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CAROL

Good morning. It's still morning here in the Boston area. I'd like to welcome you to this session of the Starr

SAIVETZ:

Forum, and our focus on Russia seminar series. I'm really excited about the session today. Our two speakers are both very well known, both here and in Russia. Dmitri Trenin is the director of the Carnegie Moscow Center and he's been with the center since its inception. He also chairs its research council and the foreign and security policy program.

Barry Posen is the Ford International Professor of Political Science at MIT, and is the director emeritus of the MIT Security Studies Program, of which I am a part. He is the author of several books, including *Restraint: A New Foundation for US Grand Strategy*. And I guess I should introduce myself as well. I'm Carole Saivetz, and I'm a senior advisor at the MIT Security Studies Program. I'm very excited about this today. And as I told both Dmitri and Barry, this all started because Dmitri wrote a wonderful piece that analyzed Biden's foreign policy.

And I said, oh, wouldn't it be great if I could get Barry and Dmitri to talk to each other about US-Russian relations. So I'm really pleased to introduce Barry first. He will speak first and then Dmitri will speak. And then we we'll open up for a Q&A. Please remember to put your questions into the Q&A section on the Zoom screen or on YouTube, and then I will collate them and we will have a discussion afterwards. So Barry, the floor is yours.

BARRY POSEN:

Thank you so much. It's great to be here. Well, we don't need to dwell at the moment on characterizing US-Russian relations. They're poor, and we can perhaps discuss later how poor they are and what seems to have made them poor. It's not a trivial matter for international politics if relations are poor, because military deployments and exercises have been partial of the bad relations. And the two sides militaries are brushing up against each other again in a way that was not true after the Cold War ended.

But in this discussion, we're simply trying to get a little purchase on future possibilities. Now for purposes of discussion, I'm going to treat both countries foreign and security policy as a product of two influences. The material aspects of their security situation, which is to say their power position as well as geography and some other things. But also, their ideologies. Though these ideologies are loose compared to the Cold War, I think that they're important. And it will surprise many of you that I'm talking about ideology here, because I'm usually known as the structuralist which talks mainly about power.

And to preview, my answer here is my view is that both the structure of power that each country faces as well as their own ideological predispositions as they interact with the predispositions of the other are going to keep relations very, very tense. I'm not very optimistic at the moment. OK, so let's just walk through the argument, which I will try and sketch out very brief. If we view the world today as having roughly three powers of the first rank, and perhaps three or four of the second, Russia's probably a somewhat distant number three, with China at number two and the US still a clear number one.

And though Russia under Vladimir Putin has clawed its way back into the club, its position in this great power club is tenuous and I suspect the Russian foreign policy establishment knows it. Now if we look at Russia's ideology it's fair to say that nationalism is the software of its foreign policy. And it has certain characteristics. Russia is very jealous of its prestige, Russia's prestige and Putin's personal prestige seem to be melded together in some way. Hard power is the main tool of choice, because it's basically the main tool they have, coupled with a rather sophisticated set of techniques.

Which, in the Cold War, we might have called subversion. In general, Russia likes to make other others' lives difficult and uncomfortable. It's a zero-sum worldview. If others are less well off, than Russia is better off. And I think the position integral to the nationalism today is that an authoritarian form of government is the only guarantee of Russia's position in the world, and serves the goals of security and prestige and respect and authoritarianism. Basically, serves and defends the nation. This obviously is a good story for Vladimir Putin as well.

Now we turn to the US power. Position is very good. But in contrast to the Cold War high, we cannot call the world unipolar. And this is a big change for the Americans because they got used to unipolarity very, very quickly. And the shift is mainly a consequence of China's rise, but also of Russia's impressive but still limited recovery. The China induced change in the structure of world power is probably not over yet. The system will likely come to look more and more multipolar. Though multipolar does not mean equal, it just means a set of powers that can strongly influence one another's security situation, as well as that of everyone else.

Now from an ideological point of view, aside from the Donald Trump interlude, the US styles itself the pallid end of liberal democracy. To be mischievous, I think the US has in some sense nationalized liberalism. And the US sees itself as the historic bearer of this view of politics and the natural agent of its worldwide diffusion. Spreading liberal forms of government and economics around the world and glueing states together in liberal international institutions was the US post Cold War Project, and its being given up only very, very grudgingly, in my opinion.

Now if we're honest here, US decision makers hope that this project would cement US leadership, cement US hegemony, lock in a certain power position. But it hasn't worked out very well. And my own guess as a theorist is it'll continue to not work out very well. Now, Dmitri suggests that, I think, will suggest that the withdrawal from Afghanistan shows that the US has gotten by this sort of post Cold War jag that it's been on. I wish it were true, but I don't really think so. The foreign policy establishment in the US is largely still seized with this mission, even if it's a bit chastened.

And if you review recent US elite discussion, say of one subject, Ukraine, which is neuralgic subject for both countries, I think you can see that relations are still very tense and they're probably destined to remain so. And finally, I just want to wrap Russian nationalism and US liberalism, as their odd quirks confront each other. Russian nationalism feeds a bunch of foreign policy, but it has little offensive potential in that other societies can't become Russian even if they wanted to, and most wouldn't. US liberalism feeds an interventionist and often bumptious foreign policy, but it also has an inherently offensive potential versus the liberal states.

It's simply undeniable that many citizens of illiberal states would prefer to live in liberal states, and some have taken heroic actions to demonstrate this hope. This just seems to be baked in the cake. But it has a funny consequence, which is the combination of US power and US liberalism. Makes Russia particularly, also China, very nervous. Because since the Cold War ended, we've drifted the Western alliance system closer and closer to Russia's border. As I mentioned earlier, Russia doesn't have very many tools to counter this combination.

And Russia keeps cycling through these tools. So the clash of these two sets of tools and this power, in this one place, around Russia's periphery, it's just it seems to be a-- it seems to generate a kind of tension that feeds on itself. So, the present poor relationship is the sum of these Russian-US power and ideological vectors, which kind of feed on each other. Now I tend to privilege the power relationship first in the way I think about the world. But ideology just keeps popping back up. And I find the nationalism of the two countries, the specific content of that nationalism, to have been an easy way to think about it.

So, to me, the one thing that could change this situation is China, and whether China can sustain its present momentum. The US foreign policy establishment is very wary of China's power. But at the same time, it seems unwilling to make any serious compromises anywhere to free up resources directed at China. So this kind of means that the US establishment is in a kind of a weird, sweet spot. I mean for the rest of us, it isn't a sweet spot, but for them it is. Because China is just strong enough to be a kind of mobilizing, unifying tool in the establishment to be able to generate more resources for foreign policy.

But when I hang around with these people, I sense that they think that China is still weak enough that most of the US global project is still doable. Yeah, the invasion and reconstruction of the small illiberal states. Maybe that's off the table. But most of the rest of the project is a lie, right? And it's going to take something inherent in Chinese power to change it. Now, finally, I just want to say that I think for Vladimir Putin and Russia, it's also a weird kind of sweet

Spot. Because I think from their point of view, and I think it may objectively be the case, that China is still weak enough that Russia can focus on its feud with the United States and treat China as a tacit ally and not as a threat. But if the pieces of the puzzle move a bit more. If China's relative power continues to improve, this may begin to exert the kind of pressure on Russia and the United States to have some sort of modest detente that maybe we've been- some of us have been expecting for a long time, but which hasn't materialized.

That said, in closing, I still think that the ideological blinders of these two parties is going to make reconciliation a rather sticky process. Innovation is always hard. Policy innovation is hard. And appraising power shifts is usually a kind of a slow process for elites. So I think, while it may be baked in the cake that these tectonic plates are going to shift, I'm guessing they're going to shift slowly. So with that, I'll stop.

CAROL

Thank you, Barry. Dmitri?

SAIVETZ:

DMITRI TRENIN: Carol, thank you so much. It's a pleasure and a privilege to be speaking on the panel today with Barry and with you as our moderator. I will talk about three things. Where we are now with the US-Russia relationship seen from Moscow, how does Russia or the Russian leadership, to be more specific, view Joe Biden's foreign policy, and thirdly, what is the future of the relationship? Before I start, I should say I very much agree with the central thesis of Barry's very, very rich expose that the relationship is tense and is going to stay that way for a very long time.

I would call this tense relationship a confrontation, which to me is one step away from a direct kinetic collision. And we have been at that state since roughly 2014 with the start of the Ukraine crisis. The relationship had been ailing for quite some time before. It's not that the Ukraine crisis produced the confrontation. I think it was the final straw that broke the camel's back. And actually, the real cause for the failure of Russia's integration into the West, US-led West, was the Russian elites and the Russian people's rejection of US leadership.

Which, of course, was the entry ticket to the American system. And that tells you something about Russia. I would strongly disagree that Russia's most important business is to make life hard for all others. I think Russia is, first of all and above all, a country that does not accept anyone above itself. Except for God, Mr. Putin would say. But not the United States. Not Germany in the past, or Napoleonic France. Not China in the future, should China rise to such a role. So the causes for the confrontation are very deep running, and the differences are fundamental.

Not just the lack of proper chemistry between the presidents, or the failure to understand each other. I think that the leaderships in Moscow and Washington understand each other pretty well. Nor do I see any strategic compromise in sight for the United States and Russia. Russia, I think, would want to have some sort of a compromise. But that compromise, given the asymmetry between the two powers, would be seen, and maybe rightly so, as a win for Russia. And a loss of prestige, a loss of influence, loss of status for the United States.

And the United States is not willing to do a compromise with Russia. What we can do, and what I think the two governments are busy doing now, and I wish them well in that, is managing that confrontation, rather than mismanaging it. Because mismanaging would mean stumbling into a kinetic collision.

Particularly now, just to give you an example, when a lot of people in the United States and Europe are worried about Russian troop movements in the vicinity of the Ukrainian border, the big story on Russian television is the appearance of US Naval ships, US strategic bombers and other aircraft in the Black Sea area. And also coming to the vicinity of Russia's borders. And that I think is just an illustration of where we are with that relationship.

On the other hand, Ambassador Burns is just back from conversations in Moscow and as if those conversations were not enough, you also had another call, post-visit call with President Putin. And before that we had Victoria Nuland, before that we had, of course, the summit between the two leaders. And that leads me to the next point of Russia's view of Joe Biden's foreign policy.

I think that many Russians see more continuity than change in America's foreign policy since maybe the second presidency of George W. Bush, when the United States reached the pinnacle of its power and international influence and international engagement. Ever since then, the United States has been carefully climbing down, reducing its sphere of engagement and focusing more and more on itself. From Barack Obama through Donald Trump to Joe Biden, the United States has been adapting to a post unipolar world.

A world in which the United States is no longer dominant. And that's-- and restoring that dominance should not be-- is not seen rightly, in my view, the true objective of US foreign policy. But maintaining America's preeminence in the world is the new goal, which I think is something that, potentially, is-- not potentially, it's really doable, achievable, for a period of time. Or at least the developments that after 2005 and 6 led to this situation, of course, where the economic crisis of '07, '08.

And China's relatively better performance than that of the West, including the United States. And then Russia's bolting out of the American-led, American sponsored security system in Europe by doing things in Ukraine and then intervening in Syria. Iraq, and most recently Afghanistan, have shown something very important. And that that's where I would disagree with Barry. I think that liberalism as a working concept is limited to some cultural areas. But primarily America, the Americas, and Europe.

It is not- it does not spread very far beyond that. And even you see developments in some countries that used to be part of the, let's say, Western world. These developments are pointed in the direction of more nationalism, more identity, search for identity. And more diversity. So we are going to live in a much more diverse world. India may be a friend of the United States, a partner [INAUDIBLE] and all that. But India is moving away from Westminster democracy. India is getting to be an influential great power.

And India will not be-- although, for Barry, it's in the second echelon of powers, of the powers in the world, I understand. But India is not going to take orders from others. So it's not going to be a Japan for the United States. It's not going to be an Australia. And that, I think, is very interesting. So in this competition with China, which threatens to push the United States to one side as it tries to establish its own authority, its own power, its own prominence in the world. In that competition, the United States is certainly focusing on strengthening the domestic base.

And that was the goal for Obama. That was the goal of Trump. And that is the goal of Biden. The three of them have very different ways of dealing with that issue, but they went roughly in the same direction. From, again, seen from the Russian view, from the Russian perspective, the Biden administration is taking a very different view of Russia than the case was during the Trump administration. Simply because Russia has ceased to be a political football in the United States. Which makes the Biden much freer in his Russia policy.

And he was able to do things that Trump would never have been able to get away with. Like extending the New START Treaty without concessions, or without conditions that Trump had been insisting upon. Meeting with Putin very early in his presidency, starting a dialogue on various issues from strategic stability, through cyber and Ukraine, regional issues, climate, and the Arctic. That, I think, is something that we will see in the next couple of years.

I do not believe that the very competent leaders that assist President Biden in Washington and President Putin in Moscow will allow a direct and open conflict to erupt between the two countries. They will try to calm things down when the situation will become too tense. But, on the other hand, I do not foresee any meeting of minds on strategic issues. There may be some agreements on JCPOA with Iran, or North Korea, on the Arctic, and on Afghanistan. And maybe even some basic rules agreed upon in the cyber domain.

But, no big- no big agreements are going to be concluded in the next couple of years. And then, I come to the final portion of my talk. After 2024, which is the date of presidential elections in the United States, probably seeing a new president taking over in Washington. And another hurdle in the Russian transition process. Again, I do not- do not expect, necessarily, Mr. Putin to leave office in 2024. But the most important thing in Russia will be this, so far, slow moving political transition.

Which will be accompanied by energy transition. Extremely important in terms of both the domestic economy and the domestic political economy. So the nexus between political transition and the power transition and the energy transition will tell the story of Russia in the 2020s and the 2030s. My final thought would be that the future of the relationship between the two countries will be influenced less by global geopolitics. And even less by China. Which I don't think will commit the cardinal mistake of becoming too pushy with regard to Russia to turn Russia into an adversary.

I don't think so. Turning Russia into a vassal is something that the Chinese would be foolish to attempt, and they will never accomplish. That could only lead to adversity. And what happens in the United States in 2024 and after 2024 is also a big question mark. I learned so much about the United States after 2016 that may be even more important that I had learned before 2016. So there are surprises that await you every step of the way these days.

And I believe that it's the domestic developments in America and Russia that will impact massively on how they view each other, and how they-- maybe not so much how they view each other, but how they deal with each other in this global environment. I'll stop here. Thank you.

CAROL SAIVETZ: Thank you. Barry, do you want to add anything, you want to respond? And let me remind our audience to please put their questions into the Q&A function on the Zoom screen, and then we'll go to the general audience. Barry, do you have a response first? And then Dmitri, and then we'll open it up.

BARRY POSEN: I don't need one if you have questions. I mean, if you want to get

CAROL SAIVETZ: No, please go ahead.

BARRY POSEN: Well, I-- first of all, I thought it was a great talk. And I'd say I learned a lot from it. I guess the-- trying to figure out where we might have a disagreement. And I think maybe even some of the language that Dmitri and I used to characterize our own countries versus the other may in fact reflect some of the point that I was making about-- there's something worth talking a little about the nationalisms. Because I don't-- Dmitri was saying Russia doesn't like to be number two, won't be dominated by anybody.

I think most great powers feel the same way. So I guess I don't see that as unusual. And he characterized Russia's policies as being defensive. And I can see where, from a Russian point of view, some of their policies which, in this country, we see as quite offensive, Russians might see us as defensive. To include, not just improving its military, but very active exercises all around its periphery. Very active probing of other people's airspaces, extremely active intelligence operations, cyber operations, and in others, politics.

From a Russian point of view, this may all seem like defense. Because often offense and defense are not easy to distinguish. But when you-- the way that's seen in the West is it's seen as-- it's going to be seen as offensive, right? And I guess it has become a popular observation that nationalism and identity politics is in the ascendant. And I think that's true, worldwide. But at the same time, you know, I would say that resentment and pushback is in some sense the greatest form of flattery. Right?

And I would say if China and Russia were unconcerned about liberalism's inherent ability to infect modern societies, infect would be a negative way of putting it. But to infiltrate, take root. If those leaders were positive about the immunity of their national idea to this kind of- to this set of ideas, they would be less defensive about them. They would be less concerned about controlling media. They would be more positive about their ability to win the battle of ideas on an open playing field. And they're not.

And I don't see this as a partisan of spreading liberalism in the way that the United States has done it in the last 30 years. I feel like the West has a great model and it sells itself. And in fact, it does damage to itself to try and marry liberalism to American national security policy. I think it has an inherent ability, right, but it's our tendency to do so. So I'm babbling here a little bit. But I very much enjoyed the many things that Dmitri had to say. And saw a lot of insight there. But I also saw, in terms of some of the different ways we talked about things, a kind of manifestation of the problem that I was trying to live a little bit.

Maybe that was too solid an argument.

CAROL

Dmitri, would you like to respond? And then we'll open, I'll start reading the questions.

SAIVETZ:

DMITRI TRENIN: Well, I-- well, there's not much to respond to, frankly. Because I was not trying to paint Russia as everyone's darling. A country that's totally innocuous, a country that does not intervene, a country that does not use force. Sometimes in a big way. Russia has been around for a long time. Russia has been doing all sorts of things. Even today, I would say that Russia's military operations have been offensive in nature. It was an offensive operation to take over Crimea. I was. It was, consciously.

And then President Putin, let's not forget, was given a mandate in 2014 by the upper chamber of the Russian parliament to use force in Ukraine. Not just in Kiev, in Crimea, but anywhere in Ukraine. He chose not to use it on a big scale. But he had that authority. In 2015, Russia intervened in Syria, starting a war. Or getting engaged, involved in a war in the heart of the Middle East. So Russia does not pretend. This is one thing that I believe is characteristic of today's Russia.

When I'm sometimes asked about the difference between Russians and the Westerners debating their foreign policies, I would say that Russians too often err on the side of cynicism, whereas Westerners too often err on the side of hypocrisy. Well Russia does not have an ideology to carry about with it. We used-- we used communism the way, well, in different way. But with the same goal, often, that Western countries have been using liberalism. Because both communism and liberalism being essentially Western ideologies are expansionist by nature.

Now nationalism is not. Well, except that when you think that part of your nation is divided by a border. We all know that. But I don't think that there is an open playing field in the media world. I don't think that there is total, how shall I put it, total ban on public dissent in Russia. Nor do I believe that there is total freedom of the media in the West. I think that all these things have to be looked at and assessed on their own worth.

And we will not be eating- we will not be earning our bread as analysts if we decided to forego the glaring discrepancies between our own self-image and the way that we are viewed by others. So

BARRY POSEN: As a person who has spent the last 20 years trying to argue for a, let's just say a major change in US national security policy, I too sometimes feel with the media debate it's not quite as open as always like.

**CAROL
SAIVETZ:**

OK, so thank you both. Let's move on to some of the questions. We've got several questions about, what would sort of management of the conflict look like? What would compromise look like, especially given the asymmetry in the hard power that both Barry and Dmitri talked about? So how would you go forward and manage the conflict to make sure it doesn't spiral out of control? Either, I'm asking both of you. These are questions from the audience.

DMITRI TRENIN: Thank you. Barry will start.

BARRY POSEN: Well you could-- one can cite a lot of nostrums, but there-- one could try and focus a little bit on means, but it's hard to- it's hard to focus on what you might call a short-term causes, potential causes of escalation without looking at the deeper one. So the example would be is, during the Cold War, the United States and the Russians, at various times, sort of agreed to kind of keep their military power apart. And not press each other really hard. Right?

And today, I think that that memory, that muscle memory is gone. And I think each side probes the other pretty aggressively. I mean when, you know, Russian fighters will buzz Western operations, American ships go very close to the Russian coastline. I mean, there's just lots of ways that the military seem to be in a kind of friction laden contact all the time. And it would be better if we had some rules of the road on that and try to talk about it. The problem is is that that competition and risk taking is driven by the political background of the competition.

And as long as the Ukraine conflict is not settled in some way, I don't think either side is going to give up what they think they're getting from these active military operations. Which is sending messages to the other, this far and no farther. All right? So I think one finds oneself coming back to the political issues. And those political issues seem rather intractable. Right? In other words, the West has dug itself in on an inability to make any fundamental compromises with Russia on Ukraine.

And the fundamental compromise, I'm sad to say, is to accept the Crimea business as a settled matter. It wasn't settled in the way we would have preferred, but to accept it as a settled matter. But in return for that, we would need Putin to accept that Ukraine, the territorial integrity of Ukraine, other than Crimea, is also a settled matter. And to stop dabbling in the Donbass and stop supporting militant groups in the Donbass and let Ukraine re-establish its sovereign authority there. Right? I mean, that that's what we would need to do. That's a compromise we would need.

It would be a deeply fundamental compromise. To some extent, it's at Ukraine's expense, in one sense. But it's to their gain in another. Right? But I don't see that compromise as being in the works. And I don't see much of anything short of that as being able to do something about the neuralgia about Ukraine. And as part of that, the United States would need to say, look, Ukraine is not going to be in NATO. And maybe we could get the Russians to say, OK, it can be in the European Union. That's how we'll split the difference.

Finland and Sweden are in the European Union they're not in NATO, that's the comparable. Right? But you can't mention a compromise like this in Washington without being drummed out of the room. I mean, you know, you just, you couldn't. And of course it's an old great power sort of a deal. Over the heads of a weak state. But it might take some of the neuralgia out of it. The other area is Belarus. Which I think is-- I think we're headed for much more tense relations over Belarus. Right? So the trends are just not good for trying to unwind this thing.

Now there are big things we don't want to have happen, like a nuclear war. So as Dmitri pointed out, they managed to re-up on that. But that's a fragile thing, in a way. Because with the Chinese building more, those kinds of numerical limits are not going to stand the test of time. I think everybody is going to be jockeying for some new way of thinking about it. So I'm just not very hopeful right now. I'm sorry to be so unhopeful, but I'm not.

CAROL

Dmitri?

SAIVETZ:

DMITRI TRENIN: Well, I'm not very hopeful either. On compromise. I'm hopeful on management. So I would treat those two things separately. I think management has been and could be, could continue to be successful. Management means that you stop things that could lead you to, what I would call, kinetic collision, i.e. war. And in case there is a risk of the two countries stumbling into a war, onto a war path, then you have military chiefs meeting. And we have those meetings. The chairman of the joint chiefs and the chief of the general staff.

The chief of the general staff and the supreme allied commander Europe. They have regular meetings, including face to face meetings. The director of the CIA has just been to Moscow. And a couple of years ago, the three chiefs of Russian security services traveled all the way to Washington to discuss things with their counterparts in the US. So, managing things is something doable. And we have that essentially every day. As for compromise, I said it before. And Barry essentially provided powerful arguments in support of that position.

I think Russia would go for a compromise. But that compromise is a no go in Washington DC. Something that would call for, call it neutralization of Ukraine. Call it a recognition of Russia, and of Russia's ownership of Crimea based on, I think, a very obvious desire of the residents of Crimea to stay Russian. And the implementation of the Minsk agreement, with regard to Donbass, that would return Donbass to Ukraine, on certain conditions. Not simply a surrender of Donbass to Kiev, which would not sell in Moscow.

That compromise is, from the Russian standpoint, would be acceptable. But not, as I understand it, not from the US standpoint. And, within Ukraine, let's not forget it. I don't think that the United States and Russia can actually settle the Ukraine issue without Ukrainians weighing in, in a big way. The Minsk agreement cannot be implemented for one very important and insurmountable, one important reason and insurmountable obstacle. The nationalists are rather small, but very, very influential group in Kiev, would not tolerate any government in Kiev that would accept Minsk and would start implementing Minsk.

To them, it's high treason, it's absolute betrayal. And although they may be in the minority, those people, but they have the energy. They have the political power. De facto political power that would not allow the Minsk agreement to be implemented. So you cannot simply decide for other countries. Those smaller countries can actually surprise the big ones by doing something irrational from the standpoint of the bigger countries. And yet, something that those countries would still do, regardless of the odds.

So that's my-- I don't think that we are close to a compromise on any of the essential issues that lie at the foundation of the US-Russian confrontation.

CAROL

SAIVETZ:

All right, thank you. We got a couple of questions about the role of China, as we're discussing US-Russian relations. And one person questioned whether China was really sort of a secondary power, or whether or not it was growing in power and prestige and therefore had a bigger role to play between the United States and Russia. Or as a factor as the two countries considered their bilateral relationship. Let me put the question that way. Dmitri, you want to start on this one?

DMITRI TRENIN: Well, to me, China is a primary power. China is a superpower, alongside the United States. They are not as powerful as the United States, they're not nearly as influential as the United States. They're not nearly as well versed in modern international relations as the United States has been in theirs. But China is a superpower, and China is a major factor in impacting, also, on the US-Russia relationship. The interesting thing about this trio, America, China, and Russia, is that China and the United States, Russia and the United States, are in a confrontation within those two pairs.

And yet China and Russia are not full allies. China and Russia are not joined at the hip. Despite the many erroneous or even provocative maybe assertions that Russia has become China's vassal or something of that kind. It's a very interesting thing. It's not-- we're not anywhere near the situation of the early 1970s when the United States managed to get China as its ally, de facto, against the Soviet Union, because China-- both China and the United States saw the Soviet Union as a threat. Now the United States sees China as a big challenger.

Russia does not see China that way, that's interesting. And Russia prefers to be its own master, as I said. I mean, it's not-- it's interesting. No country wants other countries on top of it. And yet, in fact, let me say something very blunt. I'm a former military officer, so I think I have that license. The countries that accept being allies of the United States accept America's protection. And when you essentially delegate your national security, in a big way, to a foreign power, you automatically give up, for a good reason, you give up part of your sovereignty to that big power.

You may be in France, you may think in terms of [INAUDIBLE], you may be a Britain, you may think in terms of your empire still, but you know that major decisions on security matters are taken in Washington DC. Not even in Brussels. So that's-- I'm not I'm not saying anything against it. They had a great deal, I think. All those former great powers of Europe, they've been living in peace. They've been able to enjoy prosperity. They've been able to enjoy American protection. They were immune from the communist threat within, which was real in the late 1940s, thanks to America's support and all that.

But in order to get that and maintain that, they had to delegate security matters and foreign policy to the United States. The problem, one of the problems of the European Union, is that those countries have not been doing real foreign policy for the last 70 plus years. But it was made for them by the United States of America. That's a fact. It's maybe an unpleasant fact, but that's a fact. So Russia doesn't want to be put in the position which its decisions that are dictated to it by China. It may be a friendly power.

And Russia has a better history of standing up to its adversaries, like the United States today, than holding on to its own in relations with its partners. And that's a challenge for Russia. To stay on- to be on an even keel in its very asymmetrical relationship with China. The relationship with the US is asymmetrical, the relationship with China is asymmetrical. Both asymmetries are not working in Russia's favor. And yet you can use your assets, which several, with regard to China. And to make sure that these guys never try to dominate you.

Because if they are as rash as imagined, if they can dominate Russia, that's the end of the relationship. In my view. So it's not a secondary power, it's a major power. But it's a very different power from the United States. It would not succeed the United States as the top power in the world. They will never do that. They will occupy their own position, but they will be, essentially, a national player. Not a universal player. The United States is a universal player. And it will always have allies. It will get more or fewer allies, but it will always have allies.

For China, that's not the most important thing. They are more self-sufficient within their middle kingdom. And their immediate environment. Although they will expand their influence way, way beyond that.

CAROL

Barry, would you like to weigh in?

SAIVETZ:

BARRY POSEN: Well, I mean, I guess the first thing I would just-- I would just make an observation for maybe the 60,000 foot level. You know. And that is whenever you have a constellation of power in international politics that theorists like to call multipolar. Right? Which is to say whatever, you know, you have a handful of great powers who seem to have more influence over one another and more influence over others than the rest is. So it could be three, four, or five, six. Right? Those three, four, or five, six are going to all be eyeing one another with a mixture of fear and opportunism.

Because there is nobody out there to prevent either, any of them from doing anything nefarious to any of the others. And in those systems, alliance politics is dominant. It just happens all the time. And you know, Dmitri did people a favor here in this conversation by reminding them that the American alliance system has been kind of unusual as alliance systems go. Because it really hasn't been an alliance system among peers, as say it was in the 19th century. It's really an alliance system among unequal powers.

And we've got used to thinking about it that way. And blinds us to other kinds of alliances that we see in the world today. So I would say that, even though Russia and China are certainly not nearly as close as Britain and the United States was in the Second World War or in the Cold War, Russia and China kind of make common cause. And they make common cause for a reason. And that is, the Americans have been annoying both of them for the last 30 years, partly because they could. Because the Americans were so strong.

And whether or not Russia or China would come to one another's aid in extremists, on a day to day basis, the fact that both of them are there in the world, that both of them are connected, or have strong diplomatic and military context one with the other. This is a powerful factor influencing US calculations and US behavior. Even given that the alliance is weak. So the Americans are in this position now where they have to be worried that if they get sucked too deeply into something that looks more kinetic with either of these two powers, then it's weaker relative to the other.

Relative to China. If our face is to China, our back is to Russia. Our face is to Russia, our back is to China. As strong as we are, there's still an element of truth in that. And Russia and China can make their policies now, relative to us, with that knowledge. With knowledge that the Americans face some constraints. Because of this partial tacit alliance of convenience between Russia and China. An alliance that the Americans have to fear could get worse if we're aggressive. Or, they could just prove to provide an opportunity to one side or the other if we decide to stand too firm at one place or another.

So we have to make our calculations in light of two important actors, not one. And Russia and China get to make their calculations at either end of the world with the full knowledge that regardless of how tight the alliance they have with the other is, Russia, China, China, Russia, they know that the Americans have to be fixated on the other. This creates a very different world from the bipolar world. This isn't the 60,000 foot level. We're just talking about units and game pieces and boards, right. If you drop down, you get into many of the things that Dmitri is talking about, which is national character, the quality of nationalism, the nature of geography.

Whether or not certain cultures travel very far or not. Whether or not the Chinese model, sufficiently attractive, that its belt and road Initiative can allow it to spread its authoritarian tentacles all over. The nightmare scenarios inside the Bellator. This is down in the working wolf of day to day politics, and it all needs to be discussed. But at the 60,000 foot level, this is a very different world that the Americans the Russians and the Chinese are in than the world that they were in even 20 years ago. And this is extremely interesting and portentous, it seems to me.

CAROL

SAIVETZ:

Great, thank you. I'm going to try to link to questions which were not intended to be linked. One was about energy. Dmitri referred to the energy transitions that were coming, and I guess that includes this meetings in Glasgow now and the shift from fossil fuels and everything. And then another listener asked about what would happen if there were a conflict between Greece and Turkey at the moment over the reserves in the Eastern Med, and places like that.

So they're not necessarily the exact same question, but they kind of relate in terms of energy and monopolization of energy and backing one side or another, if there are-- when there is a shortage for energy.

DMITRI TRENIN:Carol, are you directing this question to me or to Barry?

CAROL

SAIVETZ:

We'll start with you, since you mentioned energy.

DMITRI TRENIN:All right, OK, good. Well energy transition, I think, and I said it in my opening remarks, is perhaps the most important thing in the Russian political economy since privatization of the 1990s. It's going to change the very structure of the Russian economy and the political economy with it. That said, I do not believe that fossil fuels will be out of the equation anytime soon.

The most recent intelligence report from the US intelligence community suggests that even though by 2040 the renewables will increase their share, the energy balances around the world will still be dominated by fossil fuels. 50 plus percent, 60% will still be fossil fuels. And I think that the Russian strategy of moving toward the decarbonization takes that into account. So they-- I think that if I were to summarize the Russian position, I think there's been a sea change in the Russian government thinking about climate change.

Not long ago, there was flat denial. No climate change. Then there was denial that climate change had anything to do with human activity. And it was only recently, essentially within the last maybe year and a half or max two years, that there has been a change toward accepting two things. The reality of climate change, and the inevitability of energy transition. I think that the decisions by the Europeans, the Chinese, the Japanese, the United States of moving toward a carbon free economy finally brought it closer to the Russian leadership.

That brought it home to the Russian leadership, rather. That the current Russian economic model cannot be sustained. So the bedrock in which Russia's well-being rests today is going to dissipate, within the next few decades. And Russia will have to do something about it. Now, what is Russia's approach? I think it's being developed only as we speak. There has been a strategy paper published 10 days ago. There was Putin's pledge of decarbonization by 2060. But essentially what Russia is trying to do is to come up with-- it's coming late to the party, no question.

And that is a handicap. So they want several things to be included in the discussion that are currently not part of it. One of those things is acceptance of nuclear as green. And Russia is, as we all know, has big experience in nuclear. Has a fairly strong nuclear energy sector. And it wants that. Second, Russia will place emphasis on the capturing capacity of its forests, its lakes, its seas, and what have you. That's the second thing. And thirdly, Russia would try to come to the drawing board and and co-write the rules.

It will not simply accept the rules. Certainly not the rules of the European Union. The European Union is in a very different position from all respects from Russia. I think Russia is closer to countries such as the United States and Canada, in many ways. And in this new world, new geopolitics of energy, that can be very strange bedfellows. For example, the European Union's new carbon tax will affect people from Australia to India to Ukraine to Russia. All those countries will be affected adversely by the European measures.

So it's just an example of what kind of coalitions we may have to be dealing with on the climate battlefield, if you like, in the next few years even. A conflict between Turkey and Greece would, I think first of all, it's a conflict between two NATO powers. Relations between which have been very tense. I think it will be a matter for the European Union to step into, the United States. I see Russia as potentially a marginal player, but not a very- not a very prominent one, not a very big one.

It doesn't have an alliance relationship with either country. And it would be loathe to get dragged into that battle. But Russia would try to seize some interesting opportunities, should they present themselves, on the Eastern Med. Whether off the coast of Cyprus, or elsewhere, or Syria. But I do not see Russia getting involved in a big way in that conflict. But the conflict may be a test for NATO and the European Union, and the United States.

CAROL

Barry, I give you the last word because we're running out of time.

SAIVETZ:

BARRY POSEN: Oh, I don't stand myself an expert on energy. And I found Dmitri's observations to be very useful. I think an American comparative politics scholar would say, if indeed remedies to climate change do indeed suppress the use of fossil fuels and do indeed degrade and erode the market for Russian natural gas, that's, in the net, probably a positive thing for politics in Russia. In general, one crop [INAUDIBLE] states with which oil and energy states tend not to be very liberal in their domestic political constitutions.

And if Russia wants to stay rich and strong, it's going to have to do something. Which is well within its capacity, but which has political risk to the establishment. Which is to exploit its massive science and technology talent in order to become a tech power, rather than an energy power. But that has the effect of diffusing political power in a country. It's hard to control a country like that. I think that's the problem the G is even starting to deal with in China. This fear that these tech entrepreneurs are getting to too big for their britches.

So I think that Dmitri is right to hypothesize that energy shift could have important political consequences in Russia. As far as Greece, Turkey and the Eastern Med is concerned, I guess, because I think gas is going to be important in the near term. So this political transition in Russia we're alluding to is way down the road. I think, I mean, most transition theorists talk about natural gas as being very important. There's natural gas there under the Med that's making the Israelis into a power. It's making that gas very interesting.

I think the European Union probably wants to have its own fingers on that gas as an insurance policy vis a vis the Russian dependence. So I guess if I were Turkey and I were trying to calculate what posture the Europeans would take in this dispute between Greece and Turkey, I would be betting that they're going to favor Greece. But that's an arm's length kind of appraisal.

CAROL SAIVETZ: Right. All right, so let me take this opportunity to thank you both. We have run out of time. Please check the Starr Forum website to look for future forums and further discussion. And let me thank Barry and Dmitri for taking the time to do this, and for giving us lots of food for thought. So thank you very much. If we were in person, I would ask for round of applause, but I can't do that. So thank you both very, very much. It's great to see both of you. And thank you all for attending. We had a great audience today.

BARRY POSEN: I'll applaud Dimitri.

CAROL SAIVETZ: You should applaud each other.

DMITRI TRENIN: I'm applauding you and Carol. Carol, thank you very much. And thank you for your leadership. You know

BARRY POSEN: This was great.

DMITRI TRENIN: That has some added value.

CAROL SAIVETZ: No, well as I said at the beginning, I mean it was your article that really kicked off this thought process of putting the two of you together. So I think it worked, and thank you both very, very much.

BARRY POSEN: Well thanks for hosting, this was good. I'm going to ring off now.

CAROL SAIVETZ: Yeah, we all should.

BARRY POSEN: Bye.

CAROL SAIVETZ: Thank you very much.

[MUSIC PLAYING]