

Mary Kissel: Hello everybody and Happy New Year. Welcome to the Nixon seminar on conservative realism and national security hosted by the Nixon Foundation. Thank you for tuning in. I'm Mary Kissel, former Senior Adviser to Secretary Pompeo now with Stephens Inc, and I'm honored to be taking over the host chair from the great Hugh Hewitt, big shoes to fill. We're delighted to have Secretary Mike Pompeo and Ambassador Robert O'Brien continue this year as co-chairs of this series, as well as the seminar members of course, and all together, they compose some of the best and brightest minds in foreign policy in America today, and I am delighted to be engaging with all of them.

Tonight's topic is Vladimir Putin and the threat to Ukraine. We're going to explore what's happening and why. What we can learn from history, specifically President Nixon, because this isn't the first time that we've had trouble with the Russians. Here's President Nixon reflecting on his experiences with Moscow interviewed by Frank Gannon, here's the clip.

Frank Gannon: We've talked about what has been called the madman theory involving Nixon that with your background of strong anti communism, Henry Kissinger was able to talk to the Russians and to the North Vietnamese and say, "that unless you negotiate in a serious way, Nixon is just erratic enough that he might do something dangerous."

Is there a madman theory that applies with someone as amiable and someone with no foreign policy background like President Reagan? Are they going to fear him?

President Nixon: Well, it isn't just what I would call a madman theory. I think that over-states it. I remember Johnson telling me in 1959 or 69, I should say, that Johnson told me when he came to the White House that he felt that one of his mistakes was to give the Soviet an impression that we wanted peace and that we would pay almost any price to get it.

He said, he said one of the advantages that Ike had, he always called him Ike, I never did. But he said one of the advantages that Ike had was that the Russians were afraid of Ike, afraid of him because he had been the great commander in World War Two. And because of his military background, and just because of the kind of man he was, even though Eisenhower was a very amiable, pleasant, grandfatherly type, they knew that beneath that exterior was a very cold fellow.

Frank Gannon: Do you think they were afraid of you?

President Nixon: Oh, yes. Well, they were afraid of me, though, not because of my appearances or not because of my speeches, but because of what I had done.

Mary Kissel: So Mr. Secretary, I'd like to start with you first because I want to first just lay out this concept for the audience of the madman theory. What is deterrence? Why is it important? President Nixon said there they were afraid of me not because of my appearances and not because of my speeches, but because of what I had done. And he went on to say it made him a credible leader. Can you unpack that a little bit from us?

Michael Pompeo: Well, Mary, thank you. It's good to be with you all. Happy New Year to everyone. I'll give you two thoughts, one from firsthand experience working for President Trump and the second from my time running a small business. It's not just in the world of high politics and strategy that negotiations take place and leverage matters. And that your perceived willingness to take risks on behalf of your institution matters. I saw this when I was running to small businesses in Kansas when we were negotiating with big customers, Boeing and Gulfstream and Cessna, they would walk into meetings with a perception of who we were as decision-makers and how we thought about things and it was always good that we were new to this and they didn't really know much about us. I mentioned that in the context of so many engagements, and I'm sure some of the others who served in the Trump administration will have experienced this as well.

I was with the President. You know, most days when I was a CIA director, I came to know him as well as most anybody in how he thought about the world. And when I met foreign leaders, none of them knew him. Contrast that with President Biden, good or bad. He went on codels for decades. Every one of these leaders would have spent hours with then Senator Biden, talking about things, him sharing his views. It was enormously advantageous to us, forget madman for a moment, But the fact that this unpredictability, this absence of knowledge, no background normative conditions where they say, you know, I had this conversation with him in private once in 1974. None of these foreign leaders had ever had a background conversation with President Trump on foreign policy in 1974.

And that, that turned out in my judgment to help us whether it was in the Abraham accords or the work that we did with Russia and China and certainly with Chairman Kim, the fact that there was tabula rasa, to some extent in terms of how his behaviors would unfold. We got to lay down the map. President Nixon referred to it as they knew his actions, the things he had done. We were able to do that in the first instance, we didn't have a lot of historic actions that we had to account for and explain when we were beginning to try and execute the leverage that America had and the strategic advantages that we brought to bear in these negotiations.

Mary Kissel: Ambassador O'Brien, I'd like you to build a little bit on that Secretary Pompeo then saying that, you know, that element of surprise is obviously a big part of it, but clearly, it's also the character because you could have someone come into the office that holds the cards close to the chest and has no will to act. So wonder if you can respond to Secretary Pompeo?

Ambassador Robert C. O'Brien: Sure, welcome Mary. You're gonna be a terrific moderator and Happy New Year to all the fellow participants in the seminar and to Mike and those who are watching on the live stream. It's great to be back for another year of what's really been for me, something, an event I look forward every month to because it was great to hear from all the participants. You know, I want to focus on President Putin for just a moment. And the idea that Putin is a madman or that some madman theory applies to him or he's a reckless gambler. Mike and I both met, the Secretary, and I both met Vladimir Putin. We've negotiated with the Russians and I can tell you both he and his team are very calculating. They're extraordinarily tough

negotiators. And they pocket any concession they get and then they come back and ask for more. And so as you approach these negotiations, and President Nixon, I think made the point when he was talking about his conversation with LBJ, peace through strength works, but the corollary to that is a weakness is provocative in international relations and the perception of weakness can be extraordinarily dangerous for our country, and certainly for the United States. And I think we all know that fundamentally, the United States is strong. We're the greatest country in the world and we remain so. But looking at us from abroad. Vladimir Putin saw the catastrophe in Afghanistan. He's watching the unfolding disaster on the southern border. He's seen inflation and gas prices. He's watching a country that was energy independent exporting energy and, and dictating the world oil market to us now begging OPEC to expand production. He's watching China challenge us in Taiwan. And so you take that as the first part of Putin's calculation. The second part is that we gave him two things for free his number one and number two foreign policy objectives when we were in when Secretary Pompeo and I served in the Trump administration, where I claimed extension of Newstart. He didn't want to have to give up any of his non Star compliant nuclear weapons or even freezer production.

And he wanted to clean extension which we were not prepared to give them we actually negotiated a very good deal where they would stop building additional nuclear weapons or retire weapons to get an extension of one year extension to start. He got that for nothing as far as we know. And the Biden administration came in and they just said we're gonna do a clean extension new star for five years. So Russia got its number one foreign policy priority and paid zero for it. Number two, with Nord Stream two we had stopped Nord Stream in its tracks and then Mike and I spent a lot of time working on this as and others as an administration. I know you were involved Mary and others on the on the call, and we stopped it in Denmark, they had 150 Miles more to build. And then the sanctions were biting. And there was no Nord Stream, too. So that was put in the second objective. Again, the Biden administration came in and they gave it to him. And I think their theory of the case, I don't know I wasn't there and haven't talked to him about it, is that if we give Putin what he wants he'll be more malleable. He'll show goodwill and return but as we know, the Russians don't do that. They take one thing what's been given, they pocket it, and then they come back for more. And so I don't think that Putin expects to freeze US troops out of Eastern out of NATO allies in Eastern Europe, which is his latest proposal. I don't think he expects to get massive concessions on what kind of weapons platforms will put in Eastern Europe, with NATO. But I think he's figured if he makes those sorts of demands and masks his troops on the border, then maybe he'll get a concession from the US or from Europe, not to accept Ukraine or Georgia into the EU or not to accept them into NATO. I don't think he wants to go to war. I mean, it'd be a hell of a fight in Ukraine. The Ukrainians will fight. There's no question about it and a lot of Russians will go home in body bags. They'll be cut off from the world economic system. That's one good point that the Biden administration conveyed. I think even Germany would have to get on board with that. You won't have Russian oligarchs playing soccer teams in Europe or UK or vacation in this in Cyprus. You know, yachts will start getting seized all over the

Mary Kissel: But Ambassador I just want to bring it back to the concept. And essentially what you're saying is, the madman theory doesn't actually involve a lot of madness. It's simply the appearance of madness.

Ambassador O'Brien: Look, I think I think he's been very, very calculated. And I think the the problem we've got is although the administration, in some sense in Ukraine has said the right things, that the Russians are believing what they're seeing with their eyes with respect to American perceived American weakness, and not listening to what they're hearing. And so look, the solution, that we can talk more about this.

Mary Kissel: I don't want to get to the solution just yet. I want to first lay out the concept and then we're going to talk about what he's done, but I wonder if we've got not Nadia Schadlow here because she was the Deputy National Security Adviser who actually penned the National Security Strategy which was a really important document. Changed the direction of American foreign policy. Is Nadia on the line here?

Nadia Schadlow: I am on the line.

Mary Kissel: Hi, Nadia. Okay. Terrific. Happy New Year. Nadia. I wondered if you could just just to finish this up at the beginning about the Madman Theory talk. Talk to us a little bit about deterrence. Secretary Pompeo said you can't know what to expect. Ambassador O'Brien is saying, actually, you're not mad at all. Put a theoretical wrapping around us for those foreign policy geeks who are on the line.

Nadia Schadlow: Yeah, the academic wrapping? Well, I think, both Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador O'Brien are exactly right. I mean, Putin is the opposite of a madman. He's actually quite sane. He has systematically worked, you know, with real success to ensure that the Russians remain a center of the Eurasian landmass and really a key arbiter of power in Europe, right. And that's really been going on since the mid 2000s. So I think the national security strategy of 2017 sought to put military power front and center again, right the concept of deterrence depends upon two things. It depends upon having the military capability to act and the will to act. So it was a sense that military power and power matters. It wasn't just about talking, it wasn't just about diplomacy. And that peace ultimately depended on and what undergirded peace was restraint. And that's why one of the chapters in that document was called Peace through restraint. Now President Nixon recognized this as well. And he spoke later on after he was president in 1983. He wrote a book called Real peace. And essentially in that book, he spoke about the myths of peace, the idea that you could just have peace through diplomacy, peace, through friendship, peace through talking, and in fact, what you needed to maintain peace was military strength, as well as diplomacy. So right. What I'm nervous about with this administration is that it's putting diplomacy front and center which really doesn't mean that much without undergirding it with military power. Thanks.

Mary Kissel: Thanks. That's interesting because one of the taglines that the White House is coming out with this or saying, We're doing diplomacy and deterrence. So they're obviously aware that deterrence matters here, Monica Crowley, you were an assistant to President Nixon from 1990 to 1994, very close to him. And one of the things that came across in that clip is, he's

not the caricature that he's often described as in the media, or in our popular culture, right. He's actually a very, very thoughtful, strategic, calm person.

Tell us a little bit more about him and if you can, if you want to add you add to the comments on the Madman Theory. Thank you.

Monica Crowley: Sure. Well, thank you so much, Mary. And thank you for leading all of us in this discussion every month. We're so lucky to have you on board and Happy New Year to you and to everybody on the call. And thank you for the question. I actually wanted to write two books about my experiences working with President Nixon to that very point, because I wanted the rest of the world and subsequent generations to understand and know the Nixon that I came to know, which wasn't always apparent when he was president. Because you're in the crucible of making incredibly important global and national decisions every day. And it is true that Richard Nixon was a multi-dimensional person, like all human beings are and that was often glossed over when he was President of the United States. Because of the negative coverage that he often got. But he was a complex thinker, and he was an intellectual, which of course, his detractors will never concede about him, but he was a very profound thinker. He was a superb writer and he was also an extraordinary geopolitical thinker, which I think even his detractors will now concede.

It's very interesting when we talk about Richard Nixon and subsequent Presidents in the context of the Madman Theory and I heard Secretary Pompeo talking about the conversation President Nixon had with Gannon, about being erratic. And to your point, Mary, it's not about an American President who is actually erratic. It is about the perception of possibly being erratic. So we want America's enemies to think that the American President is incredibly intelligent, of course and strong, but might just be crazy enough to take some unpredictable action. But again, it's about the perception, not about the reality.

I also think it's incredibly important when we think about contemporary American Presidents who have exercised the Madman Theory really effectively. Richard Nixon, of course, Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump. So I've been very blessed to have worked for two of the three, President Nixon and President Trump. And I think what's important to keep in mind here is that an effective American president in the context of the Madman Theory, What's critical is you do not tell your enemies what you will do, and you do not tell them what you won't do. So that is sort of the underpinning of the madman theory, which is basic common sense when you think about it, but we currently have a president who does not operate that way and wears all policies on his sleeve, which tempts malign behavior from America's worst adversaries of course, and then I think the companion piece two, you don't say what you will do, nor do you say what you won't do. The companion piece to that is say what you mean and mean what you say. Which we saw with Nixon, Reagan, and of course Trump, you know, a president who understands that American weakness is a provocation but American strength is the most profound deterrent you can have. And the embodiment of that is a strong and direct commander in chief.

Mary Kissel: I want to build on that Alex Wong. We're lucky to have him on because he's one of the few human beings who has negotiated with the North Koreans actually in person, as well ofcourse Secretary Pompeo with his famous trips to Pyongyang.

But Alex, I'm gonna give you a go at this. Monica said that President Trump did exercise the Madman Theory was was fire and fury that threat was that the modern day of Nixonian madman approach?

Alex Wong: Well, I you know, I, I do think I'll say this, President Trump provided us a lot of running room and a lot of cover because of the 2017 period of quote unquote fire and fury. And he was saying things about utterly destroying North Korea about having a larger nuclear button than Kim Jong-un that to be frank was shocking to 30 years of North Korean diplomacy but was very welcome at least by me and many in the field who wanted to lay a basis for negotiation where we were on leaning forward and it was Kim Jong-un on the back heel, you know, for decades, whether it was Kim Jong-un or his father Kim Jong-il.

It is the North Koreans who played that card. Now, I don't think the North Koreans are mad, I don't think they're crazy. I don't think their objectives, if you understand the structure of the government, are crazy. But they would play the card of nuclear use, obviously in their rhetoric, was very strong. But to meet someone like President Trump who was willing to meet that rhetoric.

Tit for tat and also just explained that the basic strategic situation. We're a superpower they're not, we have more nuclear weapons than they do. We have missile defenses. We have a much larger conventional military and much larger economy. And when that's the situation when that's the strategic landscape, we can enter a negotiation a way where we can really realize US interest and do it peacefully. But if you're not going to have confidence in your own power, if you're not going to have a realistic assessment of the strategic landscape, you can't have that productive negotiation. So that period of 2017, although it was uncomfortable for many in the international sphere, it was necessary and necessary prelude to have productive talks, or these talks where we can be clear with North Koreans that we were not going to give concessions absent major steps on denuclearization.

Mary Kissel: So it just goes back to Nadia Schadlow's comment that the deterrence is will plus capacity. And just one more question before we move on to this topic, and we dive really deeply into Putin and the current administration. And Secretary Pompeo, I'm gonna go back to you as co-chair here. You know, all the participants so far talked about US presidents, Nixon, Reagan, Trump, can't the bad guys exercise deterrence too?

Secretary Pompeo: Oh, certainly, and they have often done so pretty effectively. I think back to not too long ago when we had one of my predecessors say that boy if you don't kind of deal with the Iranians, there'll be war or if you acknowledge that Jerusalem is the capital, rightful capital of Israel, the Jewish homeland that there will be war, right. These are long decades long efforts

and turns models to prevent the United States from taking actions that were deeply in their own best interest. I can think of other nations that have done this as well, too.

Mary Kissel: How about Khrushchev?

Secretary Pompeo: Khrushchev during the history of the Soviet Union did this to us for a couple of decades as well. Smaller countries are pretty effective, but as well, I think, I think of Cuba and Venezuela and even times when the leadership in South Africa, right. There are other places where they it's smaller stage less strategic from the American perspective, but certainly important to them staking out their own sovereignty, their own space, where they use demonstrated resolve, often backed by, if not true military, grand power, insurgent strength, the capacity to compare operations around the world cyber capabilities to do those same kinds of things we're speaking about.

Mary Kissel: Ambassador O'Brien, anything to add here before we move into Putin.

Ambassador O'Brien: I think Mike is right and how we respond to those sorts of efforts at deterrence are critical. I mean, we certainly saw remember the old enough to remember the Gulf of Sidra, which has guided the light of death across it and and Colonel Qaddafi was made the mistake of sending out a couple of MiGs at one point and then some other patrol boats another point to Harry one of our carrier groups, it didn't end well for them. And so it's really critical for us to maintain our deterrence for us to maintain our credibility. We've got to we've got to do as we as we say, we've got to enforce red lines and we've got to maintain our our positions I remember this in a hostage situation, which, you know, whatever happens all I do in my career, ASAP Rocky is going to be on my tombstone. And I remember the Secretary Pompeo sent me over, I was working for him at the time to bring ASAP home. And the Swedes said, well listen. Why do you care so much? We're Sweden, that's ASAP Rocky, and I said, look, the President United States thought he had a deal with your prime minister. He announced that ASAP was coming on it. We've got 50 other hostages around the world. We've got people like Austin Tice and I think Sam Goodwin was a hostage of time and others. We need to bring them home and if Sweden defies the present United States and keep someone home that the President's demanded be returned. We're gonna lose credibility around the world. And so we had to play hardball with some good friends and we got Rocky home next Friday.

Mary Kissel: Just just for the viewers who don't know who ASAP Rocky is, he's a rapper who was detained in Sweden. So in other words, Ambassador O'Brien, you have to play madman, not necessarily just with your enemies, but sometimes with your friends.

Ambassador O'Brien: But the point was, once we staked out our credibility, once the President's credibility, once the Secretary's credibility was on the line, there really wasn't an option other than to bring him home. And the funny thing is, and this is ironic, Mike will remember this a week later, I was in Beirut, negotiating with an intelligence chief from an Arab country. And the first thing he said when we set out is Wow, you got a lot of press you got that guy home from Sweden. I said we did. And now you're gonna help me get all I'll leave out who it

was, but you're gonna help me get this person home from from the country there in, and so so again, it's it's a bit humorous, but it makes the point that Mike was making is when American credibility is on the line we have to followthrough for these other smaller countries. They're going to try and do the same thing, but we can't, we can't be on the receiving end of it.

Mary Kissel: Okay, we're gonna move immediately into the current crisis then I think we've got the point about bad man and deterrence exhausted. We're very lucky to have Congressman Waltz here on the line, who actually went to Ukraine last month. And, Congressman, I wonder if you can take a moment. You know, the big broad headlines I think everybody has seen 100,000 troops at the border, history of aggression from Putin. But when you were on the ground, give us just a short description of what you saw and the situation right now.

Congressman Waltz: Sure, thanks so much and good to be with you. Happy New Year to everyone. It's important I think to stay from the get-go that this was a bipartisan trip. There were actually more Democrats than Republicans on the trip. Enormous interest from Congress on where this is going, what our policy is, and how we again in a bipartisan basis can help and help deter the situation on the ground. We met with a number of folks including, I'm proud to say the Florida National Guard which is on the ground conducting training, our special operators, which are conducting not only training but some advisory of course, the Embassy team and the Ukrainians themselves. I'll tell you across the board, there was a tremendous sense of frustration that, you know, obviously there is a lot of trepidation, a lot of concern. Some people, everyday Ukrainians that we spoke with, are very scared. But at a policy level, there just did not seem to be the same sense of urgency coming from Washington. In fact, when Ukrainian said to me, you know, we appreciate the President saying he'll take tough action but saying he'll do so, President Biden saying he'll do so after Russia invades us isn't very helpful. So there was a lot of discussion

Mary Kissel: Just to stop you there congressman. I want to be clear for the audience. Putin invaded Ukraine years ago and there's fighting and dying happening now.

Congressman Waltz: You're right. You're right. And that was the other piece and particularly we sat down with the Ukrainian Special Operations Command. They have an entire wall of people that they've lost and they're fighting and dying every day. But I think when we talked to folks in Kiev, and the prospect of Russian tanks, sitting in my dorm square, is really what what they were talking about, and the fact that there's a \$200 million lethal aid package still sitting on Biden's desk and you know, a lot of discussion of that and the pieces and parts to it. I'll tell you it's not just the provision of lethal aid. It's doing it now. And it's the types of lethal aid we could provide, particularly air defense systems, and particularly shore to ship missiles that could help the Ukrainians defend their last remaining port and Odessa if Putin is able to choke off Odessa, Ukraine is choked off as a country. And I think the other piece that really stood out to us and came over loud and clear was how our energy policy and the United States rapid move away from energy independence has emboldened Putin. He is flush with cash with high oil and gas prices. The dependency that he's creating in Western Europe or is about to create with Nord Stream two coming online really, I mean, as Solinsky, has openly said, is an existential threat to

their survival. And it's just really inexplicable in many ways. And the Ukrainians just can't understand it. They can't wrap their mind around it. And finally, you know, a lot of talk about sanctions but they made the point loud and clear. I think they're right for sanctions to bite and truly be effective. There has to be a consensus across the European continent, it has to bite in both dollars and euros and there's a lot of skepticism whether Germany, which will be critical, will really get on board with meaningful action, and for all of those reasons, it was a pretty depressing trip. A lot of concerns that we came back with but the good piece was that you had Democrats and Republicans pounding the table that publicly in fact, one the the chairman of the subcommittee room, said some things while in Ukraine that the Russians threatened to kidnap them. So the resolve was there and the demanding that the administration take tougher action now, not after a potential invasion was good to hear.

Mary Kissel: So we'll stay here on Capitol Hill with Congressman Gallagher. Congressman, I had a conversation recently with David Satter who is a longtime chronicler of the Soviet Union, but Putin in particular, and one of the points that he made to me is that Putin does not go into places where he thinks he's going to encounter resistance. And he only seems to go in, when it benefits him domestically. So David's argument is that, look, Putin isn't a madman. In fact, there's a clear pattern here. It's not the reconstruction of the former Soviet Union at all. And therefore, if you want to deter him, you've got to make it painful for him to fight. Do you agree with that? Why the thinking that that analysis of Putin congressman, I'm putting you on the spot?

Congressman Gallagher: Well, I certainly believe that the best form of deterrence is by denial, having combat credible forces on the ground capable of preventing your enemy from achieving their objective when it comes to the broader point about Putin in history.

Listen, I would say, you know, back in July, when Putin published his essay on the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians, you can criticize that argument for being a historical but clearly, it seems like he's trying to manufacture a cause for war. I think the same thing could be said about the six key demands that he made of the US, none of which are reasonable at all, and none of which the Congress of the United States would allow the President to concede to Putin and it begs a question and he writes,

Mary Kissel: I'm gonna hold you right there, Congressman, because I actually think we've got that clip. Guys. Can we put that up? Then we'll go back to the congressman.

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Mary Kissel: Okay, so it's typical Putin, Congressman I'm creating a problem and now you have to solve it.

Congressman Gallagher: Exactly. Now listen, to directly answer your question. I have not looked into Putin's eyes, nor have I seen his soul but I certainly think he's, he's positioned himself in such a manner that this situation is going to escalate. I think pretty quickly.

Everything that Congressman Waltz said about his recent trip, I think is really on the mark. And I think we don't tend to understand in America just how severe the energy crisis in Europe is. Right now. I mean, just look at the prices of natural gas. I mean, it is amazing what we're seeing, that's a part of this conflict. And maybe just to end by tying it to our previous discussion of deterrence. We tend to think about the credibility of commitments with deterrence, which really sort of two models we apply. One is sort of this idea of a past actions model, what you've done in the past, sort of determines how your enemies think about what you're going to do in the future. The other was what's called the current calculus model, which is, you know, what weapons do you actually have right now in the moment, irrespective of what you've done in the past? In either analysis, I think both models point to Putin escalating. And I think both models applied to the US, point to us doing little to nothing to stop it. Our recent past actions Afghanistan, North Stream to a lot of other things that have been mentioned, have been a joke. I think Putin thinks he can get away with this and I think everyone around the world that doesn't like America is looking at this thinking, hey, maybe we can get away with some stuff right now, too. So I think we're in a very dangerous moment. And unless we get serious quickly, I think we're gonna see an escalating conflict.

Mary Kissel: Oh, there's a lot of talking going on. Secretary Pompeo, your successor Secretary Blinken has been calling his counterparts all the time. Going to NATO. There's a meeting of I think it's the Bucharest nine coming up. So a lot of talking but one of the questions that has been raised by this hey NATO works on consensus, can NATO really come to a consensus given what Congressman Waltz just pointed out, which is that you've got a Germany that's used to giving Putin the benefit of the doubt I mean, can NATO really rise here to the challenge, sir?

Secretary Pompeo: Well, Mary, we often in the United States speak about Europe as a singular entity, but anyone who spends any time working with Europeans realizes this, nothing could be further from the truth. If you speak to an Estonian, Latvian or Lithuania and you're going to get a very different view than you would get from German or a Frenchman, and yet again from a Pole, or someone in Romania or the Czech Republic, this is to your point about consensus, they have a governance model, model that for the life of me, I could find the line chart and see how it worked objectively, legally. But if you asked me how it worked, I would argue that oftentimes it was dysfunctional, certainly when carrying out important national security matters where you know, if they call it climate change, it goes to Brussels if you call it that, and just it's very difficult and you see Europeans leaders struggling you also see they have governing blocks, mostly parliamentary system governing blocks that present an internal set of conflicts for them as well. So I think it will be absent, a really bold move by Putin. I think if he does something I say really well, if he does something that looks more like even the capture of Crimea, which from our perspective, is pretty bold - a fifth of Ukraine now brought back into the Russian orbit.

If he does something that is short of that, to find a bold consensus from either NATO or more broadly from the EU will prove vexingly difficult, and I'm being this as diplomatic as I can. Mary.

Mary Kissel: That's pretty diplomatic. Mr. Secretary, I think it's also important to point out that Putin has taken territory under Republican and Democratic presidents. I mean, he took large chunks of Georgia at the end of the George W. Bush Administration. He went into Syria and Ukraine under President Obama. So the Secretary sort of answered my question about can NATO really be used to deter Putin here, given that it works on consensus? Do you have confidence that we could rely on NATO deterrence, or is it really kind of on the United States and our stronger partners and allies as the Secretary said, we can't really think of Europe as a whole.

Ambassador O'Brien: Yeah, I think it's a partners and allies issue. I don't think we're going to get it unless there's encouragement from Russian troops across the Ukrainian border. I don't see the EU or NATO coming to consensus. The Russians have friends in both places, including the Greeks and others that would probably make consensus very difficult than those are both consensus driven organizations. On the other hand, if there's an incursion across a land border, I think even NATO in the EU would have trouble. The economic sanctions would come from the EU in some sort of, if not a military response in Ukraine, a strengthening of the NATO position and more forward position in our of NATO troops into the East would what would be an order I think we're gonna have to do for the most part though, Mary's we're going to work with the Brits and the French and the Poles and, and the the Germans the extent we can bring them along and, and, and I was encouraged. I saw President Macron. Made some pretty strong statements. I think he was bidding for leadership in the free world again by saying he might send French troops to Ukraine. I don't know if you'd actually do that. But it was impressive. It was Napoleonic of them and, and so that was great to see and I think the UK and and the poles with the balls would be equally enraged if there was some even a little attack on on Ukraine but I think we have to work with our close partners and probably not with the the multilateral organizations. If we're going to really punish or deter the Russians.

Mary Kissel: I want to bring in Christian Whiton, who I think has an interesting point of view. Christian, Ambassador O'Brien is, you know, essentially said here, okay, well forget the multiclass. It's going to be up to the democracies. But is it up to us to deter Putin? What say you?

Christian Whiton: I guess if anyone's going to, then it would have to be us. It's interesting to me, that the people who should be most concerned about this, the Poles, the Germans - don't seem to be particularly exercised about this.

And even the Ukrainians, I guess I look at this very differently. I know I hear a lot of good reasons to or tactics on how you might stand up to Putin. But what I'm not hearing is anything about US interests in Ukraine. Ukraine's integrity. I don't care about Ukraine's integrity like a lot of Americans have access to ADESA. That's not really, you know, driving my interest right now. If you go around and ask a lot of people I'm here in Colorado and northwest Colorado. I think you get people who have a gut revulsion to China into Iran. They know Iran essentially has been at war with us from 1979. But the sort of ad there's skepticism toward Russia. I just, you know,

absent Biden, or others, really explaining what US interests are in sort of the abstract. Well, we got to push back.

And so absent that, you know, we're talking about, well, why can't Ukraine stand up to Russia? They have a pretty big military isn't like 300,000. What does Putin have 110,000 people on the border? I just approached us very differently. You know, we're no it's no longer the unit polar 1990s. We're in a real fight with China. Very serious, and we're not prepared to have that fight. You know, when Biden pulled us out of Iraq, you know, if you want to mess something up, you put Joe Biden in charge of it. He was in charge of keeping us in Iraq and getting an extension on the mess that up but the argument was we're gonna pivot to Asia same with Afghanistan when we lost there's like out but you know, one of the Silver Linings is we can now pivot to Asia, there's there seems to be nothing like that very little couple billion in a fund in the NDAA about plussing up in Asia. But it seems like as every year goes by, we have fewer ships in the Pacific, a smaller Air Force, and atrophied nuclear systems. And so you know, amidst this we're talking about starting World War Three, with Russia over Ukraine because of a small part. And incidentally, I don't think Putin's gonna move in. So if you're making the case that we need to deter Russia, and I think you're right, the Germans aren't going to do it. Germans want to buy more gas from them. They're absolutely a ok with that. They just shut down a bunch more. Nuclear reactors, they're gonna be more dependence on Russia. The French and the Brits have said things, even implying they might send a couple 100 forces out there. Incidentally, Russia has about 3 million people. If you look at the expanded version of its military that it can have that it's expanded disposal but I would dial it back to an explanation the American people have what's really important here because absent that this frankly, sounds like another Sideshow war.

Mary Kissel: Yeah, well, I've got the best person here to talk about just pure interests, Kim Reed who sat on top of a financial institution. I'm in a financial institution. There was a lot to talk about interests. Sort of Kim, you know, let's address some of the things that Christian just said here. The Ukrainians in fighting and dying the Russians now for years are perfectly willing to fight we're giving them weapons. Putin isn't necessarily threatening us although, of course, he does have a pretty major nuclear weapons capability that he points at us. So kind of important to point that one out. But Kim, you know, in your opinion, should we be deterring Putin? Is that really our job?

Kimberly Reed: Well, Mary, you mentioned the Bucharest nine and for the Nixon Foundation members.

The Bucharest nine is a group including Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, Slovakia. And so Secretary Blinken had a call today in the readout from it. I don't know if you've seen it yet, but he used the language in the readout of deterrence, defense and dialogue. So we will see Don't forget that. During the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, Russia invaded Georgia so now we have upcoming events. The Olympics again, the ground is frozen. So we're going to be watching for sure and it will be very interesting to see how NATO responds to this. I have a question for Ambassador O'Brien and Secretary Pompeo. You both work closely with then Deputy Secretary

of State John Solomon, who's now ambassador to Russia. And just wondering any thoughts you might have on the need to counter Russian covert actions to divide the American people and information spaces we look at this larger issue.

Mary Kissel: Ambassador O'Brien want to take that one first?

Ambassador O'Brien: Sure. Look, one of the things that Mike and I spoke a lot about the President spoke a lot about it is the Chinese and the Russians have taken total advantage of their free access to our social media platforms to our open immigration laws to place in so called journalists all over the country that the Department of State under secretary Pompeo finally started to, to change towards the end of the administration. So there's a massive asymmetric fight going on between us and the Russians, but more importantly, the Chinese going to Christians point.

And they're taking advantage of the internet and our open borders and our willingness to grant long term visas to their folks when they don't give them to us to the CIO to Central America. And we got to stop it. We got to send home that the Chinese Communist and PLA and PLA and officers that are studying in our universities, we need to get rid of the spies we need to deal with their journalists as they deal with ours and getting short term visas and have the same number of Chinese journalists that are here that they allow him to into China and we've got to stop the we've got it we got to close the door a little bit. It's always gonna be a jar in a democracy that we got to close the door a little bit to the disinformation and the act of operations influence operations in Russia and China both undertaking the US Do you agree with Do you agree with Christian then that it's really not our issue to deter Putin? No, my point is that the Chinese I do agree with, the Chinese are the existential threat to the United States. Russia is certainly a threat. But look, I think Ukraine and Taiwan go hand in hand and I think if we see Putin take action on Ukraine, it's gonna be watched very carefully in Beijing, and they may even use the opportunity at the same time to take action against Taiwan. So they both need to be deterred. And one way you deter you deter them both by by taking appropriate action in Eastern Europe, but you also do it in the Pacific if we would open embassies and in some of the Pacific island states if we finished the code for the Compact of Free Association, if we get the coast guard ships that we were trying to move into the South Pacific. If we take some of the troops that came out of Afghanistan and put them on Palau and NRO and places like that that want them put them in Robertson Barricks in Australia, not only does that send a message to the Chinese that the the free pass of them run it ranging around the Indo Pacific region is over, but it sends a message to the Russians as well but the Americans back so I think you have to deal with both of them as a as a whole.

Mary Kissel: Secretary Pompeo agree or disagree here with Christian.

Secretary Pompeo: Look, I don't think it's binary in that sense.

There I remember where we're now just a bit past the second anniversary of the strike. The United States took where we took out General Soleimani.. It mattered to the Iranians, they took

a deep breath, they struck back, they fired some missiles into Iraq and hurt some Americans. But the whole world noticed that not just the Iranians, the Gulf states noticed that in the region Chairman Kim noticed this. I promise you she's being invited to recruit, we're observing this right. So there's something to this idea that says it's not unitary if you allow Putin to walk over you in Russia. It's not the domino theory. It's not like oh, the whole world falls apart but it does. It does suggest what an administration or the West is prepared to do to defend the things that matter to them. You know, even more specifically, right, right. Another example that's related. The whole world saw Russian cyber activity in the southeast United States shut down American capacity to move gasoline across our country. Can they still have President Biden traveled to have a summit with the president of Russia and say, Don't do that again, we'll stop you at 16 places that seems like a long time ago. It's not that long ago. I promise you the whole world saw that kind of behavior and could see that there are places they're going to be free to move about the cabin in ways that they are not with administration that's prepared to unite allies and and provide allies the capacity and the backing they need to protect the things that matter to all of us.

Mary Kissel: Nixon talked about this demonstration effect. Two actions that he took in Vietnam and elsewhere when he was negotiating with the Soviets.

Alex Gray. Just wanted you to jump in here and then you had things to add to this discussion. Is it our issue to deter, please, contribute.

Alex Gray: Yeah, thanks, Mary. I think you know, as the Secretary said, there is a valuable demonstration effect. It may not be a domino theory. But we've seen historically every time an adversary is allowed to have its way unimpeded in the international system. There is a demonstration effect and it does have a follow on impact across that system. We saw it in the 1930s. We saw it in the 1970s. We saw it with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. We saw it in the Iran hostage crisis. These things build upon themselves. And so I take Christian's point that there's very little American appetite for an actual conventional response, military response. That doesn't mean there are things we can do. And so things like extending major non NATO Allies status to Ukraine, things like you know, building on what we've already been doing, but the Trump administration with Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador O'Brien led putting additional US troops in Eastern Europe and building that that capacity in the region to serve serve as a deterrent already in the region. But those are the types of things that we should be thinking creatively about, as well as what the ambassador said, actually demonstrating through our capacity in the Indo Pacific that we're going to be a deterrent to the Chinese. There's a lot we can do in Ukraine short of actual military, military response, and if we do it early if we if we take the opportunity, unlike in the Obama era, where we waited four years to give the Javelin offensive missiles to the to the Ukrainians, if we act decisively and we act early, the deterrence effect will actually have some value.

Mary Kissel: That's such an interesting point that deterrence we always think about it in a military sense, but actually, there's so many ways to deter. We've got a lot of foreign policy

experts who are really deeply in the bowels of Capitol Hill, who can see all of these various things that the US government can do well, let's see if John. Yes, go ahead, Alex.

Alex Wong: I want to jump in just just to, to, to, to add to this, you know, Christians points in Krishna area, but, you know, a couple of factual points. I think I disagree with you on whether the Poles and the Ukrainians themselves are, you know, worked up about this or concerned or making their own military preparations in urging of greater sanctions. I think the Poles and Ukrainians are actually quite active diplomatically, militarily on that, so we could investigate the facts on that. But beyond that, you know, I do think this is about the United States in large part and I think that's evidenced by the fact that the Russians only want to negotiate with the United States after they've done this build up. They're excluding the Europeans and they want to negotiate directly with the President. And if you look at their statements of their red lines of the request of what the President has to agree to, it's not just about Ukraine, it's about NATO. It's about other countries. It's about a US led security order in Western Europe and really beyond. Now, we could debate whether leading a security order is what we should continue into the 21st century and I think it's served us pretty well in the 20th century. But that's about us. That's about the decision. We have to make for the United States people, you know, together in this democracy, whether we want that to continue because that is what Putin is taking aim at, in my view with this buildup.

Mary Kissel: Boy, this is a depressing conversation. So what have we talked about? We've talked about the madman theory, what is deterrence? The strategy of Putin, the fact he's a very rational actor here, that we can't seem to rely on multilateral institutions and that there's a question now, of whether or not it is the United States his responsibility to lead the response and if so, how? Let's talk a little bit about the Biden response. Congressman Gallagher, you're up on the hill. You're seeing the ins and outs of this is, you know, what has the administration done and what should what should they be doing?

Congressman Gallagher: They'll claim to have sorted out certain logistical problems with the provisional aid, military and otherwise to the Ukrainians. We're still investigating the details on the Armed Services Committee. There were a lot of mistakes made there is more that we can yet do in terms of anti tank weapons and some other weapons.

Beyond that, though, really what we've seen is the threat of enhanced sanctions but the points that were made earlier, I'm just not sure we're moving with enough alacrity. And it seems like these are all these sort of deterrence by punishment if you do X. We will then do Y, after Putin has already accomplished what he wants to accomplish in Ukraine. I doubt any sort of sanctions after the fact are going to do anything at all. And we should be putting in place a variety of measures right now, in terms of financial and economic warfare, designed to dissuade Putin if indeed that is possible. One comment I'd like to make sorry, and I really appreciate Christian making a provocative point, and he always does it very smartly and forces me to revise my own priors.

I think if we consider this as unconnected to other crises in regions around the world, Christian has a better point. However, if we believe, as I think I do, that how America and our allies are performing Ukraine also reverberates into other crises, and I'm thinking mostly of Taiwan, then I think it's harder to make the case that we have no interests in Ukraine. I certainly would allow him to push back on that or would welcome his thoughts. I know we have limited time, however.

Mary Kissel: Yeah, we just got a couple minutes. Christian you want to?

Christian Whiton: Well, I guess the argument would be that Xi Jinping actually going into the party congress, which is more important than the Olympics. Does he really care about what's going on? In Ukraine? And incidentally, if we antagonize Russia further and of course rather, you know, two takes two to tango, Russia is doing plenty of this pushing Russia towards China - which is already happening.

If we get entangled in the idea that this could be quickly resolved to sort of the usual wrong assumption we have and if we become bogged down in Europe and Eastern Europe than that, and if we continue to distract ourselves with spending money on NATO, doing cowboys and Indians and backwaters in the Middle East and not plussing up forces in East Asia, well, that actually does help Kim excuse me that helps Xi for that matter. And again, just with you know, it's great that the Europeans are standing up, they should step up more. They have an economy 12 times the size of Russia. They have 400 million people. I think Russia does well at 130, 140, 150... yeah, just a lot of factors here. I don't really buy that Xi Jinping is watching this really closely to decide if the US is going to defend Taiwan or not.

Mary Kissel: Okay. Morgan Ortagus, jump in.

Morgan Ortagus: We need to explain these things to the American people and why it matters. It's one of the reasons why - I talk to so many folks talking about these things because I think it's important living in Nashville in Tennessee. If I walk out my door, this isn't an insult. In fact, I think this is one of the nicest places I've ever lived. But if I walk out my door and talk about the Donbass or Crimea, talking about Ukraine, I'm going to get blank stares. And I think that that's again, that is not an insult, people are busy with other things. And in a democracy, we need to be accountable to the people who put us in power. The people whose children go and fight our wars, the people whose taxpayer dollars are paying for all of us to have the interesting jobs that we had. And we're not making the case to the American people why these things matter than we've lost on foreign policy. So I think that's just one point. And I think the second point that I would just end with is listen right before we got on this call, Mary, my toddler threw a fit to go to bed because her dad is out of town and she knows that mommy will cave when she throws a fit right and goes to bed and doesn't want to go to bed. Why does that matter? It's not really people are people, human beings are human beings. My toddler if there's a fit whenever she's home alone and with me, because she knows I will cave Putin, throws a fit whenever Biden and former Obama officials are in powered because ultimately he knows they're by the cave. And I don't think so just to tie this back to Mary's very first point about the madman theory. I don't think it takes a madman, I think it takes a strong man. One point Mary, when you and I were in Russia

with Secretary Pompeo, and he doesn't even know this. But we were waiting on Putin and Putin was taking a little bit too long for the meeting. And Secretary Pompeo looked at all of us and said, Okay, I'm gonna go, I'm not waiting. So I got really nervous, and I left the room and I went and found one of Putin's aides, and I said, what's he's really going to actually leave like he's this is not John Kerry, is not playing around. He's going to leave and then magically, Putin showed up like 20 minutes later because they knew who they were dealing with.

Mary Kissel: Great story Morgan. Alright, we talked about and I'm going to go into the lightning round because there are a couple of people who really want to jump in Congressman Waltz. Give it to us in a minute or less.

Congressman Waltz: Yeah, sure. I was just to Christian and everyone else's point just at a forum with a local journalist who asked me why does this matter? Why does Ukraine matter? That people have Volusia County, Florida? And, and I think on the face of it, that's a valid question and a tough question. But, obviously when I walked them through the value of the United States standing with democracy was standing with our allies and standing up for our values. Of being reminding folks that we have been the leader underscored by American diplomacy and military power of free trade, open sea lanes, free markets and on and on, and that is now in threat with authoritarianism and authoritarianism on the march around the world. And I have to tell you, in Kiev during our visit, Afghanistan was mentioned over and over and over again. So I do think there's a lot of credence to the domino effect. And I just, I would just end with saying we have to be very careful. And I've had this I've gone round and round with my share of, of certain Fox News hosts as well, who share this skepticism and view we have to be very careful with presenting these false choices.

We have to stay away from World War Three which I think I heard Christian just mentioned in the Ukraine versus let's look elsewhere. I think there's a lot of things we can do to get consensus at a very relatively little cost, and deter an action that could cost the world a lot more in the long run.

Mary Kissel: Okay, I'm gonna go into the nuclear missile guy - John Noonan. Got to go to him really quickly, John.

John Noonan: Yeah, well, like you said, Mary, former nuclear missile officer and you know, one of the things they they taught you when you were screened to both do your duty and also always say you would do your duty to suggest otherwise would suggest that you wouldn't insert your launch key and give them a turn would essentially unravel the entire enchilada.

The signaling is not just to the American people, but to people like Russia, and China - Soviet Union, years ago, and I think Nadia made the key point, which is, deterrence is predicated on will and military capability, but I think what we miss when we have these conversations is it's, it's also based on the perception of capability. I'm not going to bury it down the historical rabbit hole. I will know that in World War Two nearly every US fleet submarine suffered a torpedo failure.

And it came at great costs in American lives. If we do fund our military to the point where not only are we building the fighter squadrons, we need the armored divisions we need the nuclear forces that we need, but also it starts eating into the defunding starts eating into maintenance. We are unintentionally signaling a lack of resolve and lack of credibility. To both Russia and China and Ambassador O'Brien had the key point like what's the nightmare scenario? It's both. It's not just Russia moving on Ukraine or into the Baltics. It's Russia making the move and in Eastern Europe and China moving to Taiwan at the same time. And while I agree with you, Christian, that we're not making a Western here, and we're not trying to get into fights that are unavoidable.

I do have a selfish interest and passing along the rules based international order that I inherited as a child of the Reagan administration. I like to pass that along to my kids as well. So with that, I think that was less than 45 seconds.

Mary Kissel: That was pretty concise. Thank you, John. I just want to give the two co chairs, gentlemen were a little bit over time. But you are the chairs of this seminar. Ambassador O'Brien any last thoughts?

Ambassador O'Brien: Well Peace through strength works, perception of weakness is dangerous, we need to keep that in mind. And the line of the night I think was from Morgan saying that Mike Pompeo is no John Kerry. So I think we can all agree on that comment - again, happy new year, looking forward to next month and great, great inaugural session as the moderator room.

Mary Kissel: Very, very good. Secretary Pompeo, final thoughts?

Mike Pompeo: What better way to end than that. I would have walked out.

Mary Kissel: I believe you sir. Okay, well, I just want to thank everybody for participating in tonight's session. And while we always enjoy these discussions amongst ourselves, I just want to reiterate that every single person on the screen here is up engaging in public. You've seen many of them were in the secretary others on television, but they're also on social media and Twitter. We're gonna put their Twitter handles up right now. I know that they would love to hear from you if you have interesting, respectful questions for them. And that's it for tonight's Nixon seminar on conservative realism and national security. I'm Mary kissel. Thanks for tuning in.