russian billionaire. I think he was worth 40 billion when he was arrested. Spent 10 years and jail. Finally let him out. And I asked his very senior official in the Kremlin why did you let him out now. And he said, we want to have a better working relationship with you guys, it was for you. You the United States. He let out [Pussy Riot], again "as a gift," as one of my colleagues at the minister of foreign affairs said for us. For me, most spectacularly was this party, this most fantastic party that Putin threw. He spent 50 billion dollars on it allegedly. I was there too [Sochi]. I toured your [Athletes] Facilities. I can't compare Olympics I confess. But it was a pretty spectacular event, a lot of money spent, and the messaging of that event to me, as a keen consumer of the message, was this is not your Soviet Union. We're different. Russia's back, we're part of the world today, we're not separated like we were last time where some countries attended back in 1980. There were 10,000 of these Russians in these incredibly colorful outfits running around, mostly college students, fluent English, and their job was to make you feel that you were in a friendly place. And I took 200 photographs with various kids like that, the U.S. ambassador,

the nasty West[ern] representative. That was the feeling here. And really strikingly, if you watch the closing ceremonies, you may remember there was one episode where in the stadium they had these placards or drawings of their writers flip up. How many stadiums in the World could flip up 50 or 60 writers and everyone in the stadium knew who they were? Pretty impressive culture and history that they have. Two of them jumped out at me, Brodsky and Solzhenitsyn: Dissidents. This was to say, we're reclaiming these people. We're back. This is for everybody for us to say this is not the Soviet Union. So why do you put in all that money and put on a show and a week later invade Crimea? There is something more we have to add.

Alright, second explanation: It's all our fault. This is popular in Moscow, in some circles in Washington, and most certainly some people in Ithaca that think this. Let me unpack two different arguments about U.S. policy, one of which, it's important to understand, is at least part of the explanation. I meant to say it on the first piece, it is a necessary condition that Russian power, this growing power, to the explanation. It's an important part of the story that Russia has new capability, but what I'm trying to get at is where does the intention come from to use that capability? Likewise, I would say that the U.S. policy story is part, at least of the post-facto narrative. And there's the standard arguments you'll hear Russian leaders make of U.S. foreign policy pushing on Russia to make democracy, doom markets, expand NATO and bomb Serbia, and invade Iraq, overthrow country's leaders that are friendly to Russia and we [did] the same thing in the Arab Spring, and in the Ukraine and Russia. That's the basic narrative today, to why finally Putin had to push back. He had to push back and reassert Russia and that's why you see what we see today in Ukraine. In other words, [because of] the expansion of NATO, Putin had to invade the Ukraine. I want to be clear, there's something to this narrative, and in fact I quote myself here.

"Failure [by the West] to embrace and defend the

PUTIN GREETS GÉRARD DEPARDIEU,
A FRENCH CITIZEN AND STAUNCH
SUPPORTER, DURING SOCHI.

upstart leadership [after the fall of Gorbachev] would provide the real opportunity for a counter-revolutionary backlash. If economic decline and civil strife were to continue under a new regime, calls for order and tradition flavored with nationalist slogans will resonate with a suffering people. At this future but avoidable stage in the drama of the Soviet revolution, the specter of dictatorship will be real.” (Dated August 19th 1990).

I was worried about this. I was worried that we weren’t going to help the transition enough. I was worried that we weren’t going to see that this was a pro-Western revolution and that we would be stuck in our Cold War ways and that there would be a reaction to it, just because we wouldn’t do enough. There was reason to be worried about that. I want to be clear, you understand, that I felt that way in real time about these debates including the debate about NATO expansion by the way. But there’s a problem with that explanation. And that’s something called the Reset. For better or for ill, I was the architect of the Reset or part of the team. We did this thing called the Reset and the essence of it’s pretty simple. We [Obama administration] came in to power, we won November of 2008, we had a transition period, we reviewed all of the policies, as every administration I’m sure does. I was in charge of the policy review for Russia. And as we walked through President-Elect Obama,

our thinking and our explanation for why U.S.-Russian relations were as difficult as they were back then (remember that the Russians had just gone into Georgia August of that same year), he kind of looked at all this and said “I just don’t get it. Why does Russia want Iran to have a nuclear weapon? Why does Russia want Al Qaeda to win in Afghanistan? Why does Russia not want to reduce our nuclear arsenals?” In other words, he marched through the big issues we later tackled for the next three or four years, and for him, leaving aside history and leaving aside personality, and just thinking about our national interests, he saw that there was more overlap in our interests, our security and economic interests, than confrontation, if we just looked at things from a dispassionate, rational, and with a fresh look.

And in particular, he had this fondness back then about win-win outcomes in international outcomes between states. Not zero sum, but if we work together we can achieve outcomes that are good for your country, and good for ours. And if you look at some of his early speeches about Russia, you’ll see that he used this quite a bit. And we got some stuff done. We got some pretty big stuff done. This [Picture of Obama and Medvedev] is in Prague, the signing of the new START Treaty, we got rid of 30% of nuclear weapons in our arsenals. We haven’t finished yet, but we were on our way. We got done what we called the Northern Distribution

THESE ARE CORE NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AT THIS TIME, AND ON ALL OF THEM, RUSSIA WAS OUR PARTNER, NOT OUR ENEMY, NOT OUR COMPETITOR.

I WANT TO STRESS FOR YOU THAT THESE ARE NOT MARGINAL SYMBOLIC GESTURES.

Network: This is a supply network that goes to Afghanistan, part of which goes through Russia, through planes through trains, through trucks to supply our troops and other personnel fighting the war in Afghanistan. When we came to power, this [Northern Distribution Network] was just getting started, maybe 2% or 3%. By the time I left the White House this was over 50% of our supplies, including flying U.S. soldiers through Russian airspace. That hadn't happened since World War II. And suddenly, in this moment of the Reset, you had this cooperation against a common enemy in Afghanistan. By the way, that may not seem that important to you, there may be a lot of ways to get to Afghanistan, actually in 2009, over 90% of our supplies went through the Southern route through Pakistan. And you may recall, we were increasing our operations in Pakistan, some pretty hostile operations, including one very famous one against Osama Bin Laden. And we worried that if we did that, if we violated their sovereignty, the government of Pakistan was likely to close those supply routes, and we were right about that. They did, that's exactly what they did. But when they did it, they closed it at 45% levels rather than at the 90-95% levels that they were at. We [UNSC] put the harshest sanctions on Iran ever. That was primarily because of our cooperation with the United States and Russia.

And then dogs that didn't bark are also worth

remembering in this period. The Kyrgyzstani revolution that happened in 2010, there were 100 people who died, the regime fell, 300 people fled into Uzbekistan, on the verge of what we feared was going to be an ethnic civil war in Kyrgyzstan. I was still at the National Security Council at the time [and] without question it was the scariest period of my time in the U.S. government, because I worried that we were about to witness genocide and have very few means to try to stop it. But that worst-case scenario never happened because working with the Russians, the President called Medvedev and said it is not in our national interest for civil war in Kyrgyzstan and we had this base, the Manas air base renamed the Manas Transit center. We had some vital interests there, they had them, the story is a long one, but the essence of the story [is that] we managed that and the nightmare scenario never happened. I took some time on these things, because I want to stress for you that these are not marginal symbolic gestures we were doing with Russia. We weren't just holding hands and singing Kumbaya and talking about peace and understanding. These are core national security concerns for the United States of America at this time, and on all of them, Russia was our partner, not our enemy, not our competitor.

These were really big things. [Slides move on to show U.S. and Russian paratroopers training together]. Here are U.S. and Russian Paratroopers

IN 2001, BUSH CALLED PUTIN
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stuff done. We got a bunch of things done; we got them into the WTO, the PNTR (the Permanent Normalized Trade Relations with Russia), new Visa Regime. We had momentum even on the economic story, its modest, but moving in the right direction. Increased travel, I fought hard with homeland security and other agencies that get nervous with too many Russians in our country. We liberalized the visa regime and the numbers went the right way. This is just [Graph of opinion polls] Russian attitudes towards the United States and after hitting 17% after the Russian-Georgian war, at the peak of the Reset 60% of Russians had a positive view of the United States. And by the way, same thing in our country, over 60% of you all [Americans] had a positive view of Russia just 4 years ago. All of that happened after these events, after NATO expansion, after the Iraq War, after the Orange Revolution. So for me, you can't explain this or this [charts of opinion polls] by citing these factors. All that stuff happened, it was real. Believe me I was there and it felt genuinely that we were creating a different kind of cooperative relationship with Russia. All of that stuff, the Reset happened after the earlier events. So there's got to be something else to explain how we got to where we got. Now there's another argument of course, in the spirit of its all the west's fault, and that Obama's weak. Obama created the permissive conditions for Putin to go into Ukraine; he didn't deter Putin enough. This is what happens when

you have a weak leader in the White House. This is a little bit of an unfair quote. This is from the speaker of the house:

“When you look at this chaos that's going on, does anybody think that Vladimir Putin would have gone to Crimea had George W. Bush been president of the United States? No! Even Putin is smart enough to know that Bush would have punched him in the nose in about 10 seconds.”

That captures that argument. People say a lot of silly things before elections so let's give him a break, but just to remind you why I think that's a silly argument; first we did push back, but the second thing is that every time leaders in the Kremlin thought about using force in Eastern Europe, they talked about the American factor. In fact, I thought about this: so when I was in the White house, we would have these discussions about Iran or North Korea or Libya or Syria and at some point in the conversation, the President would turn to me and say “well what are the Russians going to do about this, what do the Russians think?”

There must be an equivalent in the Kremlin, let's call him Ivan Ivanovich. Every time Russia gets ready to use force in Eastern Europe, Brezhnev or Krushchev or Putin turns to Ivan Ivanovich, and asks “well what are the Americans going to do Ivan Ivanovich?” and the answer every time

*PUTIN SEES THE WORLD IN ZERO SUM TERMS; MEDVEDEV
SEES THE WORLD IN WIN-WIN TERMS.*

*OBAMA AND MEDVEDEV
FORMED A FRIENDLY
RELATIONSHIP EARLY IN
OBAMA'S PRESIDENCY.*

is: nothing. We haven't in all these historic times. Even Ronald Reagan hasn't been able to deter the crackdown against solidarity in 1981, I don't think anyone would accuse Ronald Reagan of being weak against the communists. I think the patterns [are] pretty clear. What's interesting about the pattern is not about our ability to deter aggression, and I would argue, and now I'm going to provoke you, that if you compare all of these cases [Bush with Georgia, Reagan with Poland, Johnson with Czechoslovakia, Eisenhower with Hungary, Obama with Ukraine, Barack Obama's response to Ukraine looks most like Ronald Reagan. Do you know how many Russians went on the sanctions list when Russia invaded Georgia? Zero. How many Russian companies? Zero. Even non-lethal assistance sent to the Ukrainians is already quite substantial. So I don't think the "Obama's weak" [argument] is that compelling, but I'm biased so I accept that.

So we've talked about the balance of the international system and Russia as a rising power. We've talked about U.S. policy and most certainly some of those elements of that U.S. Policy help the post-facto explanation that Putin provides for what Russia is doing right now. But as I talked about, there were these other moments in U.S.-Russia relations. There must be something else after this Reset period that helps us understand how we got into the mess we're in. And in my

view, it really does focus mostly in on Russian domestic politics. So I want to focus on two big changes. There are many more, but the first one is Putin to Medvedev. I remember this day very vividly: I was still in Washington, I had already been nominated, I was going through the process [of becoming ambassador] and a couple of days later, the president pulled me back and said, "Well what do you think of this?" And I said, "Well you've developed a relationship with Medvedev," and they had a pretty good working relationship, "but remember Putin's always been the big dog, always been the big decision maker." That was our analysis in government [and] I always thought that academics thought this as well: Medvedev's just the puppet right? There should be continuity. By the way, the Russians were also communicated this message of continuity at this time.

Turns out we were wrong about that. And it turns out we were wrong in thinking about Medvedev as doing only what Putin wanted. Because it turned out with more of our interaction with Putin, that they have different worldviews. Putin sees the world in zero sum terms; Medvedev sees the world in win-win terms. Putin saw the United States as a competitor, Medvedev saw the United States as a partner. And perhaps most problematic for us, as you'll see later, the United States for Putin uses its power to overthrow regimes that it doesn't like. [There is] a lot of empirical data to support that

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THE ENTIRE RUSSIAN REGIME.*

hypothesis if you look over the last seven years. And he therefore has this paranoia, especially about the CIA, he's really fixated on the CIA. And he thinks that this is what the United States does irrespective of whether that president is Bush or Obama.

Obama, by the way, tried to one time push back on this analysis as Putin went through this litany of regime change. As he of course went through Iraq as well, when he got the chance he said, "Hey, you and I are on the same boat on that, Mr. President." Putin kind of implied [that] the military industrial complex runs your country anyway, you guys [presidents] come and go, but this continues in the tradition of U.S. foreign policy. So that challenges this vision of win-win outcomes. And I think in retrospect, we underestimated the differences between these two gentlemen [Medvedev and Putin]. I think we underestimated how far in Medvedev had leaned to make the Reset work.

Second thing. In between this announcement in 2011 [Putin's declaration to run for the presidency] and this election in March of 2012, there was a parliamentary election in Russia in December of 2011. By my estimates and our estimates as a government, it was stolen—falsified at the levels of previous elections. No big deal. It's the way Russian elections are. We've got our analysts inside the government and outside the government. This is normal falsification, nothing extraordinary. But between this election and the last one, something's changed in society. People got richer, people began thinking about their rights a little bit more, and technology helped. You had smartphones, V Kontakte, Facebook,

Twitter. And so this time, when this falsification happened, it got discovered, it got documented, it moved around the internet in the rapid way, and some folks—the urban rich educated folks, not everybody— but those folks [picture of Volodnaya square], they decided that they were going to protest this election, they said, "We don't like our votes being stolen," and they whipped themselves up and they moved from initially just protesting the vote and eventually to protesting the entire regime, the entire Russian regime.

Putin didn't like it. I heard him say, "These people, I made them rich. I'm the guy who turned Russia around. That Yeltsin guy brought the economic disaster, I'm the one that made them rich, how could they turn on me now?" The second response was how to deal with these protests, how to respond, and how to come up with a new argument for first the campaign, but then to come up with an argument for legitimacy; for Putin to just be in power. The economy wasn't growing in the way it was his first 8 years, and he was entering his third term. And so they debated it. It was not inevitable, but Putin decided that they needed to crackdown on these folks, and, as part of the crackdown and as part of the argument towards his electoral base, to resurrect the U.S. as an enemy, as the force that was creating this. Just like in Serbia, Ukraine in 2004, just like in the Arab spring, the United States was coming in and organizing this. And that was the argument that Putin was beginning to sell.

Over time, we learned that it wasn't just electoral politics; it was here to stay. I then became a part of it. Because of some of the things I've written as an academic, they cut and pasted some of things I've

*McFAUL WORKED AS
AMBASSADOR TO RUSSIA FROM
2012 THROUGH FEBRUARY OF
2014.*

written to argue the fact that I was sent by President Obama to foment regime change in Russia. That was my assignment. Nevalny, one of the opposition leaders, he was my project. They even said one time that McFaul sent Nevalny to Yale for six months to get his revolutionary training. And I tweeted back, why would a Stanford guy send somebody to Yale?

But this was the new Russia. They put out a calendar: “McFaul Girls,” and every month had a different opposition leader in it—both in Russian and English by the way. This is a poster [poster with various opposition leaders] from the May 6th demonstration of 2012, one that actually turned violent and some of [whom] were arrested and [are] still in jail today. This just says the political circus is coming back to the arena. I’m called the artistic director. This other woman is Sobchak who announced that she was fleeing Russia at the advice of the FSB, which is the successor organization to the KGB, for fears that she’ll be assassinated. [Next picture is a Photoshop with Mcfaul’s face as a Nevalney supporter]. He ran for mayor when I was ambassador, won almost a quarter of the vote with almost no resources [and] no access to television. I’m photoshopped here. [Shows cartoon of him training the Russian opposition and association with Nazis]. Okay so you get the feel, those kinds of arguments about us being the enemy, supporting the opposition, all of

those domestic problems are caused by us. Make us the enemy, that’s how you mobilize the people. [Shows a picture of Obama being compared with the leader of ISIS]. Last piece on this, this is more recent, this is after Ukraine, but just to give you flavor for what’s on TV these days, this is their main talk show [Rossiya-1]. It is the equivalent of 60 minutes. This is comparing Barack Obama to the leader of ISIS. [Comparison includes disrespect for the rights of others, willingness to kill without trial, aggression, intolerance, messianism]. That’s where Putin decided to go.

Last two things I wanted to say. One, this was not inevitable, in my opinion. For my argument to work, leaders have to have choices, have to have options, and I would just remind you that President Medvedev, in response to the same demonstrations, had a different approach. [Shows picture of Medvedev meeting with officials] Here he is meeting with Boris Nemsov, and Udaltsov. This meeting took place out at Medvedev’s Dacha, and it was his attempt to negotiate a path to political reform moving forward.

By the way, the only time I ever met the opposition was in the cloakroom of Medvedev’s Dacha that day. I was coming into a meeting with the president and these guys were coming out grabbing their coats, they all freaked out when they saw me, especially Udaltsov who was not a

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I WANT TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT WE SUPPORTED A PACTED TRANSITION; WE SUPPORTED A NEGOTIATION BETWEEN YANUKOVICH AND THE OPPOSITION.

big fan of the United States. I think it's important to remember that there was an alternative path. It was not inevitable that the leader of Russia would take the course that Putin chose. And yet, even up to the events that happened in Ukraine, I would say that Putin was still struggling with these dual impulses. On the one hand, he thought we were

fomenting revolution. On the other, he thought that the Exxon Mobile Rosneft deal, allegedly for 500 billion dollars, was the most important event in U.S.-Russian relations. He told us one day that he deliberately chose an American company to build this kind of bridge with the United States.

It wasn't inevitable, he had this argument that he was developing, he had this suspicion about us, we stopped cooperating on a lot of thing, but even up until February these dual impulses were in play; in fact I saw them in our interactions with him, including, very famously, when he and President Obama sat down in September 2013 and cut this deal to eliminate chemical weapons in Syria. Then the last straw that broke the camel's back was of course the fall of government in Kiev in February of last year [2014].

I want to make it clear that we supported a pact transition; we supported a negotiation between Yanukovich and the opposition. We didn't like it; Yanukovich had just killed 100 people. We debated it but we decided at the end of the day that that was a better outcome for both the stability in Ukraine and for our interests with respect to our relationship with Ukraine and Russia. And we worked it, we worked it hard. I think the Vice President called Yanukovich a dozen times to sit down and negotiate a deal with the opposition. When he did it I was in Sochi, we all did our high

VIKTOR YANUKOVICH WAS REMOVED FROM POWER IN THE SAME MONTH THAT McFAUL RESIGNED FROM OFFICE.

fives, we thought it was a breakthrough, and a few hours later Yanukovich left. He went to Kharkov and then to Crimea, and then he ended up in Rostov. I to this day do not totally understand why he left the way he did. He said his life was in danger, Putin's now said that, but his life was in danger in Kharkov or Crimea that was not our reading of this situation at all. So it's a little mysterious to why he left the way he did. But it wasn't portrayed mysteriously for Putin. For Putin, this was the CIA again. We double-crossed him. This was a giant smokescreen—this negotiating with him. This was another case in which the United States was fomenting regime change on his neighborhood. So he struck back. That's when he went into Crimea; he decided to support these fighters in Eastern Ukraine.

*THE DECADENT WEST IS A
BIG MESSAGE BACK HOME.*

So I'll end with good news and bad news. The good news is that, if you buy my argument, is that this is not some master design by Putin. I don't see that evidence. I think that he's overrated as a grand strategist. This was tactical and emotional, not strategic. And therefore, I think it's a question to where it goes. And more generally, if you buy my argument here, we are not destined forever, because of culture or history, or the balance of power in the international system, to have conflict with Russia.

The bad news is I don't see a way for Putin to back down from his position now. He's fighting a messianic, ideological struggle against Nazis, NATO, and the decadent West. The decadent West is a big message back home. We are evil, that's how we're being portrayed, we're ISIS. I think it's very difficult to negotiate with evil. I want to be

wrong, because I think this is a really bad scenario for us and Russia, but I don't see him changing. I think he's flipped to the other side and that this dual impulse is now a single impulse. And he's playing to the bitter end. Bad news is also that he can be in power until 2024 and perhaps even longer. And he works out 3 hours today. Aside from this 10-day disappearance, he looks in pretty good shape today. The real question to me is not where Putin has decided to go. It's about our response to this. Do we understand it in the way I've said, and do we have the willpower to deal with Russia for what I think will be years, if not more, to come?

*RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA
ARE EXPECTED TO RETAIN
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