



**NATO at 70: Does the Alliance Have a Future? (4/2/19)**

- 00:00:26 Harmony Barker: Good evening and welcome. My name is Harmony Barker, and I'm the public programs coordinator here at the 9/11 Memorial & Museum. It's my pleasure to welcome you to tonight's program, "NATO at 70: Does the Alliance Have a Future?"
- As always, I'd like to extend a special welcome to our museum members and to those tuning in to our live web broadcast at [911memorial.org/live](http://911memorial.org/live). The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was established on April 4, 1949, almost 70 years ago to the day. Today, NATO is an international alliance consisting of 29 member states from Europe and North America.
- 00:01:09 Immediately following the 9/11 attacks, for the first and only time in its history, NATO invoked Article 5, the mutual-defense clause of its founding treaty, asserting that an attack against one is an attack against all. In light of this historical connection, I am pleased to share that the 9/11 Memorial & Museum is officially partnering with NATO to present a number of museum programs that will highlight the imperative of this alliance in the post-9/11 world.
- 00:01:38 Tonight, we're privileged to have former U.S. Ambassador to NATO Nicholas Burns and former Deputy Secretary General of NATO Alexander Vershbow with us to discuss the current state of NATO and provide perspective on the alliance's uncertain future.
- 00:01:54 Ambassador Nicholas Burns is the Roy and Barbara Goodman Professor of the Practice of Diplomacy and International Relations at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and his career in the United States

government spans 27 years. A career Foreign Service officer, he was named ambassador to Greece in 1997 by President Clinton and ambassador to NATO in 2001 by President George W. Bush. He also served as the director for Soviet affairs in the administration of President George H.W. Bush.

00:02:26 Ambassador Burns has received the Presidential Distinguished Service Award and the Secretary of State's Distinguished Service Award, among others. He recently co-authored a report titled, "NATO at 70: An Alliance in Crisis."

00:02:40 Ambassador Alexander Vershbow is a distinguished fellow at the Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security. He was the deputy secretary general of NATO from February 2012 to October 2016. Ambassador Vershbow was also a career Foreign Service officer and previously served as ambassador to NATO, ambassador to the Russian Federation, and ambassador to the Republic of Korea. He has received the Department of Defense's Distinguished... Distinguished Civilian Service Medal and the State Department's Distinguished Service Award, to name a few.

00:03:16 He recently co-authored a report titled, "Permanent Deterrence: Enhancements to the U.S. Military Presence in North Central Europe." With their combined professional experience and considerable expertise, we are truly fortunate to have Ambassador, Ambassadors Burns and Vershbow here to share their insights with us.

Without further ado, please join me in welcoming Ambassador Nicholas Burns and Ambassador Alexander Vershbow in conversation with executive vice president and deputy director for museum programs, Clifford Chanin.

(applause)

00:03:51

Clifford Chanin: Thank you, Harmony. Good evening, everybody, welcome. Gentlemen, thank you so much for taking the time, coming to talk to us. It is a big moment in marking the 70th anniversary of the signing of the NATO Treaty of 1949. But I want to go back to...

Each of you has a very interesting story of where you were and what you got caught up in on 9/11. You've just had a bit of a tour, a bit of a tour of the museum, so perhaps we've brought you back a little bit to that day. Ambassador Burns, you had just become the successor to Ambassador Vershbow as ambassador to NATO. You had just been in Brussels for a matter of days at that point. Please, pick up that story.

00:04:37

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Well, thank you very much. And first of all, I want to say what an honor it is to be here at this extraordinary museum and at the memorial. As an American, you know, we're so proud of what you've accomplished to remember the people who perished and the sacrifice of all the first responders here in New York and New Jersey. So thank you for the invitation...

Clifford Chanin: Thank you.

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: ...to be here. I was a career Foreign Service officer, had just arrived at NATO for 12 days on 9/11. We were six hours ahead of the East Coast of United States in time, and we heard about the attack on the first tower and the attack on the second.

00:05:11

Um, we're a combined State Department-Defense Department mission at NATO. In fact, I think at that time I had... We, there were more Defense Department people in our mission than State Department people reporting to me, as they had reported to their boss, Sandy Vershbow.

We tried to reach the State Department, the Defense Department, the White House. They had all been evacuated, obviously, as you, as many of

you will remember. In the intervening hours, we were essentially getting our information from CNN, because we couldn't reach Washington.

00:05:39 And the Canadian ambassador, who was the dean of our corps, the longest-serving ambassador at NATO among the 19 of us at the time, called me and said, "Have you thought about invoking Article 5? I think the allies want to defend the United States." And Article 5 is the clause in our 1949 treaty-- which we're commemorating in two days from now, the 70th anniversary-- that said, as Harmony said in her introduction, that held NATO together and that deterred the Soviets from ever attacking Western Europe.

00:06:09 Because if the Soviets had attacked-- Stalin or Khrushchev-- one of our NATO allies, we would have responded. An attack on one is an attack on all. And there was always an expectation that if 9/11 were ever to be invoked, it was going to be the United States and Canada going over to protect a European country that had been attacked, and NATO had never had to invoke Article 5 because World War III never came.

00:06:32 And so we began talking about it that day. And at 9:00 that evening, we convened a meeting of the North Atlantic Council-- all the ambassadors from every one of the countries-- with our secretary general, Lord George Robertson. He asked me to report. I told Cliff about this earlier. And I said, "You know, "we, we know there were tens of thousands of people who worked in the World Trade Center's buildings." And at that point that evening in Brussels, it wasn't clear how many people had died here. And I said, "I, I fear this may be the bloodiest day in American history since the Battle of Antietam"-- September 1862, 23,000 American casualties between the Union troops and the Confederacy.

00:07:13 And the allies pledged at that meeting that they would defend us, that if we chose to go to war in response to the attack here, they would be with us. Some of them had to get parliamentary approval and approval from their prime ministers overnight. I had to get approval from President Bush, George W. Bush, and so we agreed to meet the next morning, invoke Article 5, take this decision that they would come to our defense.

00:07:40           And I called Condoleezza Rice, the national security adviser, at 4:00 a.m. in Washington, her time-- and we're both good friends with Secretary Rice, Condi Rice. And I said, "Condi, the allies want to defend us, "they want to go to war with us, they want to invoke Article 5." She said, "Go for it." I said, "Condi, I'm just a lowly ambassador here in Europe. I need the president's permission." She said, "Go for it." I said, "But I really think I need..." Then she broke in, she said, "The president had the worst day imaginable. "He's trying to get some sleep. Go for it." I said, "I take that as a presidential command."

00:08:18           And before we signed off on the phone, as I was explaining, I said, "Every ally is going to fight with us. Every ally is with us." She said, "It's good to have friends in the world." And I just... "Good to have friends in the world." And I would just finish this, Cliff, by saying, as we commemorate NATO this week on its 70th anniversary, these allies all went into Afghanistan with us-- Canada, every single one of the Europeans. Combined, they've suffered over 1,000 combat deaths. They have paid the price with us. So it is truly good to have this alliance, and I think it's supported by the American people, very high levels in all the recent public-opinion polls.

00:08:56           Clifford Chanin: Let me ask one thing before we turn to Ambassador Vershbow. You know, one has the impression of diplomacy as a relatively bloodless exchange where interests are always paramount. But clearly under these circumstances, you are dealing with something well beyond what standard practice would require.

And tell us a little bit about the mood in this moment of the invocation of the alliance, and the reckoning that you must have had at that point that things did not go at that moment as everyone had expected, and that something very different had changed in the world, vote, confirming that change.

00:09:36           Ambassador Nicholas Burns: You're exactly right. I mean, 9/11 is without any question, looking back 17-and-a-half years, one of the great turning

points in modern history. Because we had dealt with terrorism before. We dealt with it in Oklahoma City in 1993 at the Federal Building, a lot of you will remember that. The Europeans had dealt with it for a generation, but it had been homegrown-- car bombings, assassinations, horrible things, but flying airplanes into buildings? Mass casualties? I mean, the horrific events right here?

00:10:05 This was new, and it was apparent to everybody that day, as we met that night, and as we invoked Article 5 the next day, we were dealing with something profoundly dangerous. I mean, the evil in the hearts and minds of those attackers. We knew they were still out there, that there are other people out there who would want to attack the United States.

00:10:24 And I must say, the Canadians and Europeans felt, "This could have happened to us." They felt profound sympathy for the United States. And we were recollecting at all of our diplomatic establishment, embassies and consulates around the world, people came en masse with flowers and letters. We were... my wife and I were in Louvain, a medieval Brussels, Belgian city, a couple of days later. There was a long line outside the ornate medieval city hall. It was Belgians lining up to sign a condolence book for us, for the American people.

00:10:59 So it, it... they've identified with us, the Europeans, and Canadians, and they wanted to help us through this. That's why it's good to have these alliances, good to have these friendships around the world.

Clifford Chanin: Let me ask Ambassador Vershbow, you had been in Brussels in what turned out to be an alliance that proved itself so well. But you find yourself on 9/11 in Moscow, which is the target, or the barrier to what the alliance intends. How was that different for you?

00:11:30 Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: Well, of course, in those days, the relationship with Russia was more mixed. There were positive elements... elements. And my three-and-a-half years as ambassador to NATO were dominated by several things. The first enlargement of NATO, in which we brought in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, who were, were sort

ahead of, of their peers in being kind of ready to both take on the burdens and, and enjoy the benefits of NATO membership.

00:11:58 We also launched a strategic partnership with Russia and set up a special forum called the Permanent Joint Council. Because, I think, wisely, under the Clinton administration, there was a sense that, you know, "We, we need to do what's right to rectify the historical injustices for all the countries in Eastern Europe," but we had to do it without damaging the relationship with Russia.

00:12:19 But, but that relationship... relationship was already on the rocks, because the Russians were very upset over what NATO had done to end the genocide in Kosovo. It was the right thing to do, but the Russians felt we kind of bypassed them. So I arrived in Moscow with Putin already looking a little more skeptically at NATO. In fact, when I first met him, I was at a meeting President Bush had with him in, in Italy at, during one of the G8 meetings, and Putin's only comment was, "There's too much NATO in that guy."

00:12:45 Clifford Chanin: You.

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: Me.

(laughter)

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: I said, "Nice to meet you, too."

(laughter)

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: But then I was, I had gone off on summer break, came back literally two days before 9/11, to Moscow, to, to see the terrible events unfolding on TV. And the Russians were quick

to signal their readiness to help us in any way. To, you know, go after the perpetrators in Afghanistan. Putin, although he didn't end up speaking with President Bush, was the first to try to reach him and ended up talking to Condi Rice.

00:13:19 Clifford Chanin: Right.

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: And offered Russia's support and assistance in whatever we needed to do. And I think that led to a, a period where we sort of saw all kinds of new opportunities to cement a genuine strategic partnership with Russia. And that was what I tried, at least in my first years, to promote.

00:13:38 Uh... And at the same time, the popular environment couldn't have been better after 9/11, as Nick mentioned, but I think it was particularly striking in Moscow, you know, our former enemy, to have these thousands of people coming to the embassy with flowers, lighting candles, kids giving their teddy bears. It was, it was quite moving. There were special memorial concerts hastily organized by the Russian musicians. Uh, it was a time when we really felt that we were becoming allies with Russia, not just with our NATO allies.

00:14:16 Sadly, it didn't kind of work out so well. Uh... I think a lot of the disappointment came as Putin became more and more concerned about consolidating power at home, and he saw the United States and the West as a threat, not so much in terms of NATO, but in terms of our values, which were a danger of encouraging the Russian people to believe that they, they, too, could have real freedom, which Putin wasn't prepared to give them.

00:14:45 But it was a hopeful time, and I think 9/11 kind of at least created an opportunity that led to some improvement in the relationship, but ultimately wasn't enough to, to get us past the challenges that we're facing now with Russia.



- 00:14:59 Clifford Chanin: What was the Russian response to the invocation of Article 5, the mobilization of the Western alliance, and, ultimately, the arrival of the troops from all of these nations in Afghanistan, where Russia had its own long and troubled history and which brings them very close to, if not the Russian border itself, then the former republics that had been part and were still under the influence of the Russians? How did they react to Article 5 being invoked?
- 00:15:27 Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: I think in, in those days, they were generally supportive. I think they recognized that Afghanistan was a lot closer to Russia's borders than, than it was to America's borders, and if this was the hotbed of terrorism and radicalization, then it was in their interest to at least indirectly support the U.S. and coalition efforts to, to go after bin Laden and to, to destroy the Taliban who gave them a safe haven. You know, they wanted us to get their consent. They considered themselves sort of to have kind of oversight over the Central Asian countries. They never fully accepted them as independent countries.
- 00:16:08 So they wanted us to kind of clear anything that we were going to do with, with Moscow. And we didn't feel we had to play that game. I mean, these were, in our view, independent countries who had their own interests and their own reasons to, to help our military in terms of staging its operations in Afghanistan.
- 00:16:29 But, but it... But overall, it was, it was a positive period, and the Russians did share some intelligence that I think helped us in the early days of the war, I mean, we didn't know our ass from our elbow in terms of what was going on in Afghanistan, and the Russians, unfortunately, had spent ten years in an unsuccessful war of their own from 1980 to 1990, and so they still had some ties to some of the warlords, especially in the northern part of Afghanistan. So there was some mutual, pragmatic interests that we were able to build on for a while.
- 00:17:03 Clifford Chanin: What did they offer by way of advice about getting involved in Afghanistan? As you say, their experience had not been encouraging. And some attribute the collapse of the Soviet Union to the experience, at least in part, in Afghanistan, and essentially their defeat

there. Were they sort of watching us with one eye and thinking, "Oh, this could really hurt the Americans, too," or was it more full-hearted than that?

00:17:27 Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: At least at the beginning, there wasn't that sort of a zero-sum mentality. At least I didn't detect that from the Russians. I think they, they saw a genuine common enemy in international terrorism. And they, you know, felt, you know, "If America's prepared to expend a lot of its resources to destroy our enemies, then we should, you know, cheer them on." Didn't mean that they necessarily were going to get directly involved themselves. They had their own Afghan syndrome, similar to our Vietnam syndrome.

Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm.

00:17:54 Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: And of course, they, they did blame us to some degree for their defeat in Afghanistan, because we did arm the, the mujahideen-- this was under, mainly under President Reagan-- which, in geostrategic terms of, of the Cold War, was the right thing to do, but unfortunately, it may have sown the seeds for the radical, radicalization inside Afghanistan that led to the Taliban and to, to their giving harbor to al Qaeda.

00:18:28 Clifford Chanin: Ambassador Burns, what was the vantage point from NATO as to how the Russians were going to react to this mobilization? Were there indications, one way or another, from how the Russians felt about this massive alliance mobilization so close to them?

00:18:43 Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Putin, I think, as Sandy said, identified with us in a way. The Russians had been victims of their own, their own terrorist attacks from the North Caucasus, where they have a large Muslim population inside the Russian Federation. Putin came to Brussels, I think about a month after 9/11 and gave a speech that he wanted to cooperate on counterterrorism with the U.S. and Europe. He said he didn't want to join NATO. Russia's too big, proud, and so we formed the following spring, as a direct result of 9/11, we went to Italy, President

Bush, and we formed a NATO, a NATO-Russia Council. And we invited Russia to set up a formal diplomatic establishment.

00:19:27

It was a successor to the one that Sandy had talked about, and it brought the Russian ambassador into NATO not as a member, but as a country with which we could all cooperate, and we met with this Russian ambassador. Some of you may have heard of him. He's probably in the Mueller report. His name is Sergey Kislyak.

(laughter)

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: We both dealt with Sergey Kislyak for years and years. Tough customer, prickly, but a professional diplomat. Very well informed.

00:19:55

Clifford Chanin (laughing): Yes, particularly, I would say.

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: He was the person sent... Yes, very well. He was the person sent to try to improve the relationship. It never really happened, because, as you remember, a year and a half after 9/11, we went into Iraq. And the Russian Federation, as well as our NATO allies Germany and France, opposed President George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq, and that really did sour, at NATO, our relations with, with the Russian Federation.

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Afghanistan was a daunting place. Condi Rice writes in her memoirs, when they went to Camp David the weekend, it would have been probably, just four, five, four days after 9/11, and they, they put the map of Afghanistan and the Hindu Kush out on the table in Laurel Lodge, in the conference room-- she said her heart sank when she saw this forbidding terrain that we would have to fight in.

00:20:48           The British gave us immediate support. The British went with us as we invaded on, I think, October 7, just... Even less than a month after 9/11, we were in Afghanistan. And other allies gave us individual support. We felt at NATO that the alliance, having invoked Article 5, should make a collective effort. And so eventually, all the allies went into Afghanistan with us. They, most are still there with us. A lot of them had trouble getting there, because a lot of them don't have the strategic lift that the United States is, so we had to ferry a lot of allied soldiers into Afghanistan. We actually had to rent Russian and Ukrainian Antonov superlifters to get some of the troops-- European troops, not American.

00:21:30           And so it, it also showcased for us the fact that we had an unbalanced alliance, that we had some very capable countries-- the United States and the United Kingdom, the Brits, especially-- and we had some very weak allies who might have been able to deploy well in Europe, but couldn't deploy to South Asia without a lot of help from us. And that led to a lot of soul-searching that continues to this day about the need for Europeans to do more, to lift up their end of NATO.

00:21:55           Clifford Chanin: I do want to come to that. But since you mentioned it, I, I'd like to ask about the impact of the war in Iraq and the division among the NATO allies about that, and the enduring impact that you feel that that has had. Now, combat operations are essentially over there. There are still troops there. But you know, some of our allies did go with us to Iraq, and it's not so much to ask you about, "Should we or should we not have?" But having done so, what do you think the consequence of that was in putting strains within the alliance? Because the alliance itself was divided about Iraq.

00:22:30           Ambassador Nicholas Burns: The Iraq War?

Clifford Chanin: Yeah.

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Yeah-- so we're unified about Afghanistan, 9/11, Article 5. We were divided on Iraq. Germany and France-- two of the most important and most capable allies-- and Belgium and

Luxembourg, as a quartet, decided, "We're opposed to the war," Iraq 2003. "We're not going. We're not going to allow NATO as an organization to give any help to the American war effort."

00:22:55 I objected. I was the American ambassador. My bosses were, of course, President Bush, Secretary Colin Powell, Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. They all knew NATO. We fought a big battle. And eventually 18... We had grown in the intervening year and a half. We now had 26 allies. 18 of the 26 allies came into Iraq with us, not immediately, but eventually, many of them to train the Iraqi army, to help in rebuilding cities-- valuable work. Some into combat with us, for many, many years. We were very grateful to that.

00:23:26 We were divided grievously in 2003. In fact, there was a time in the winter of 2003, just before our invasion of Iraq, I didn't know if the alliance was going to survive, because Germany and France, and Russia, had formed kind of formed a trio, a troika of countries so vociferously involved. But we were able to overcome it, and I, I must say, I must give tribute to the Germans.

00:23:50 The Germans decided that NATO is more important than their disagreement over us on Iraq. And the Germans said, "We're not going to join with you with troops, "but we're not going to block you, and we'll let NATO go in and form a NATO training mission for the Iraqi military," which is very valuable to us, because then we could take some of the troops from our side, American troops, who would have been involved by the thousands in training, we could put them into some of the combat roles where we had a, a real comparative advantage over some of the Europeans. So I credit the Germans with that.

00:24:20 The French fought us to the end, as the French sometimes do, in ideological wars that we have-- among friends. But I must say, and Sandy was deputy secretary general, the alliance has long since overcome this.

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: Mm-hmm.

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: We are a unified alliance. And there's great support for what we've been doing. NATO is with us in fighting the Islamic caliphate. The operation had just concluded against at least the caliphate that has been so successful. NATO, NATO countries have been with us. In fact, they've been leading some of the counterterror operations in Mauritania and Mali. The French are leading, we're in support. They're still in Afghanistan with us, 17 years later, so I really credit the allies for sticking with us.

00:25:02 Clifford Chanin: Ambassador Vershbow, you were deputy secretary general and also your experience there. I mean, how did you see the burden of this disagreement and difference over Iraq on the unity of NATO? And indeed, how NATO managed to overcome that?

00:25:20 Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: Well, by the time I returned to NATO as deputy secretary general, I think it had been pretty much overcome. It was, it was obviously something from which we derive a lot of bitter lessons. And I think it still has some lasting impact on the relationship with Russia, because even though they didn't kind of engage in the sort of histrionics that the French engaged in at the time of the invasion of Iraq, the Russians were quite angry over the fact that we acted without the authorization of the United Nations Security Council. And we had done that previously in the, in Kosovo, which was a humanitarian crisis, and... I think met the criteria for a genuine humanitarian intervention.

00:26:01 But in this case, we were going in to topple a regime without any international sanction. And that's, to this day, is one of the sort of top ten of the grievances that you, you hear from President Putin. But I think it, it, allies learned that they need to kind of ensure that everybody is a participant in, in the development of, of a strategy that could lead to military intervention from the earliest days.

00:26:28 I think part of the U.S. mistake in, in Iraq was not lining up more European support for making the "go" decision. I mean, other problems, the manipulation of intelligence-- there were a lot of mistakes made in

Iraq, and, of course, the long-term impact on the Middle East was quite devastating, but that's a subject for a different, different evening here at the 9/11 Museum.

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But I think, you know, we saw in how NATO rallied after the Russian invasion of, of Ukraine in 2014, you know, patient efforts led by the United States, but with a lot of the other allies chipping in to shape a coherent response and to sustain that over several years in terms of, you know, basically rebuilding NATO's defense and deterrence posture that had been pretty much dismantled when we thought that, you know, that the Russian threat had gone forever.

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So I think NATO kind of now is functioning more effectively than at the time of Iraq. But of course, the big cloud hanging over it is none other than the president of the United States, who, whose commitment to the alliance is not entirely consistent or clear from one day to the next.

Clifford Chanin: Well, let me, let me, let me ask about that...

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: You were being diplomatic.

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: Just to make a smooth segue.

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Clifford Chanin: We will, we will fast-forward up to today, where the president and the secretary general of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, had a joint conference. So you've each spoken and written very clearly about this. I'm going to first quote from Ambassador Vershbow in the "Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review," in which you write, "So far, NATO and transatlantic security have managed to survive the president's wrath. Despite Trump's complaints that NATO is 'obsolete' and that allies aren't paying enough for U.S. protection, his administration has actually increased U.S. military presence in Europe and boosted funding for the European Deterrence Initiative. But the president's tantrums during the summit and his recent outbursts during the end-of-World-War-I

commemorations in November suggest that his commitment to the alliance is tenuous at best and should not be taken for granted."

00:28:35 And then coming to the report from the Belfer Center, that Ambassador Burns directed, "NATO at 70: An Alliance in Crisis," you wrote in that report, "The most significant challenge is the absence of strong American presidential leadership. President Trump is regarded widely in NATO capitals as the alliance's most urgent and often most difficult problem. There is no reason to believe President Trump's attitude will change for the better during the next two years. He believes NATO allies are taking advantage of the U.S."

00:29:09 So the whole thing was structured around the mutual interest of the United States and its partners. It has managed to endure for these 70 years, and yet we are in a situation where the number-one problem at the heart of the alliance comes from within the alliance itself. I'm not quite sure what the question is, even, at this point, but, you know, how do we get ourselves through this situation, if indeed we do?

00:29:40 Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Well, I would explain it this way. Every American president since Harry Truman, who presided over the signing of the Washington Treaty 70 years ago this Thursday-- conservative, liberal, Republican, Democrat-- every one of them has thought that NATO is vital to us, it's in our self-interest. We don't do it for charity.

00:30:00 Their insight in the late 1940s, and these were people who had led the World War II effort, and many of them, like Truman, had fought in the First World War-- Truman had fought, General Marshall had fought in the First World War, of course, Eisenhower had fought in both-- that the United States could no longer defend itself in the late 1940s, unless we were deployed in Europe and in Asia, we had major troop presence. That was the only way we could defend our country in a global world. That is more true now in 19... in 2019, than it was in 1949, considering the world that we live in, and considering what 9/11 represents.



00:30:36 21 young men got here, through our defenses. And so you have to be out with our allies defending us. And that we'd be stronger with allies than without. These were the great insights, they're still true today. President Trump-- I'm not trying to be political. Both of us served both parties as non-partisan people, career civil servants. President Trump doesn't believe that.

00:30:59 He thinks that NATO is outmoded. He thinks the allies are taking advantage of us. He kind of counts the pennies. "How much are you spending? How much are you spending?" But he never acknowledges the 1,000 combat deaths that they suffered in Afghanistan. And I think at its essence, Cliff, the United States has a power advantage over Russia and a power advantage over China because we have allies. Because of the 29-- soon to be, we are going to add North Macedonia this year-- Europeans and Canadian allies, and in East Asia, because of the Japanese and the South Koreans and the Australians-- our three treaty allies-- the Philippines, Thailand, our defense partners there...

00:31:41 We're so much more powerful in alliances than without them. Churchill used to say, "The only thing worse than fighting with allies is fighting without them." Churchill was a wise man. What do we get? We can contain Putin, because we have allies to help us in Europe. We can defeat the Islamic caliphate-- we've just defeated the caliphate, not the entire organization—in Syria because we have allies. We can respond to terrorists in Somalia and Mauritania and Mali and the West Coast of Africa-- from the east to west—because we have allies.

00:32:18 And so we are more powerful with them. They share the burden. Their taxpayers share the burden, their young soldiers, men and women, share the burden with us. This is a good deal for the United States. It is sometimes aggravating. We were defend... we were paid to argue with the allies at the table. "More money, please." "More soldiers"-- we're not timid.

00:32:37 But I think that President Trump doesn't believe any of this. He has never committed himself to Article 5. He's had several occasions to do that, never done that. First president ever. He hasn't stood up to Putin. He is

now embracing the far... the anti-democratic populists like Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and he's become a leading critic of Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron.

00:32:58 This is turning 70 years of successful policy on its head. Last point: In a recent poll by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, over 65% of Americans say they believe in NATO, and I testified before Congress last week on the subject of NATO and our relationship with Europe and Russia. Every single member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Europe, Republican and Democrat, said, "We believe in NATO." Congress has invited Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO secretary general, tomorrow morning to give a joint address to the Congress, to the House and Senate.

00:33:36 Mitch McConnell and Nancy Pelosi did this together to say, "We believe in NATO." Everyone's trying to compensate for the president. The president has been giving the stiff arm to NATO. Again today, in his press conference. And yet, you know, Republicans, Democrats, combining forces on behalf of all of us, to say, "We're happy to be in this alliance." "We love this... We love the Europeans and the Canadians, and admire them, and they're with us."

00:34:02 So it's an extraordinary moment. We've never had a president like this. And I... this is not a partisan issue. The Republicans, maybe even more vociferous in their support for NATO, maybe even than the Democrats. It's interesting.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah. Ambassador Vershbow, your sense of the moment?

00:34:18 Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: I agree with everything Nick has said. It's a, it's a bizarre situation where you have an administration that is doing a lot of the right things, as I mentioned in that article you quoted, in terms of further contributions to the deterrence posture in Europe, putting more troops on the ground, coming up with initiatives that were adopted by the NATO summit last July to raise the readiness of allied

forces, and challenging the Europeans and the Canadians to do more as part of these initiatives.

00:34:37

Uh... But the president only sees this issue of defense spending, the two-percent-of-GDP benchmark, and, you know, in a narrow sense, he has a point.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah.

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: A lot of the allies are not living up to what they promised to do. They pledged in 2014 to move towards this two-percent goal over a ten-year period. It wasn't, you know, that demanding a requirement, yet some of the big allies—and it's not just Germany, although they get most of the abuse. But Italy is equally in bad shape.

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Canada.

00:35:18

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: Canada is not so good, the Netherlands. Countries that are, are very defense-minded, in terms of their, their traditions, but they aren't making the case to their own publics that the world is a dangerous place-- which is... seems self-evident to me-- you know, that a little bit more spending on defense is ultimately an investment that will pay off in the sense that we won't have to fight so many wars.

00:35:40

If we can deter the Russians, if we can deal with some of the problems on the periphery of Europe before they, they come and destabilize European countries, we're all better off. But the president, you know, he has a point on two percent, but he misses the bigger point, which is, as Nick said, that it's, you know, we benefit as much from having these allies and having the structures that NATO has built up over the years, so that if there is a crisis, we have all these capable, interoperable, highly trained military forces who can fight with us, or if it's a political challenge, we

have a lot of, you know, like-minded democracies who add political weight to the U.S. position and can help us, you know, win the day in the United Nations or other international fora. It's, it's not just that we're going over there to protect our, the allies, and we should be paid for it, like mercenaries.

00:36:33 We gain as much: They give us bases, they give us their troops, they pay the ultimate price. And I, I've, you know, I've heard the president, when commenting about the casualties taken by allies, he sort of said, "Oh, two or three people." He doesn't even know that countries like Canada, which doesn't have a huge population...

Clifford Chanin: Yeah.

00:36:52 Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: Have in per capita terms probably lost more of their men and women than the United States. And a tiny country like Georgia-- which isn't a member of NATO, but is desperately keen to get in-- they have the highest number of troops per capita to this day in Afghanistan, because they want to show that they're worthy of being allies and willing to pay the price to get into NATO.

00:37:13 So, um... but the president's going to change. He's been saying these sorts of things for years, well before he became president. Uh... And we used to hope that the adults in the room, Jim Mattis and others, would keep him, keep the president in check. But a lot of those adults in the room have gone. That's why I'm, I'm, I'm a bit nervous about, you know, getting through the next two years without something dramatic happening. We heard in "The New York Times" that the president mused about actually pulling out of NATO and was talked out of it.

00:37:47 Unfortunately, the lawyers say you need Senate approval to, to adopt a treaty, but you don't need the Senate's approval to withdraw from a treaty.

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: It's the president's prerogative.

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: The president could do that.

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Yeah.

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: Just... George W. Bush did it with respect to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty...

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Yeah.

00:38:06 Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: When I was ambassador there. So that's, that's my worst-case scenario. But even short of withdrawing from NATO, the president could do further things to destabilize the alliance and create new rifts with our allies, who we need, perhaps more than ever, as we face a rising China, continuous, continued terrorist threats in the Middle East, North Africa. It ain't over yet in Afghanistan. You know, we need these allies as much as they need us.

00:38:35 Clifford Chanin: I think one of the points you make in your report is that you would like the Congress to pass legislation that would require that a withdrawal from the NATO treaty gain congressional approval, that it could not go into effect unilaterally by presidential decree.

00:38:51 Ambassador Nicholas Burns: That's right. That's right. I want to point out that this Harvard study that was just published, on NATO's 70th anniversary, is by me, but also by my friend and colleague Ambassador Doug Lute, another ambassador to NATO-- President Obama's ambassador. And so he, he deserves credit. We do ask... We have, we have an op-ed in "The Washington Post" tomorrow morning, saying essentially, calling on the Congress, because Congress is so united in favor of NATO, "Please pass legislation that would prevent the president from drawing down the American troops in Europe. Prevent the president

from..." You know, God forbid he try to take us out of NATO. It would be the greatest mistake in American political history, American foreign policy history, if he did that.

00:39:30 And the Congress would oppose him en masse. But as Sandy said, he may have the executive power to do it without a vote in the Congress. We would hope that Congress might pass a law that would prevent him from taking these actions, on a bipartisan basis.

00:39:43 The other thing I want to point out, Sandy and I have both, you know, obviously been to all the NATO ally countries. The other advantage to us is that we have access to air bases-- Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany, Aviano Air Base in Italy, Souda Bay Naval Station in Greece, in the Eastern Mediterranean-- our planes, our, our Air Force, our Marines, our Army, our Navy, are in these facilities. We are a continent closer to defend America against al Qaeda, as we did after 9/11, or terrorists in the Horn of Africa or terrorists in Syria. We're a continent closer because of NATO. We wouldn't have the right to be in these countries and have this American military presence since 1949 without the NATO treaty.

00:40:28 And I think Americans should do things because then... they are in our interest. It's also good to do things because they're the right thing to do, but you also want to act in your own interest. This is in our own interest. The president describes it as some kind of charity. It's not charity. Today, he said, in his press conference, with the NATO secretary general sitting beside him, he said, "You know, NATO, that just protects the Europeans. It doesn't help us." That's what he said today.

00:40:53 And, you know, we ask our presidents, Republicans and Democrats, to represent us on big occasions. Thursday's a big occasion, it's the 70th anniversary of NATO. I think any prior president-- President Reagan, President Bush, either one, President Clinton, President Obama, President Truman-- would have said this week, "Thank you, Europe and Canada, for sticking with us during the Cold War, four-and-a-half decades. Thank you for 9/11. What you did to honor the people who died." Here, on this spot. "Thank you for sticking with us in Afghanistan for 17 years."

00:41:29                    Nothing today. No thanks, just belittlement and criticism. "You're not spending enough." Um...

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: To add insult to injury, the... A couple of weeks ago, there was this report that he was actually going to have our allies pay us for the privilege of having our troops use their bases. The cost, plus 50%. So we should make a profit off of our allies.

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: It makes our soldiers...

00:41:55                    Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: They've said that this was just an idea being batted around in the administration, and it hasn't happened yet, but it just is kind of symptomatic of...

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Our soldiers aren't mercenaries. They never have been, right?

Clifford Chanin: Yeah.

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: But we gain from using Ramstein or Avianoor... yet they should pay us. >>

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Right.

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: So that we'll keep coming.

00:42:13                    Clifford Chanin: So it raises an issue that you both come to at various points, but more, I think, in, in your report, which has to do with NATO as the accumulation of a set of shared values that these countries are committed to. I mean, that fundamentally is the reason that it is a commitment that people think is worth doing on their own behalf. But it

would be fair to the president... I mean, we do live in a time where he is not just the only symptom of things coming apart in the postwar order. So you do have the anti-democratic rise of governments in some of our NATO allies. You do have these movements, whether political in government, in Italy, or on the streets in France, or the Brexit thing-- which is certainly an expression of, you know...

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Crisis.

00:43:03

Clifford Chanin: ...the end of this postwar order, in some way. And so there is more going on here. And the question is, do the values underpin this, or are the values coming apart themselves, and therefore the structures that are supposed to be held up by these values are now tottering?

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: The values are contested right now.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah.

00:43:20

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Democracy, human rights, rule of law-- everything that we believe in, that's in our Constitution and our Declaration of Independence, in our whole national history. The second line of the NATO treaty-- if you go home and Google it, the Washington Treaty-- the second line talks about human rights and democracy and the rule of law. So we are both, NATO's both an, a military organization, and it's a political organization. As you say correctly, Cliff, if we're an alliance of democracies, we don't let authoritarian dictatorships come in.

00:43:48

Now, we have had experiences where democratic countries go bad. The Greek colonels of the '60s and '70s, Turkish military dictatorships, Hungary today, Poland today, Turkey today. So we've got to fight the battles within. And I just say, as we look ahead the next ten or 20 years, two of the biggest, not literal battles, but metaphorical battles we're going to fight-- struggles?



- 00:44:11            There's a battle of ideas out there. Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, Mohammed bin Salman-- they believe that authoritarian governments is the way forward for the rest of the world. We don't believe that. We believe democracy is the way forward. We're going to have to fight that battle. I mean, to stand up... Like the way Ronald Reagan would, did, the way John F. Kennedy did.
- 00:44:31            The other battle is one of technological change in our military equipment. We've been, since 1945, really since the dawn of the atomic and hydrogen age, the nuclear age, we've been, had the qualitative military edge. We've had better technology, more powerful military technology. We've been able to remain dominant because of it. The Chinese are contesting that right now through artificial intelligence, machine learning, quantum computing, biotechnology. These are mainly intellectual revolutions.
- 00:45:06            They're in the tech companies. The technologies are being militarized. The Chinese are going to develop a whole new generation of space-based weapons. We've got to keep up. We've got to at least keep even, if not exceed them. We're going to need the NATO allies, the scientific and technological talent in Germany, in Britain, in France, in Poland, to pool our resources to make sure we don't lose this race. And so, another advantage for the United States of having democratic allies who don't want to submit to the Chinese and Russians if they ever became, God forbid, more powerful than our country, the Western alliance, NATO.
- 00:45:42            Clifford Chanin: Let me ask about Russia, because more recent years seem to have built not just Putin's intentions, and his confidence in his ability to act on those intentions, but you know, the real effect of his movement into Crimea and Ukraine. The threats that are now in the focus of your report in, in the northern part of Europe, in the Baltic states. The interference in the democratic processes of the Western countries. I mean, what do you assess Putin's intention to be? How far does he plan to go? Is there a line that you can see?

00:46:21            You both write, I think, that we're not on the verge of war with Russia, but, you know, there are things that they are doing that have gained them an advantage, however permanent or temporary it might be. So let me start with Ambassador Vershbow.

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Okay.

00:46:34            Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: Well, I think Putin's overarching motivation is to stay in power and to solidify the system that he's built up, of kind of crony capitalism or kleptocracy. And that system is threatened by democratic ideas, democratic values. And the first battleground is the former Soviet space. Putin is determined to re-establish hegemony over countries like Ukraine and Georgia, not only because he wants more territory and buffers against possible foreign threats, but because he wants to be able to prevent the emergence of strong democratic states that could turn, turn to the West, but also set an example for the Russian people that would ultimately bring down his system.

00:47:27            So he sees our values and our ideas as I, think, the, the main threat that he's trying to counter. And he's countering it through sort of offensive action, uh... Rendering Ukraine, or trying to render Ukraine, a, a failed state by occupying parts of its territory and annexing the Crimea; doing similar things, and occupying parts of Georgia, Moldova. But also this political warfare that we've now seen more and more.

00:47:59            Demonstratively, the interference in our election, the active use of disinformation and propaganda, cyberattacks, all of which, you know, came together in the activities to influence our election, but have been equally visible in, in Europe. Ukraine is kind of the laboratory where all these techniques are tried out first. All this is an, is an effort to kind of undermine our democratic institutions, weaken the solidarity among democratic nations expressed through NATO and the European Union. Basically, Russia feels it'll be more secure, the weaker all the, the neighbors and the western democratic community may be.

00:48:41                    So it, it leads to the conclusion that we're going to be in a kind of a long-term struggle with Putin, because this is about his vision of the future of Russia and his vision for a European security system that's basically based on spheres of influence, where Russia gets to dominate its neighbors, and we're supposed to accept that. And of course, we're, we're not ready to do that. And so, it leads to a kind of a long-term standoff for, for many years to come.

00:49:09                    Clifford Chanin: Let me just ask in relation to this, I mean, and it comes to a point I made earlier, I mean... He does seem to have found sympathetic audiences in many of the Western countries. So these movements that I mentioned before, whether it's, you know, the Brexit movement or the Five Stars in Italy, or...

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Marine Le Pen.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah, exactly. I mean, these are people who are significant in their own domestic politics. And yet they have a favorable disposition towards Putin, despite the fact that they are NATO allies, or their countries are.

00:49:40                    Ambassador Nicholas Burns: He's, Russia's not strong enough in conventional terms to challenge NATO. NATO is too strong in Western and Central Europe. So what has he done? He's a KGB guy. Intelligence operations, hybrid warfare of the type that Sandy described, attacking our databases, our state electoral offices here in the United States.

00:49:59                    We know he tried to break into 23 of the 50 state offices. He's doing the same thing to the West Europeans, to the Dutch, French, German elections in 2017. So we need to raise our defenses. This is a cyberattack. He's also using social media-- and most of us are on some form of social media-- to just deliver millions of bits of false information to divide us from each other and turn us against each other, as Americans or as Germans.

00:50:24 So we've got to raise our defenses, be aware of this, combat him on those terms. And this is a very difficult war. Struggle-- it's not a war, it's a struggle. We have to defend ourselves, because you say rightly, in Western Europe, in particular, there are these anti-democratic populist movements. These people don't believe in democracy. Well-funded... Marine Le Pen, the Front National in France, she took \$11 million openly from Putin, and she ran against Emmanuel Macron in the elections of 2017. Alternative für Deutschland in Germany, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands. And then you have these established government figures, Salvini in the Italian coalition-- he's a government official-- and Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary, who are aiding and abetting, in a way, much of what the Russians want.

00:51:11 So they're trying to divide NATO and the European Union from within-- it's quite a challenge. We need an American president... I know what Ronald Reagan would have done. We were young guys working in the Reagan administration 30 years ago. Ronald Reagan would have stood up for Angela Merkel. Maybe he wouldn't have agreed with her politics, maybe he would have. He would have stood up for Emmanuel Macron. And that's not happening. President Trump is not standing up for the small-D democrats in Western Europe. He's embracing the Viktor Orbáns of the world. And America does not want to be on the side of anti-democratic populists.

00:51:42 Clifford Chanin Yeah, yeah. This notion of hybrid conflict, which I think you write does not justify the invocation of Article 5, yet is this sort of gray area of conflict, where there is real damage and real vulnerability on our side, on our allies' side, on the other side, as well. What do you think NATO can do, or the Western world, or whoever, can do, to establish rules of the road and implement some sort of punishment for these kinds of steps? Is that something that happens unilaterally by the injured party? Or is this something that NATO or some other organization should be formulating rules for?

00:52:24 Ambassador Nicholas Burns: When the Washington Treaty was signed 70 years ago this week, Article 5, you know, people then would envision troops crossing a border, and then you'd know that one of your member states had been attacked, and you'd respond. In, in 2007, I had come

back from NATO-- I was undersecretary of state-- our ally, Estonia, our NATO ally, was attacked in another way at the beginning of the cyber age.

00:52:53

A denial-of-service attack, which took down their computer systems for a couple of days, and for weeks, even months, we were trying to figure out, all of us, what happened and who did it. We know now it was the Russians. But at the beginning of the cyber age, we didn't have the capacity to know, you know- and authorization's really difficult to know, even the best of circumstances, on cyberattacks.

Sandy has been involved in the effort to try to answer your question: Define how is a cyberattack, when would it trigger Article 5?

00:53:24

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: Yeah, I mean, the treaty speaks of armed attack, but clearly there's cyberattacks that could lead to the same kind of destructiveness as dropping a bunch of bombs, in terms of bringing down critical infrastructure, causing a breakdown in the banking systems, causing, you know, social unrest. You could even, you know, through a cyberattack, cause a dam to breach and flood hundreds of thousands of people.

00:53:50

So NATO decided in 2014 that, that Article 5 could be invoked in the event of a cyberattack, you know, if it rose to a level comparable to armed attack. And basically, it's sort of the old standard, "You'll know it when you see it."

00:54:06

Uh... But of course, there's other forms of hybrid warfare that the Russians are becoming expert in which don't necessarily lead to the same sort of physical destruction, but lead to increasing of social tensions, whether it's manipulation through social media, or propaganda, or funding of extremist parties and spreading of, of hate, hate speech and fake news. Some of these require efforts by individual nations. NATO doesn't have all the tools or the answers.

00:54:37 I think all of us have to learn more about how these, these new kinds of information weapons operate-- educate our publics, our young people who use the social media, to be a little more vigilant, to know what they're dealing with as far as the sources of information, so that we're less easily manipulated by Russia or, or anyone else, even Alex Jones. I mean, there are domestic people who do this, too.

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Yeah.

00:55:03 Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: It's not just the Russians. So it requires a kind of a team effort. NATO has a role, the European Union, which has much more jurisdiction over some of these domestic institutions that are being attacked. And individual countries and governments. And civic groups. This is something where government doesn't necessarily have all the... The solutions. It requires our teachers, parents, people who can influence the younger generation, in particular, who may be more prone to use the, the tools that the Russians were trying to exploit.

00:55:39 Clifford Chanin: Thank you. Let's see if we have a question or two from the floor. This gentleman over here. Just if you would wait for the microphone for one moment, it's coming to you.

Man: Good evening, and thank you for being with us. Pre-Erdogan and pre-9/11, Turkey, in spite of some democratic shortcomings, was a pretty committed NATO partner. Would you call yourself an optimist for the future of the Turkey-NATO relationship?

00:56:09 Ambassador Nicholas Burns: I would not. Turkey came into NATO in 1952, and for a long time has been the second-largest conventional military, next to the United States, in the alliance. Turkey was critical in the Cold War on the southern flank, just beneath the Soviet Union.

In recent years, President Erdogan has turned as much towards Putin as he has towards President Obama and President Trump. He's just about,

he's, says he's going to buy a Russian-made S-400 air-defense system, which we could not possibly integrate into the NATO air-defense system. It's a Russian system. It's like letting the fox right into the henhouse. We can't... and President Trump, appropriately, has said-- let me say something nice about him.

00:56:48 He said, "There's no way we're going to do that." And, and Erdogan runs an authoritarian police state. It is interesting. It's not a total authoritarian state. He just lost important elections on Sunday, in Istanbul and other major cities. So there are people trying to revive the democracy there. It's a very troublesome ally right now.

00:57:08 The interesting thing about NATO is-- Sandy referred to it a couple, we both have, a couple of times-- we operate by consensus, so every nation has to agree before we do anything. That's why on 9/11, I was counting votes. I didn't want to bring that to a vote if one or two of the allies would not vote for it. I didn't want the message to the... want the American people to be, "NATO fails to support us." So we had to make sure everyone voted.

00:57:34 We couldn't kick Turkey out of NATO, because the Turks would say, "We don't want to be kicked out," and they would veto the action. So we're stuck, and it may be we have to wait till the Turkish government returns to a full-flooded democratic ally.

00:57:50 Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: I'm a little more optimistic, in light of these recent elections. It may take some years for change to occur in Turkey, but at the end of the day, despite their playing footsie with the Russians, you know, they still need NATO's protection. They're in a tough neighborhood. I think we have to manage this problem, avoid getting to, into a situation where Turkey actually does block day-to-day work of NATO, which is possible, but hope that internal forces, civil society in Turkey-- which is still, still there-- eventually brings about change that makes them a little bit easier to deal with.

00:58:24

Clifford Chanin: Let me just expand on this, the issue of the S-400s. The Russian anti-aircraft missiles come against, at a moment when Turkey is supposed to take possession of the latest American jet fighters, which would then expose the F-35...

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: The administration has just...

Clifford Chanin: ...which would expose one technology to the other.

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: The administration has done the right thing in saying, "We're going to suspend the delivery and ultimately suspend Turkey from participation in this program which they've invested in." Because you simply can't have Russian radar on the S-400 sort of learning how to defeat our... You know, crown jewel advanced fighter.

00:59:02

Clifford Chanin: Let's see, gentleman here. If you would wait for Ruth to bring you the mic. Gentleman here.

Man: Thank you for a great presentation, by the way. Oh, could you say something about this Russians sending troops into Venezuela, just recently, as a violation of the Monroe Doctrine? That was one thought I had. And now I can't for the life of me think of the second thing.

Clifford Chanin: I think that's good enough, I think.

00:59:36

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: Yeah, it's a fast-moving situation. The Russians are clearly... You know, going all in in support of Maduro, sending in military advisers, trainers, selling them weapons, which will just, you know get them even more deeply into, into debt. I think they're motivated, first, by just sort of opportunism, with this place where they think they can make some gains.



01:00:03 But if there's a, a sort of a overarching political goal, it's to prevent regime change. They don't consider Maduro to have, you know, been elected, re-elected illegitimately, and they're quite determined not to see the West, and the United States in particular, get away with toppling regimes that they considered to be legitimate. That was their beef over the Iraq War, toppling Saddam Hussein, the toppling of Qaddafi, 2011, after we were, you know, intervening mainly to protect the civilian population from, from atrocities.

01:00:41 But in the end, it led to regime change. I think that's why they went into Syria in 2015, was also to prevent Bashar al-Assad from, from being toppled, which, he was on the verge of, of throwing in the towel before they, they acted. So this is going to be an interesting test for the Trump administration, which has sort of invoked the Monroe Doctrine and has doubled down on support for the speaker. What's his name, Guaiyo?

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Guaiyo, Guadió, yeah.

01:01:08 Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: Uh... you know, is this a red-line moment for the president? Is he going to do something that could lead to some military stand-off with the Russians? But right now, the Russians seem to be, you know, using very limited resources to confound our ability to get our way in Venezuela. And I'm not sure what Trump's going to do next.

01:01:37 Clifford Chanin: Let's see, someone else? All the way in the back, the gentleman all the way in the back row.

Man: Thank you for your presentation. Unfortunately, you have told us many things that we haven't read about and are very, very frightening in this world. What bothers me the most is, we have about 40% of the population of this country who will back anything that our president will do, including leaving NATO. How do we inform the public in this country how important this alliance has been to us, and has kept us out of many wars? And in fact, if a NATO-like consortium had existed in the 1930s, Hitler would, never would have been able to do...

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Right.

01:02:32 Man: What he did. And for us to say that we, we're not going to support this alliance anymore is like slitting our own throat.

Ambassador Nicholas Burns: Well, the good news is that, as, as we've said, that the vast majority of Americans support NATO. The vast majority, the great overwhelming majority of our elected representatives in Washington-- both parties-- support NATO. I think there is a wisdom in the 1940s generation. They had come through this terrible total war.

01:03:00 As I said before, many of them, World War II-- World War I, and they were convinced that it was American isolationism that had prevented us from joining the League of Nations in 1920, when the Senate voted it down. We weren't there when Hitler and Mussolini rose to power, we weren't helping. FDR was barely able to get Lend-Lease through the Congress in 1940, and they were anti-isolationists, and they were bipartisan.

01:03:26 Eisenhower and Truman, Dulles and Acheson, Republicans and Democrats, they came out of World War II, said, "Never again are we going to just withdraw back into the 50..." what became 50 states, 48, then. "And just think that we can just cover our eyes and pull the covers over our head and hope the world goes away," because that's not how it works, especially in the age of nuclear weapons and chemical weapons and 9/11 attackers.

01:03:53 We have to go out to meet the challenges. The trick is, of course, we can't over-extend ourselves. We can't be every... We can't be the policeman on every street. So what our smartest presidents understand, when we need to commit when it's vital to us, and then when maybe someone else should do the job overseas when it's not vital to us. None of our presidents have thought that we had to be the world's policeman.

01:04:15 But Europe is vital. They're the allies, democratic, who stood with us. They're our largest trade partner, the E.U. They're the largest investor into our economy, the largest number of American allies in the world. They're vital. The Japanese are vital. The South Koreans and Australians are vital. This has been agreed for 70 years, and suddenly it's now being put into question not by the secretary of state, not by the secretary of defense, not by Mitch McConnell-- by one person, he happens to be the president.

01:04:42 So I really commend the museum for having this session, for focusing on NATO. Thank you for doing that. And, you know, I, both of us, and all of our brethren, of, in both parties, are out trying to speak to the American people to say, "This is good for us. We're stronger in the alliance than we are alone."

Clifford Chanin: Ambassador Vershbow, your sense of what these public discussions do and what they capture, or where they fall short.

01:05:13 Ambassador Alexander Vershbow: Mm-hmm. Well, I think the more public discussions, the better. I think people don't study history much anymore, and, and some of these things, even if they read about them in books, you know, it's ancient history. And I think there needs to be way, ways... We do a better job of bringing kind of a human face to some of the things that NATO has done for us.

01:05:37 More of a spotlight on veterans of Afghanistan, who fought with us from, from, from Canada, from Europe, from other parts of the world. Paying more attention to crises that are still boiling in Ukraine, which, you know, it's been five years. The Russians have been continuing the violence there.

01:05:59 You know, these, these stories need to be dramatized. People have to see what's at stake. If we lose our ability to influence events in Europe, the

kind of instability and conflict that we're seeing today could just get, get worse.

It's ultimately a challenge of education, and, like Nick, I commend the museum for having these kinds of fora, and I hope that your collaboration with NATO on doing, you know, a whole series of these kinds of programs can reach an even bigger audience, because it's vital, I think, for our long-term national interest.

01:06:33 Clifford Chanin: We need a bigger auditorium. I think that's very, that's very clear. We're going to stop there. I do want to call to everybody's attention, well worth reading, the Atlantic Council report, "Permanent Deterrence: Enhancements to the U.S. Military Presence in North Central Europe," Ambassador Vershbow and General Philip Breedlove, the leads on that. So you could get that online, I'm sure.

01:06:55 And then from the Belfer Center at Harvard, "NATO at 70: An Alliance in Crisis," Ambassador Burns and Ambassador Douglas Lute. Again, you know, there's much more in it than we have the time to get to tonight, and well worth reading. And all the references in it will take you even further into this subject.

With that, I want you to join me in thanking Ambassador Alexander Vershbow and Ambassador Nick Burns.

(applause)