

Rod Rodriguez ([00:02](#)):

I'm Rod Rodriguez. This is Military Matters.

Rod Rodriguez ([00:08](#)):

One of the most common rules to podcasting is not to reveal the date this show was recorded. This is so you're not distracted by a Christmas message if you're listening in July, but this episode is a bit different. I think it's important that we tell you that this episode contains interviews recorded prior to the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces, that it was edited on February 27th with an intended release date of one March, 2022. The crisis in Ukraine is moving quickly. Just a few minutes ago over Twitter, I saw a report that Ukrainian officials have agreed to hold talks with Russia at the Belarusian border. By the time March 1st rolls around, we could all be breathing a sigh of relief as the people of Ukraine begin the process of picking up the pieces and finding a new normal. On the other hand, no one knows what the next hour will bring much less what the world will look like in a week. To help bring some perspective to the crisis and perhaps more importantly, to add some historical context to the events in today's headlines, Jack Murphy brings us two interviews that could help bring into focus what we're seeing in the news and on social media. Ukraine is in the spotlight, but Russia kind of put it there. Jack Murphy takes us into this ongoing war, where it all really started and where these experts think it's going.

Jack Murphy ([01:41](#)):

The concept to do a deep dive on Russia, the way Military Matters did last season with China is something that Rod and I had discussed for quite a while. But current events have overtaken us all making this subject even more relevant. As I edited this episode, Russia formally acknowledged the breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine that they had helped rebel in 2014 and announced that they would now be occupied by the Russian military. The United States government responded by announcing additional sanctions. This comes after a series of escalating tensions between the United States and Russia over Ukraine that has taken place over the last two months. We've witnessed Russian belligerence, American deterrence, intentionally leaked intelligence reports and declassified intelligence reports announced in official American press conferences. All of this comes as both Russia and the United States have mobilized military forces in Eastern Europe, the largest military buildup since the second world war. Let's start this conversation today with Russia analyst, Nick Trickett, then a little later, we're going to hear from a former member of the Russian Intelligence Services who defected to the United States. Nick is a commodities analyst and a gas and oil consultant who specializes in Russia. With that said, let's get right into it.

Jack Murphy ([02:58](#)):

From the America's point of view. Russia is Putin. Putin is Russia. End of story. What's really going on internally inside Russia from their own political standpoint?

Nick Trickett ([03:08](#)):

It's important to think of, of Putin as someone who's built a system, as opposed to some, an individual who can necessarily change everything on a dime. Like obviously he, he can make decisions much more quickly and change things, like he can make a snap decision, but he also, he has to appease you know, or, or, or at least work with various like interest groups that have helped him cement his power and cement the kind of political constituencies to keep him in power. And then obviously, you know, most of those are elite constituencies, so it's not as much about making the public love you, but equally the

public can't totally hate you because they, I mean, going back to the early 2000s, the original idea was to build a party of power called United Russia that would effectively act as their arm in the legislature.

Nick Trickett ([03:51](#)):

And then, you know, and it would allow for what we'll refer to as kind of systemic opposition party like. So the communist party is a systemic opposition party. The ostensible liberals who are not liberal at all are also systemically opposition party, et cetera. They're allowed to have a place in the legislature and take place in debates and kind of have a back and forth and occupy some positions, but they don't, they can't veto what the, the regime wants as expressed through United Russia. Even though ostensibly things can be forced through by fiat, by executive decree and so on from the Kremlin, you know, at every level, you still have lots of policy capture where businesses or interest groups are trying to make sure that their, their interests are protected. And on top of that, I think an important observation is that the, the bureaucracy is also often opposed in some respects to making things more efficient, right?

Nick Trickett ([04:36](#)):

So, so bureaucrats and people who've, you know, survived by earning off the state, also have an interest in maintaining their role in distributing rents or in distributing money, et cetera. So, so, so it's not, it's nothing like a system where one person can actually just dictate the outcome every single time. And, and on top of that, it's also worth noting that, you know, a lot of times Putin will order things to happen, you know, in the economy, let's say not necessarily in foreign policy issues, but the economy, and they'll just never come to pass and there's, and no one comments on it, despite the repeated failure of government after government to hit their own targets. So I, I think that it, one way to think of it is that there's a mismatch in terms of the executive power to order you know, military or intelligence assets to do things versus what the, what the executive can do to actually affect the economy and economic base of the executive support.

Nick Trickett ([05:24](#)):

And, and that's true in the United States as well, right? I mean, obviously it's a very, very different context and much more extreme in, in terms of the centralization of power in Russia. But I think that Putin somewhat has built a system basically that he's now kind of captured by and has to sustain. Like he can't retire cause obviously until it, and he can only retire when he can find a way to build a system that protects him when he leaves power. And that's, you know, obviously very difficult to do, you know, how do you preserve the regime and that process of preservation obviously you know, it's increasingly oppressive and so far as it's increasingly reliant on direct direct use of arrests on, you know, on making sure you, you censor different outlets, controlling the internet more and information space more amongst new media and, and not delivering anything economically. And that's really where his power's weakest ironically. So I think people have a distorted view of, of, of Putin's power because they only see the parts where the executive in any state would probably have the most power to unilaterally decide things.

Jack Murphy ([06:24](#)):

So it really is a, a sort of interlocking oligarchy of elite interests.

Nick Trickett ([06:29](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I think the, the difference now is probably that more so than before Crimea, you know, the oligarchs have no reason to break with him because you know, he, the more we sanction Russia, the

more reason the oligarchs have to, to basically act, you know, as, as if their interests are aligned with the state's. Right. but the flip side is, is that they still have interests and they, you, they still have to be kept rich. They still have, you know, policy needs that get debated about constantly. It's a very, very dry subject. But you know, one of the things you can do to kind of best understand what's happening is to look at on a month by month basis, what the, the latest kind of reports are about plans to spend money, to build things basically. And it'll just, you just see it steadily get revised down after like an initial idea, you know, until they'll come out and say, you know, we're spending like over a trillion rubles to build X X then, you know, throw let's say at the rail system or something, but then it buried in the fine print will be that they're cutting more spending than that on other projects elsewhere that were promised.

Nick Trickett ([07:29](#)):

So, you know, it's a system that also and this is a, a more economic point, but that it's, it's, it's kind of hostage in that they they're so terrified of inflation.

Nick Trickett ([07:40](#)):

And any time inflation increases, we're seeing that in the U.S. And obviously now, you know, as in terms of something that's a bit more close to home, but anytime inflation increases, they panic. And so, and obviously the default is to pull more money out of the economy and to do less. And obviously that the net effect of that over time when, and when you're an economy like Russia's because it's still ultimately largely driven by resource exports, but not only, it's a much more complicated economy, like the line that it's a gas station is, is not true. Gas stations, generally speaking, don't produce nuclear weapons and nuclear icebreakers. It's the effect is, is that they have to impose, you know, stagnation and austerity in the public over time to kind of maintain the system they've built and that's not, I mean, that's not necessarily gonna lead to some like, you know, regime collapse, like the Soviet system, but it's not necessarily sustainable as it is. It's one of those things where like, where they'll keep muddling on, but like things are just getting worse below the surface as they muddle on.

Jack Murphy ([08:35](#)):

Right. So they're gonna twist the knife in Ukraine because of some of the domestic issues that they're currently facing. But they're also hoping, I mean, is there, is there a legitimate from your point of view, a legitimate threat of increased territory expansion that they, they want Kyiv within their borders? I mean, is that a serious thing that they would consider?

Nick Trickett ([08:54](#)):

I mean, so just to back up one sec, I should say that events in Ukraine also are really important for this. There were attempts from Zelenskyy, the president of Ukraine to open up negotiations that then kind of fell flat because of the domestic pressures he faced, you know, and, and he's also tried to, to meet Putin personally and Putin's kept rebuffing him. So I think so, so some of what's happening now is also that they, they realize, OK, we, we don't have a negotiating partner that can actually deliver for us in Ukraine, so we have to do something. So there's also that going on. To your question about expansion? No, I don't think, I mean, I think the only expansion that makes logical sense would be the land bridge linking Crimea and Donetsk and Luhansk because that, that basically allows them to gain like water supplies from Crimea cause they they've been shut off and it makes, you know, it makes, it makes it a bit cheaper to maintain Crimea as an, as you know, a territory.

Nick Trickett ([09:46](#)):

Cause obviously right now it being cut off and the fact that they have to ship stuff in by sea you know, and, and the, the bridge they built, you know, helps some, but it's, it was a really badly, you know, it was, it was, it was a bit of a white elephant project. The, the rationale there makes sense. I think after that, I don't really see a, a logical, you know, reason to, to gain territory. Obviously they might, they might think it makes sense for them to do it because it'll, it'll simply hurt the government in Kyiv so much that they have to negotiate. Right. So that's possible. I, I don't think that an all out invasion in which they, they drive on Kyiv directly to trip to topple the government makes a lot of sense primarily because, you know, being able, being able to do something is different than being able to, to win the peace.

Nick Trickett ([10:32](#)):

Right. So they could, they could win the conflict probably without too much of a fight, even though I do expect that there'll be enough Ukrainians that are willing to sabotage them, that it'll be a pain in the you know, for a while. And I would imagine that there's, they're probably planning contingencies right now to do that. The the bigger problem is that, you know, the only way they can make sure that the government signs the agreement they want is if they install that government. And once they install that government, the public's obviously going to reject it. And the next thing you know, they're, they're, they have to act as the, kind of like the armed police for a regime that is not popular and is not wanted. And also one that has technically inherited an existing set of obligations to the EU that are already in place.

Nick Trickett ([11:17](#)):

So for example, like you can't take away like, like Ukrainians have visa free access to the EU at this moment. And you know, you rush a taking that away from them is gonna suck, right? Especially given how many migrant Ukrainian laborers went to Poland for instance. So it's, it's hard to game out a scenario in which they, in which Russia strategically gains anything from doing that. And the problem with annexing territory is that the amount that it gets them strategically to do so is so small compared to the obvious escalation in, in sanctions and tensions. And the fact that all the, all they're doing is basically solidifying NATO when it was, it was otherwise dying in terms of its relevance, right. You know, and, and, and all they're doing is giving Ukrainians who, who used to be much more sympathetic to Russia, every reason to hate them. So it's like, what it's I think of it as a massive own goal, especially because of the, I mean, it was, it was, it was minor, but the very appearance of interference in 2016 election in the U.S. Meant that, you know, it would become a domestic issue in the U.S., Which means that we would always hate them.

Jack Murphy ([12:29](#)):

What's hear an alternative perspective on Ukraine from Jan Neumann. Jan is a former Russian FSB counterintelligence officer who was appointed by the Russian government to supervise a multi-billion dollar money laundering operation for the state. He later defected from Russia. He was then brought to the United States by U.S. Governmental organizations. He was then a consultant for a variety of U.S. Governmental agencies, helping them with investigations related to Russian intelligence, money laundering, and the fight against Eurasian organized crime groups.

Jan Neumann ([13:01](#)):

Well, first all about the Ukraine. My, for me, it's really kind of personal because I had back in the days, I had a lot of friends in Ukraine and I had a lot of and it's not a secret that bunch of the Russians, and I don't wanna foot any numbers. I just don't know them, but let's say theoretically, about 15 or 20 million

Russians, they do have families in Ukraine or family ties to Ukraine. Lots of the Ukrainians going to work to Russia on like yearly ... As a seasonal workers and do some construction work and such a lot of them relocated to Russia during the beginning, after the 2014, when the revolution of kupu ly happened in basically political system changed in Ukraine, 2014, close to like two and a half, 3 million people went to Russia. Ukraine is always, Russia never considered Ukraine as a, as a enemy, as what I remember I was visiting Ukraine when it was Soviet Union.

Jan Neumann ([13:58](#)):

And then I was later during the '90s and the early 2000s and never had any tensions, any problems, any problems with the language or people knew you were coming from Russia and kind of, it was more like you basically just driving within this, this kind of a big brotherhood state, right? So we'll, we just, we're not just neighbors. We literally just one nation, one country, one same people. I'm not looking about the Western part of Ukraine, but I was primarily on the, on the eastern side of it. And plus the Azov Sea and then the Black Sea itself and Odesa, for example. And then Crimea so kind of, it was no even visually or mentally or culturally, any kind of difference between you, you in Russia, you, you are, there, it was felt absolutely the same. ... Slightly different, but language are the same.

Jan Neumann ([14:48](#)):

People are the same. Everything is the same. Ukraine till 2014, Ukraine was playing with the both sides. So at the same time, they had the military drills with NATO and it was happening like from earlier, whatever was late '90s or mid '90s. And at the same time, they've been business partners with Russian military industrial complex, right? So Ukraine's been producing a lot of parts, like engines for helicopters, and they've been doing a lot of small things like IT stuff for Russian missiles. They've been building the turbines for Russian ships and such. So this was kind of full scale calculation. People been going back and forward. I personally do believe that Ukraine got absolutely insane and phenomenal ... Political location. They are right in a spot between the west and east. They have access to sea. Ukraine potentially could have been like an Eastern European Switzerland, just my opinion.

Jan Neumann ([15:43](#)):

They have really nice and mild kind of a climate compared to Russia. So it's close to same thing as a, in Poland or in Germany, they have absolutely they have natural resources. They have their own gas, by the way, they have minerals. They have ore, they have coal they have the perfect transportation hub between the goods for goods, which is supposed to, which potentially can go from the China through Russia to, to Europe and Ukraine just can work and then have it all. So in, in Russian head and again, what, what we saw, we thought that Ukraine can potentially use it and be really successful, prosperous really a rich country itself. But they supposed to just stay as neutral as possible. Don't go into any military block with Russians. So don't do anything with the West. Just be yourself, make money, be happy.

Jan Neumann ([16:38](#)):

Like, honestly, you guys, in the best spot in Europe you can imagine, like, because there's two titans like European whole European industries, and then you have Russians. ... So, and I guess that was pretty OK. For Russians what's going on in Ukraine. So guys been dealing with east and west and they saw it as a hub and then Ukraine, Ukrainian people, whether as Ukrainian elites, try to change the whole, the way country going. So they decided to go directly maybe toward smaller, toward more west and then join the NATO. And from this moment, Russians immediately felt as a threat. So that's why they took Crimea

because Crimea, if you control Crimea, you control the whole Black Sea, no Crimea, no Black Sea. That's pretty simple. That's ultimately unsinkable air carrier standing in the middle of the Black Sea. If you have it, you're gonna control the whole area.

Jan Neumann ([17:34](#)):

Doesn't matter how many ships Turkey have or Romania or Bulgaria or anyone else, if as long as you have Crimea, you're gonna control it all. So, and that's why they decided to take it over because they felt that next step will be NATO might take it over. Again, it's my opinion. I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm not in Kremlin. I, I have nothing to Russian politics, but it's just is how I, I saw it. So they, they, they, they really were afraid that they gonna lose it. So they, they took it over. And then, and they also saw Ukraine. Again, my opinion, it was like a perfect, like a no man's land, a buffer zone between the east and west, more like a, like a safety zone for everyone. Right? So you, you, you, so NATO is really close to Russian borders, but at the same time, you still have this huge gap, like as Ukrainian territory.

Jan Neumann ([18:29](#)):

And look at, if you look up, there is the same, same type of buffer zone as bill of Russia, between the Russia and, and the NATO, the right, and the middle. So, and now, if NATO is taking completely Ukraine, Russia's most likely gonna feel really unsafe and insecure because then a NATO's coming literally next to their borders. And I guess that's why we have all this mess. They just they feel that they, they can't lose it. And of the only reason is because it's their own like national security issues. And they, they can't give up on this piece of territory that, that, that is and they, for sure they don't wanna see NATO in it.

Jack Murphy ([19:15](#)):

What, what do you see as the spark for this latest conflict, this latest bit of tension in Ukraine? Because there, there was no threat that Ukraine was going to join NATO now, not with they can't with Russia controlling some of their territory. What is this latest conflict in 2022 about?

Jan Neumann ([19:37](#)):

I, let me try to find some polite words, how to explain it. I, again, as I said, I think it's really personal and I really upset at what's going on.

Jack Murphy ([19:48](#)):

That's OK.

Jan Neumann ([19:48](#)):

Yeah. I just, I wish it would've been no conflict in Ukraine because I, I do, I consider them as as, basically as a family and even being here in States. I have several friends there from Ukraine, even from Western Ukraine and we are really best buddies. So we kind of, we have, we never had any problems. So I guess it's overall feeling that they're losing it. That may be the right answer because it's like, it, it is clear that Ukraine is drifting towards the West, at least the political elites and the way with the way they see the future of the Ukraine itself. So maybe problem was with that. Some Western countries brought their advisors or started to train Ukrainian military forces or have got try to, they've been doing some military installations on Ukraine soil, all of this showed the Russians that at some point they will lose it completely.

Jan Neumann ([20:46](#)):

So not just like immediately, Ukraine's gonna join the NATO. That's not the deal. They know that's not gonna happen, but it's like a slow integration into the NATO. And then finally they everything will be just a part of the NATO. So I guess they just really don't like it and they decided to stop it. And if you look at, if you look just, just be like for a second, that ... Look from their perspective, they had this a safety zone and it was, it was OK for them. They were not doing anything. And then within several months, so days it's all just turned upside down, they lost it, how you can, what you can do in this case. Imagine if let's say Russia or China would've changed political system or help, let's say motivate local people let's say in Ireland, and then they're gonna put their own instructures to Dublin and gonna tell them, I'm gonna say that, OK, Ireland is gonna join in Russian military unit.

Jan Neumann ([21:51](#)):

How quick Brits will do something in it, how, how quick they will engage and how, and it's gonna be a absolute disaster for Britain. So I guess here it has happened the same thing, even if it's no like direct threat, but they feel it it's hypothetical. It's future. It's coming and they wanna fix it. I, I, again, as I said, I just hope even with all of this tension, I'd hope that all will be resolved without any war. No, no one will be dead or short or whatever it happened. So, and everything will go as smooth as possible, just like it was in during the Crimean crisis when like one big meeting. And basically it's all over.

Jack Murphy ([22:34](#)):

Let's get back to Nick Trickett for some deeper analysis on why Russia fears NATO encirclement. From what I read about like these fears that Russia has of NATO encirclement now, I mean, to some extent, I understand if Russia was on our Canadian and Mexican borders, we'd be freaking out about that. But on the other hand, it also seems that there's this like profound, Russian paranoia, that NATO tanks are gonna rush across the steps to Moscow. And it's just something that's like, I mean, I, I get the, the there's a larger geopolitical context, but I mean, there's also a certain amount of paranoia when I read about these things. I mean, what, what do you think is going on in the, in the minds of the Russian government or Putin himself when they talk about NATO and NATO encirclement, what are their real concerns there?

Nick Trickett ([23:21](#)):

I think my, my basic point would be that obviously NATO is not as, as an alliance is not gonna attack Russia, but going back to the Turkish example, members can do things that are escalatory in specific theaters that, that make it harder for us to operate. So that that's a specific risk. Right. now obviously like Ukraine-Russia is very different than like Syria and, you know, Nagorno-Karabakh or Artsakh, I guess, I guess now, technically sorry. But, but that that's a general problem, right? I think the other thing that I, I would say is that even if the odds of a NATO invasion of Russia are like infinitesimally small, you know, like 0.0001%. If you're a security planner, thinking about force posture, you still have to be able to deal with that eventuality because they're on your border. And they're big as a, as an alliance and the U.S. is big.

Nick Trickett ([24:12](#)):

Right? So, so that that's a problem. I mean, it, it's, it's a resource drain regardless of the actual direct threat that NATO poses. And I think that really, I mean, people debate about what, what, which, which transgression of international norms was the, the moment when Russia broke over and over NATO, I think that's kind of stupid. I think it's pretty obvious that Iraq was really the, the biggest turning point

because that was a next level compared to Kosovo. But but I think that the, the lesson that I would draw is that when you go back and look at stuff in the '90s, even the liberals in Russia were very adamant that Russia had privileged interest in Eurasia. I mean, even Kozyrev, the, the kind of erstwhile, you know, liberal foreign minister through, during Yeltsin's first term, who was frankly, not that good a diplomat, but in, and not really, not really good internally.

Nick Trickett ([25:04](#)):

Like he was, he was despised by a lot of a lot of Russians for failing to assert the national interests. Even he wrote an essay in foreign affairs early on, basically saying that like that we were heading towards a multipolar world and that Russia had privileged interest and a sphere of influence and, and the U.S. Would have to acknowledge those in its dealings with Russia. And we just didn't. I mean, obviously I, I I'm, I'm exaggerating a bit cause I, I mean, I do think that Russian paranoia is a huge part of the story and I don't, and I I'm of two minds on NATO expansion because I, I, you also, obviously, you know, if the issue is, is people applying to join, then, then the, the, the fix would be to renegotiate the terms under which people can join, not to complain about the fact that small states next to Russia decided to apply you know, and that that's a more complicated process.

Nick Trickett ([25:53](#)):

And when we're talking about, you know, Ukraine, for instance, and potential membership in the future, but but I, I think it's not, I think, I don't think it's just paranoia. I mean, I do think they've always had like a deep seated idea that this region, which, you know, was still interconnected in many ways. Right? So it wasn't, it was also, you know, a set of countries that were, that used to be one economy in one country that also often moved between each other in terms of population and so on, you know, they had reasons to be linked. Now the, the, the paranoia part, I think, is more, has more to do with the, the failure to realize the, the, the political constraints on action that you know, American or other politicians face in democracies that like, you know, it took a concerted campaign in '02 to get to Iraq.

Nick Trickett ([26:41](#)):

It wasn't like a, the, the, you know, a president just unilaterally decided I'm doing this. Like there, there were so many bureaucratic things that had to be done in a specific manner and, you know, and, and individuals appointed and so on to get to a certain place. So I think that's ironically something that Russia might have learned from, from the way that Biden managed to, to withdraw from Afghanistan, was his ability to actually defeat the bureaucracy in that regard. But I think, I think that's one thing that sticks out to me. I think another thing that sticks out to me in terms of that, that tanks on Moscow scenario, I mean, you, you're talking about leadership and, and a society that, that still remembers its, its own collapse in some, in some respect, right. And, and it remembers its own collapse at a point in time when, you know, it was, it was weak, you know, it felt many people to this day obviously feel like Gorbachev just conceded too much at the end and, and failed.

Nick Trickett ([27:29](#)):

And then many people obviously blame him for bringing the, the Soviet Union to its knees. Probably rightly overall. And, and, and there's this sense of, you know, being taken advantage of, because, you know, because of that traumatic event, that lingers. So I, there, there is an element of like kind of like revenge or, or whatever you wanna call it, that's there. But I don't, but I also, I don't, I don't think that when they talk about Ukraine or NATO expansion, that it's entirely per, you know, paranoid because ultimately like they're plenty for contingencies. Cause obviously if, if they know and recognize that their



interests conflict with ours and with NATO members, then obviously it's a problem for them when people join, you know, that, that that's just the basic tenant of, of state craft. And I think that it's one of the problems that, that in the U.S. We suffer from is that we, we don't want to admit that they have interests because we inherently see them as illegitimate and it doesn't really matter if they're legitimate or not. They still have them.

Jack Murphy ([28:28](#)):

Let's get back to Jan here. Sometimes it's easy for Americans to overlook the root causes for what motivates the Russian people in their government. As we have no real experience with the type of historical trauma that their nation has suffered. You once pointed out to me that and I thought this is very telling and it's important to talk about from a Russian perspective that the, the Soviet Union, whatever its flaws were, people felt that they had a country, that they were moving in a certain direction, that there was something that they were fighting for. After the Soviet Union collapsed. There was this feeling that like I lost my country.

Jan Neumann ([29:07](#)):

Jack collapse of the Soviet Union was basically brought more damage than maybe the World War II on the Russian soil. Overall human losses as a, as a casualties almost were the same. So the whole country just fell apart, families fell apart. Some cities just used to exist because the industries and factories had been closed and it was, it was absolute mess. People who were everything like let's say professors or scientists. So teachers, so engineers military personnel they had stabilized. They, they knew about it was a planned well planned future. They had bright future for their kids. And overnight, this all was just gone. That's it, everything went completely south. And the country turned into the wasteland with the kind of wild west elements in it with huge gang wars all around the country.

Jan Neumann ([30:10](#)):

So it's, it was a tragedy, it was a disaster and especially imagine how hard it was for Russians. So within a hundred years period, they lost country twice, 1917 absolute disaster. Yes. The, the Bolshevik coup October coup and then civil war for like four years, which was, was destroyed almost everything. It was Western countries intervention. Then it was industrialization process where they, we tried to rebuild the whole thing and they actually were able to do so. Yes, that was, it was absolutely bloody, I guess it was the bloodiest period in Russian history. All these great purges and repressions, but they were able to repair a country for Nazi invasion. So they had only like 18 years to prepare and they, they was, they succeeded. They've been able to fight the war and win the war, of course, with Allies' help, with the lands, support and such, but they, they took the main impact from the Nazis as well.

Jan Neumann ([31:13](#)):

And it cost them 27 million people, which is another huge punch to the country. Then they've been rebuilding this, resetting this it's again, a lot of blood, sweat, a of lost lives. And then 70 years later ultimately the whole country collapsed again, was divided on smaller pieces. So I guess they kind of overall Russians, they don't want anything like that happen to the country again, that's why they're looking for, the only main goal is just stability. Try to avoid any potential war, like on a global scale. They have some kind of potential future right now. And that's, that's why they wanna kind of save and secure it. They don't want anyone else like the two guys before run the country, like the person who lost the Soviet Union, who was a dreamer and might be slightly incompetent leader. And the second guy who

was in '90s, that was a godfather of Russian corruption that you wish Yeltsin, which is not a big secret at all.

Jan Neumann ([32:22](#)):

And he was the guy who was behind the privatization and loans for shares and such. So now the guy who is basically a crisis manager, that's the only thing he can do. He's he's doing everything in mental mode. So, and he took the country when it was almost on the edge of the, another civil war and on the edge of the collapse. So Russia was supposed to be cease to exist in in the late '90s. And I was right in service in this moment. And it was in the air that country might sustain a few years more, but this is pretty much it. And then I dunno what happened, but country was able to survive.

Jack Murphy ([33:04](#)):

Americans don't really understand that. Do they Jan, like the sort of national trauma that Russians have been through?

Jan Neumann ([33:10](#)):

Huge guys? I mean, the, just the casualties, just losses itself. If you put together, let's say 1917, the first of all, first World War I, right? A lot of casualties for Russia, they've been fighting then Russian revolution and the civil war, which is, which was going like for four and a half years, then industrialization plus the great purge and all the repressions within. Then World War II with the 27 million losses then sort of stability for at least like 30, 40 years. And then everything went down immediately overnight '90s, 91, 92, just, just look at this that's absolute tragedy. And it's I dunno how to, to explain it and kind of, and my family and kind of, we went for all of this things, and it was a huge impact on everyone and people, they don't wanna repeat it again.

Jan Neumann ([34:07](#)):

Plus every time it was a huge humiliation, same thing happened in 1917. Then the same thing happened in '90s. When at the same moment, you can feel like you are, I was a kid. Like you grew up in this idea that you were part of something really big, you are a citizen of this huge monster country, which is largest country on the planet with the insane military capabilities and bunch of the resources. You only have like a bright future. If, again, if you're not paying attention to this ideological crap, overall, like you're part of something big, right? So it's not a communist idea. It's just part of the big country with a lot of nationalities and it and it's pretty safe and stable and then it's gone and then more, it is not just gone and everyone has started to talk and bring some information how bad that was and just kind of, it was it's completely turn, turning, changing your mind and your view on things, how they were, and then absolute disaster for about or it's like 1989 up to 2000s, early 2000s. So yeah, it's, it's if you never, and I hope U.S. Will never face anything like that, that just, that that's kind of my, my wish. And that was what I want you in Russia. We say there are some things which you can't even wish to your enemies. So I don't, I kind, if I really don't want any country and anyone, anything, anyone go through what Russia went through within this like hundred years time period.

Nick Trickett ([35:43](#)):

The first problem I think is I think that there's not really been any effort to educate the public on just how extreme the collapse of the state was in the '90s. You know, I think, I think it it's hard. It really is hard to, this has stressed. I mean, I mean the state ceased to function.

Jan Neumann ([35:58](#)):

They lost their country and it traumatized the population.

Nick Trickett ([36:00](#)):

Yeah. Like in a very basic yeah, in a very basic way, the state ceased to function. And, and, and, and also, and so when, you know, when various reforms were pursued right out the gate, including you know, easing up like capital controls to get money in and out. You know, the reason why FSB guys suddenly, you know, surge in influence is because they're they're, these are guys that have experience working abroad and have foreign contacts. And suddenly they have to, they're the ones who have to negotiate the imports for food. Cause the country's short of food, you know, and try to get the money, money in to feed people. Like, you know, it, it, it wasn't just like greed and evil. It, it was very practical considerations of like, they, they were short of basic consumer goods, they were short of food, et cetera. And then, and, and they, they experienced a massive recession for years and years.

Nick Trickett ([36:48](#)):

So like a massive follow up in living standards and so on. And then like, you know, and like state ministries cease to function effectively in many cases. And they, they had to be rebuilt over time and, and, and, and that's, and that's even, you know, setting aside the, the, the very problem of like Yeltsin shelling parliament to, to give himself power, to, to prevent a kind of unending back and forth with, within democratic systems. So that there was more stability, which, you know, obviously in, in hindsight was a terrible choice, but what felt, felt version at the time. So I think that's one thing to start from that, that like, it's that the, the corruption that people start pointing to and talk about all the time it, it doesn't evolve in some kind of like vacuum of like guy chain smoking cigars, wearing turtlenecks, and like scheming, like, like what do you, don't when the state's not providing basic services people step in to provide them, right.

Nick Trickett ([37:43](#)):

And that's, that's a basic tenant in any, you know, any scenario and you see that happen in the U.S. In some cities, obviously not in the same way, the same scale, necessarily. A lot of the corruption in Russia is not really illegal it's stuff that's been legalized and that's, and, and that's important to, to, to get your head around, but it's, it's not people, as much people stealing money, you know, through the legal means. You know, even the broad is obviously still a common place and people still try to take shortcuts around stuff. But it's, it's, it's rather that there, there are legal means by which people can extract tons of money out, out of, out of the public. And, you know, one of the easiest ways to do that is to basically just allow the contractors, the state hires to build something, et cetera, to massively inflate the costs and then pocket the difference.

Nick Trickett ([38:26](#)):

You know, that that's an easy one and, and, and no law's been broken. The, the laws that are broken are in that case are actually about competition because you, you might have one guy literally registered 10 different companies that he's, he owns all of them, but they're bidding against each other for this contract. But the larger point is that that's not, it's not necessarily the outright theft as much. It, you know, as it might seem, it's more about things structurally being designed to hand money, to different elites, to keep things going. In the same way that like in the early 2000s as Putin was consolidating his power, he had to basically make a deal with organized crime to, to just get violence down on the streets and so on and to impose some kind of order. So the deal basically being, we're not gonna stop you

making a profit, but you're not doing X thing, Y thing B you know, et cetera, like, like they kind of established rules for what was acceptable, what wasn't and over time it may incorporated you know, organized crime into the states.

Nick Trickett ([39:21](#)):

So they actually used them for like, you know, foreign policy, you know, uses as well as domestic stuff. I think a third thing that comes to mind is back to earlier is that Russia's not a gas station. Russia was not a petrostate, you know, that then, you know, built up an economy. It was an industrialized economy that got rich, that, that started exporting oil for money in like, you know, en mass, in like the, in like the sixties, basically. So it's a very different situation than like Saudi Arabia. You ha you have a, an economy that already has this large industrial base that's really inefficient. It needs a lot of investment that eventually becomes, you know, it becomes dependent on money being transferred from the oil sector to industry. And then the, the real problem that happens in the Soviet period is that eventually, you know, they, they, they mismanaged fields, they don't explore enough, et cetera, that it gets more and more expensive to maintain oil output.

Nick Trickett ([40:14](#)):

And, and it gets harder and harder to transfer that money. So it's not a straightforward story of like, you know, of like Putin's economy recreating this dynamic, even though in the 2000s, that's what was going on. You know, it's a country that as a professor of mine joked, you know, can build nuclear icebreakers, but is really bad at making TV sets. And, and, and I think that miscolors the way we think of a lot of what Russia does because oil and gas lend themselves to like geopolitical chicanery. People like to imagine the idea of like the leaders, having their hand, the spigot and just choosing what happens. And like, there's obviously an element of truth to that, but that's really not how oil and gas work. And, and so Russia's not that, and I think the last thing to stress, there's always more I'm sure is the, the stability of the, of the leadership of the country, right?

Nick Trickett ([41:03](#)):

The, the idea that Putin and the people who are closest to him have been in power for decades now does not mean that the country's stable, it's a dynamic place. Things are always changing. There are, you know, like art is being created. There are new fads, fashion does exist, even if it's like outdated, when, when you go to like the, a, of Moscow and St. Petersburg, like, like, you know, but it, but it's not just dynamic in a sense of like, people's people live normal lives there it's, you know, and people, I think in the U.S. In particular tend to forget that life in, in authoritarian or semi authoritarian states is actually pretty similar to life in democracies for the most part, because your life's mundane and you aren't constantly protesting on the street. It's also that the, the process of their leadership maintaining that power is the dynamic.

Nick Trickett ([41:48](#)):

So they're, they constantly have to, the regime is constantly trying to find new ways to manage public opinion, you know, to, to pay off a, a certain elite body or, you know, or, or to figure out who should be controlling what asset, you know, and so on. So like, I think it's vastly you know, like exaggerated the extent to which it's like stable. I think that people have this idea that Putin's just there in, in that sense and it's stable and it's just not, it's a, it's a, it's a constant balancing act that he's been really, really good at. And it's actually removed himself from over time to some extent 'cause he, he hasn't really given a --- - frankly about, you know, domestic policy for like most of the last decade, but it, but it's something that

he, you know, that like he, he, he he's thoughts to do it. You know, it's not like he is he's, he's not defying gravity, which I think people tend to assume there's this kind of cult that assumes that he's all powerful.

Jack Murphy ([42:39](#)):

How long do you see this sort of renewed Russian belligerence? Shall we say going on? I mean, if we I don't want to use, you know, kind of like a crass term, like this is the new cold war two cold war 2.0, but what

Nick Trickett ([42:55](#)):

That's China.

Jack Murphy ([42:55](#)):

Yeah, yeah, exactly. But whatever this resurgence is in, in Russian belligerence in various parts around the world and in regards to America and how long do you see this phase of our diplomatic relations going on?

Nick Trickett ([43:11](#)):

I, I, I see a, a kind of status quo kind of persisting for the next five or 10 years. I mean, I think that, I think things have about bottomed out, you know, there's not much more they can really do without risking like a serious attack on our part. And I think that they they've kind of realized, you know, if you track the, what what's happening with the negotiations over the Ukraine, as an outsider, not necessarily, you know, talking to people who are like there, but just reading between the lines you get the sense that there's a realization in the Kremlin that Ukraine was kind of their own red line moment. They set themselves up to do what Obama did and then, and, and like Obama now they're like, oh, this is not worth it. I have to find a way out.

Nick Trickett ([43:49](#)):

And, and, and obviously if they, whether they do or not is an open question. So I'm, I, I, I don't do predictions, right. Cause with this stuff, cuz it's, it's all BS, you know, everyone's gonna 60, 40 it, so they can sound smart no matter what happens. And it's not really, at some point analytically it's dishonest, but I think the bigger point is that they know that there, there are serious constraints on what they can actually achieve and they've probably achieved as much as they can. So I don't, I don't see them becoming conciliatory. I do see the kind of material constraints of what they can achieve, creating a situation in which, you know, they're, they're gonna try to keep finding ways to negotiate. And of course for them that's probably gonna be triggered by threatening something so that we talk to them instead of ignoring them, we are trying to get some kind of, of, of agreement about like verification of, of forces, if nothing else.

Nick Trickett ([44:33](#)):

And just, and just ways to kind of, you know, diffuse some of the tensions, so they stop panicking about us putting, you know, like, like more aggressive systems and so on in place in, in neighboring countries. But I, I, I see them kind of hitting a dead end because of the political economy also of what they've done in some sense. Like, I, I don't see, I think confrontation's probably here to stay, but I think it's confrontation with the intention of trying to find some new diplomatic normal. I don't, I don't, I don't

buy the idea that they can go much further. I mean, I think the fact that they demanded the crazy things about, about NATO, like, you know, taking troops out of Bulgaria and Romania, to some extent reflected paranoia, it to some extent reflected the idea that they wanted to make this Ukraine standoff a much bigger issue in terms of what it was meant to do. But it also meant that they're trying to, to throw out crazy stuff so that the middle's acceptable.

Jan Neumann ([45:24](#)):

Let's say the, the ideal, I can say only about the ideal case scenario, maybe some big guy is gonna have a meeting and they're gonna make a decision. The, that Ukraine will be the Eastern European version of Finland, that's it, you're not part of any military block. We are all gonna help you. East and West is gonna help you to rebuild your economy, which will be the safest option for everyone. Like basically like joined whatever it is. Marshall plan applied, between the Russia and Americans and Europeans to Ukraine. They will be completely neutral and it will be just a major economical hub for Europe. That's it. That would be maybe the best case scenario everything, but it's, it's, it is just, it's, it's a miracle. I'm not sure it's gonna happen. As for kind of a global perspective. I still believe maybe I'm naive that U.S. And Russia are never gonna fight as an open war because these two countries can destroy everything and everyone. That's the, the only, I guess the, that that's the safety thing we have in our, in relation between the Russia and U.S. That because both countries know what they can do.

Jan Neumann ([46:35](#)):

They're never gonna fightAs for Ukraine again, as I said, unfortunately not it, it's not up to Ukraine. It's up to big guys and we don't know what they're gonna come up with and I, I just hope they can make something smart out of it. They already have past experience how to do it. And I, I just hope they can go back to the old books and just maybe apply to the same thing, cuz they've done back in '60s. So without creating any kind of new mess and any tension.

Jack Murphy ([47:11](#)):

Folks, it could all be very different by the time you hear this podcast. So please bear with us, there are enough people out there, fearmongering and warmongering. We don't wanna participate in any of that. We just hope to present information about how we got to this point and explain the background and history that has led us here. Ultimately, you're going to have to make up your own mind, but I hope that cooler heads prevail and that this conflict is avoided entirely. In the end, a military incursion into Ukraine does not serve American or Russian interests. It certainly doesn't help the people of Ukraine who will suffer the most. We've got a couple more episodes in this series lined up to discuss Russia's intelligence services in military at greater length and depth. I'm Jack Murphy for Military Matters.

Rod Rodriguez ([47:57](#)):

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