

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Keynote Conversation
**“Global Security Forum: Foreign Policy in an Era of
Domestic Division”**

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FEATURING

Secretary William Cohen

Former Secretary of Defense

Secretary Leon Panetta

Former Secretary of Defense

CSIS EXPERTS

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Ms. Suzanne
Spaulding:

Thank you very much, Dr. Hamre, for setting the stage for this important conversation. And thanks to both of you for making time to be here to have this conversation with us today.

We are going to get to the issues around divisiveness that are the core of the report that brings this conference together today. But of course, we're going to start with what is on the forefront of everyone's mind, and that is this horror that is unfolding in Ukraine. And you know, I know one of the things that people are really thinking a lot about, and the two of you are well-situated to talk to this, is what are some of the most likely ways that this plays out. Where does this – where does this go from here in the near term and in the long term?

Secretary Leon
Panetta:

Well, you know, it's a tragic moment in our history when we have Putin and the Russians invade a sovereign country, like the Ukraine. And watching this unfold on television and seeing the chaos and the carnage that's involved with what's happening, you know, just makes us all aware of the fact that sometimes we don't learn the lessons of history very well.

And yet, I think, as John pointed out, this is very much a pivotal moment. It's going to tell us an awful lot about what happens in the 21st century. I mean, I look back at the 20th century and think about what happened in World War I as, in many ways, defining what the 20th century was going to look like. And I think what's happening now could tell us a lot about the 21st century, not only in terms of what happens with democracies but what happens with autocracies as well. So this is a very pivotal moment. And probably the best thing about it is that the United States, as a world leader, asserted its role as world leader and was able to develop a unified position with our NATO allies that really came together. And Bill knows this, having dealt with NATO. This is a very diverse group of nations that are part of NATO. And going to Brussels and dealing with them is not an easy task.

And yet, you know, I give tremendous amount of credit to the president for his ability to kind of pull together and really agree on a strategy that involves sanctions, it involves weapons to the Ukrainians, it involved reinforcing our position in NATO. And it really – what it did was what they said they would do, which is to make Putin pay a price. To make Putin pay a price for his aggression. And that was extremely important. And, you know, as this thing's unfolded, I think – you know, I have to tell you that for all of the things we did at the Defense Department looking at Russian capabilities, this thing has really made clear the weaknesses of the Russian military.

Whether it's poor training, whether it's poor leadership, whether it's poor planning, I don't know all of the ingredients. But the fact was they were planning within a few days to take the capital, to have the government collapse, and that they would be rulers of Ukraine – of Ukraine. That was the

way it was supposed to play out. And that hasn't played out, in large measure to the bravery and courage of Ukraine and what they've done. But it – you know, it tells us a lot about the weaknesses that we've seen.

How does it play out? I think there's one or two scenarios. One is that we're squeezing Putin economically with the sanctions, and these are tough sanctions because of the unity of these other countries – tough sanctions. We're squeezing him. We are seeing Russians who are disturbed by what they are – what's going on in Ukraine, and the demonstrations that are taking place in Russia tell us a lot about the fact that Russians are concerned about what they see happening, and thirdly, the ability to provide weapons, war weapons to the Ukrainians so they can put up a hell of a fight and continue to put up a fight and, as I said, the ability to reinforce our position in NATO. It could put enough pressure on Putin so that at some point he decides that he's in trouble as leader of Russia and that he's got to find a way to basically resolve this, say he's – you know, he's been able to achieve the goals that they were after, you know, be able to retain control of the Donbas area and the other areas that they've gotten, and have a Ukraine that is neutral but is its own country in the remainder – in other words, to find a way where he can say I've achieved the goals that I was after and I've made my point that our security is important and that he's taught others a lesson. I think the world would still consider the fact that Putin was defeated as a result of that, but at least it's a way for him to get out with some degree of, you know, of saying, you know, I was able to achieve my goals.

The second option is that he's able – you know, he goes in, turns a lot of these cities to ashes, we have a lot more refugees leaving, was able to control some of the principal cities in Ukraine, and that there is a resistance that develops there that we support that will be a very prolonged resistance. Ukrainian people are going to continue to fight. I think what Putin understands right now is he may try to conquer Ukraine but Ukraine cannot be conquered. It's that simple. And so we have a prolonged war of resistance, and the issue, then, is whether at some point Russia decides, as it did in Afghanistan, to get the hell out. I think those are probably the two scenarios that I see at this point.

Ms. Spaulding: Secretary Cohen, I'd be interested in your thoughts on how this plays out, and what more could the U.S. and NATO and our allies be doing to try to push this toward an outcome that is, you know, more desirable?

Secretary William Cohen: Pardon me for looking at the camera. (Laughs.) I'm unaccustomed to doing that but I'd like to at least address everybody in the group here.

I agree with Leon. We have failed to learn the lessons of the past, but, you know, taking the long sweep of history into account, I think historian Will

Durant once said, if you look at the past 3000 or 4000 years, only 212 have been free of war. So it's endemic to the human species that we are driven to war. And I was interested also – I've read it before but I've started rereading it again – Donald Kagan's book "On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace" and he points out that there are three things, basically, that drive people to war, countries to war: one, interests; two, fear; and three, honor or pride. All three things are involved here as far as both the Russians are concerned and certainly the Ukrainians.

The Russians have been, quote, "fearful" that the expansion of NATO is somehow going to present a physical threat or certainly an economic threat to their existence. They have interests which they believe they should restore the sphere of influence that they had back in 1997 or before that time. And there's a matter of honor involved, pride. Putin now says the pride of Russia is involved and so he's going to break down as hard as he can or come down as hard as he can.

I don't know what the end result is going to be here. I don't think anybody can tell us. I agree with Leon's presentations about two options.

The one I worry about is, you know, the one kind of described in T.S. Eliot's "Waste Land:" "I'll show you fear in a handful of dust" – in this particular case, the possibility of radioactive dust, although I don't think it'll come to that. That's the fear that he is trying to stoke in the West right now.

And we're seeing day by day he has absolutely no apprehension about killing as many people as possible, no matter what the hardship, whether they're young babies or old men. He is prepared to, simply, level every city in the process until we find some solution to this. I don't think it's going to be us, frankly. I think the Chinese, notwithstanding they're trying to stay above the fray, I think they're one of the few countries that have the ability to intervene, at least have an intervention privately with Putin, saying, this is not going well. Because even if Leon's second option is right, that there'll be a long insurgency which he waged against Russia, Putin is going to say, wait a minute, are you coming in from Poland? Are you coming in from Moldova? Are you coming in from Hungary? I don't think so. I think this is something that I want to really up the ante as far as all of those countries are concerned and then start looking at ways to attack them, and then that calls us to respond. What do we do if there's a NATO country involved? How high are we willing to go up the chain?

So I think he, at this particular point, has concluded that he is able to survive the sanctions more than we're willing to impose them over a mid or long term. I think he has concluded, we know what sacrifice is, going back to the Second World War and before, that we can bear almost anything, and that the West will fold before we do, that we are going to suffer some pain in the

immediate short term, medium term, and how long will we hold on? That's a concern that I have.

The positive thing that has come out of all of this, if I can say there's anything positive, is that we have seen a drift toward authoritarianism in the world, certainly, with China, certainly, part of Turkey. Certainly, we have seen it in Russia and we've even seen it in this country in which we have drifted away from the rule of law and we're seeing a turn to the rule of power.

That has been the most dangerous development, from my perspective, in this country. When you lose the rule of law then you're endorsing the law of rule. And it's disappointing. (Laughs.) We were going to talk about this, as part of the agenda was really to talk about the absence of bipartisanship today as compared to the good old days.

But we're finding – to me, at least, the most worrisome thing is that the American people have been less concerned about preserving the integrity of our institutions that have made us the greatest force for freedom on the planet, that we have taken that for granted and now we don't really respect the rule. We don't respect it, from Putin's point of view. We don't respect it geopolitically and we don't respect it here at home enough. And I think what Putin has done is to consolidate this as, wait a minute, this is raw political and military power being exercised against people who are only seeking freedom.

And so as Leon was talking about, you've seen the consolidation of all of our NATO countries, which were doubtful up until most recently. Think about it. We insulted the Germans. The German chancellor didn't get a chance to shake the hand of our former president. He, I think, demeaned her publicly.

We had the former president question the utility of NATO, who also expressed concerns about whether we should be in Japan, whether we should be in South Korea, whether we should be in Germany, and I didn't hear an outcry coming from members of Congress on that saying, wait a minute, we are here, we have these relationships because you have to make your friends before you need them. This is the combination of all of the democracies in the world saying we have something precious, and only by staying together can we preserve that.

So I think Putin has – I don't mean this in that way – done us a favor. He's killed thousands. He's displaced at least, I'd say, 5 million, maybe 10 million that are planning on it. But what he has done is reminded us, the free world, what is worth fighting for and that we have to stick together in the face of authoritarianism and what that means for world security and peace.

I feel a Senate response coming on, so I'm going to cease and desist for any longer comment. I'm starting to feel like a senator again. So I'll stop here.

Sec. Panetta: Bill used to operate under the five-minute rule. (Laughter.)

Sec. Cohen: Well, you were in the House, so that doesn't count. (Laughter.)

Ms. Spaulding: Well, I'm glad that you took the time to make those really important comments about this broader impact on democracy. We know that Putin has spent many, many years conveying the message, trying to convince Americans, his own population and those around the world that democracy is weak, corrupt, and chaotic, right, and not something to be longed for, that it is irrevocably broken.

And I think he tested the strength of democracy when he made that decision to go into Ukraine. And so while there will be time to look back at important lessons to be learned, as you mentioned, about things we might have done differently over the years, months, and days before the invasion of Ukraine that might have changed the course of events, we can learn some lessons right now about the strength of democracies, right?

Secretary Panetta, I know you've talked about, you know, leading with our strengths as a democracy, the fact that we have allies instead of client states that come about through lots of work, that we can operate with transparency. As a former head of CIA, very interested in your thoughts on the intelligence community's performance here and the policymakers' decisions to be as transparent as they have, to shine light into the dark corners where Putin hides his secrets, for example.

Sec. Panetta: Yeah. Look, I mean, I'm a believer, as Bill is, in the United States as a world leader. I think it's extremely important for the United States to play that role because of the values we have as our democracy.

But the way we've been able to be a world leader is because of our military strength – we are the strongest military power on the face of the earth – our diplomacy, our ability to use our diplomacy effectively, and our ability to build alliances and to work with allies.

We're living in a dangerous world right now. And, you know, no matter where you look, even before what happened in Ukraine, the reality is, you know, we're dealing with a second chapter of the Cold War in Russia. We're dealing with China and the threats from China. We're dealing with North Korea. We're dealing with Iran. We're dealing with a Middle East in which there are a number of failed states that are undermining the security of that region. We're dealing with cyber war, which has become really the battlefield for the future.

And our ability to be able to have a strong defense, have strong intelligence and have strong allies is what gives us the ability to try to confront these danger points in the world. And we had a great example of what it means when we are using that leadership in order to be able to confront an adversary like Russia.

I mean, yeah, look, Russia – Putin read weakness on the part of the United States for a long time, going back probably three or four administrations. And that's why, you know, he went into Georgia, he went into Crimea, he went into Syria, he went into Libya, and he, you know, used a cyber war against the United States on our election capabilities, institutions – a very bold cyber war that's still going on.

And so he – you know, he read weakness on the part of the United States, and that he could get away that exercise of power. And I think he just – you know, he looked at the United States, he looked at our polarization, he looked at the messages Trump was sending out, he looked at the divisions within our own country, and what Bill said in terms of, you know, respect for the rule of law, or whether we were still – or whether we could even govern, for God's sakes – whether we could govern. And, you know, he then saw what happened in Afghanistan and said, you know, I think these guys are not going to draw a line on me.

And we did. We did. We drew a line that had to be drawn when the United States and our allies came together. And when we used the intelligence capability to basically look at what Russia was doing – I mean, normally Putin likes to operate in the dark, let's face it. Like to operate not on the public stage. But when we put all of that intelligence out on the public stage and said: This is what he's up to, this is what he's planning, these are the moves he's taking – stuff that intelligence – you know, in the intelligence business that's what we're supposed to do, is be able to determine that. And most of the time when you determine that, you know, you put it into the PDB and it's classified and nobody knows about it except a few people. This was put out to the world. Great decision.

A great decision, because it made the world aware of what the hell they were up to. And when Putin then moved, even though, you know, he kept saying we're not going to invade, we're not going to invade, even in the face of everything that was being put out on intelligence, it showed him for the liar that he is. And it weakened their position that much more when they then attacked and invaded Ukraine. So it was a good move to be able to put out that information. It was a good move to draw the line on Putin and say that he's going to pay a price. He's now paying that price. And the key I think right now is that the United States and our NATO allies have to stick together in a more unified way than ever, because if we're into this long-term resistance

war that goes on in Ukraine, with all the sanctions in place, with all of the economic consequences, we're going to get some breaks that are going to start appearing.

And we cannot afford to have any breaks in the unity between the United States and our allies. We have got to remain firm. That's going to be the key as to whether or not we ultimately are going to be able to prevail one way or another in this war that we're in. And we are – even though it's – we haven't declared war, the reality is, for all intents and purposes, the United States is in a proxy war with Russia right now. And we have to determine who ultimately is going to prevail.

Sec. Cohen:

I think we're in two kinds of war. Number one, informational warfare and economic warfare. The fact is, we tend to lump the Russian people in our discussion, but the Russian people ordinarily would be with us. They have seen the benefit from what is happening in the West, as the Ukrainians have. And Putin has shut that down now. We like to cite Orwell, but just think about it. This is not a war. This is a special military operation. And if you call it a war, you go away for 15 years. If you criticize our military, you go away for 15 years. So he has turned this into Orwell's Ministry of Truth. And you think about it, you know, war is peace, ignorance is strength, slavery is freedom. It's whatever they say it is. And if you suppress the information in Russia, they're going to listen to what he's saying.

So we have to wage an information warfare to penetrate the iron curtain that he has put up in terms of the Russian people understanding what's going on. I mean, think about the Russians so far. I think they've arrested at least 8,000, maybe more, people who were in the streets in Russia saying they know what's going to happen to them. They're going to go away. They'll go to the gulag of the past. And yet, they're out there demonstrating against him. So the more the information gets out there, the more people are going to be in the street. And the more people in the street, he's going to be even more threatened.

Well, that presents another challenge for us: What happens when he really is threatened from within? What does he do at that point? Does he lash out further? Does he then get more aggressive in terms of what he is threatening to the NATO countries or in Ukraine or those that are not yet members of NATO? We don't know, which is why I think China has a big role to play here.

China, they've signed their deal at the Olympics and saying we're with you hook, line, and sinker. But the Chinese don't want to see this erupt into a much more global conflict than it is right now only in Ukraine. They have a major interest in not seeing us come face to face with the Russians and what can happen by either a misjudgment, miscalculation, mistake. If one of those missiles flies into Poland and takes out some American or Polish soldiers,

what's our reaction at that point? I think it would be a pretty strong reaction. Then we start climbing up the ladder.

But I want to come back to Leon's point about hanging together, and that's one of my concerns right now. I don't recognize the Congress that I served in or that you served in. I don't recognize the House of Representatives. I don't recognize the United States Senate. There were never cases like that when we were in office. And there are reasons for this change. Neither Leon nor I ever had to confront and deal with social media. We really never had to deal with the effects of globalization. If you think about what's going on in this country, apparently they're out on the 95 – or, I-95 or 495 now demonstrating against the wearing of masks or the mandates for vaccinations. (Laughs.) Even though we're taking the mask off, even though we've vaccinated most of the people – 75 percent – they're out there demonstrating. And they're appealing – members of Congress, especially in my party, appealing to the worst instincts of the American people in terms of fear, racism, misogyny. All of the – all of the things that have been in our lives from the beginning of time has just come to the surface more in the last four or five years.

But we have members of Congress now saying we support Putin or why didn't – why don't we support Putin. And the short answer is: You believe in freedom, don't you? And that's why we're supporting the Ukrainians, because of freedom. Not that – here you are demonstrating against masks; these people are dying. And so I worry that we won't be able to sustain the consensus that exists now because we're moving into a political year and now we're saying, well, didn't Biden lose this war? Isn't this Biden's fault that we lost this? And then they start in again trying to really place themselves in front so they can win the election in November. I think Putin's counting on that. I think most authoritarian governments look at us – most of our allies look at us and they say, how can we be sure that you'll still be there?

The reason you're seeing so much discontent in the Middle East is our allies and friends don't trust us. They don't trust us. You touched upon all the issues. Why not? They saw how we pulled out of Syria. Some of you may recall that it was SecDef General Jim Mattis who had – he was forced to resign after he saw that the president said pull out of Syria, now; no notice to allies, no notice to anybody else, get out. And he felt, I can't serve anymore. And so then we're out of Afghanistan and the way that was certainly initiated. They're looking at us saying that we want to get out of Iraq. So all of these countries are looking at us and saying, we're not too sure.

So maybe the Saudis have to hedge and that's why they haven't been very responsive. President Biden asked them to produce more energy and they said, no, I don't think we're going to do that.

Israelis came out finally and endorsed condemning Russia, but they're in a conflict – they have a conflict. They've had a good relationship they've been developing with the Russians. And I think we all know why that is in terms of having some access to go into Syria without being hit by S-400s, but they've got a conflict there and they're being torn by that. They came out. They had their prime minister go and meet with Putin, and that is great.

And then you've got India. India would be one of the largest democracies in the world. They have remained reasonably silent. Why? Because they depend upon Russian military. Fifty percent or 60 percent of their military equipment comes from Russia. They've had long, historical ties to Russia.

Here we are trying to establish a much better relationship with India, the Quad – you know, India, Japan, Australia, U.S. – and so they're in a position now where they're trying to hedge, what do we do? We want to maintain our neutrality or our autonomy and not get caught up Russia versus United States, but the fact is they look at China and see that China is posing a threat to them economically and militarily. So it gets more complicated in terms of how we hold onto all of this solidarity, so it comes back to interests, fear, and honor. And so I don't know how it all ends. I'm hoping for the best. I hope Leon is correct that some settlement can be arrived at. But isn't it ironic that we have to find a face-saving way out for Putin who has created this disaster on a monumental scale and we've got to – how can we save face for him? I find it hard for us to do that but, again, I'm hoping that others will – I don't think that we can. I don't think that we'll be able to do that, but I think that others who have an interest in seeing this not spread will be helpful in this regard.

Ms. Spaulding: How much do you think that effort to find an off-ramp, the effort ultimately, perhaps, to negotiate some way out of the violence here, is complicated by Putin's decision to indiscriminately target civilians? The U.N. is now talking about war crimes investigations. How much does that complicate the way out here if we're going to be true to the rule of law, for example?

Sec. Cohen: Do you want me to keep –

Sec. Panetta: You go first

Sec. Cohen: (Laughs.) OK, I'll go first. (Laughter.) I'll try to be as short as I can.

It does two things. The cruelty that he has demonstrated has, I think, rallied the world against him. So as Leon was saying earlier, everybody who has freedom of information can see what he has done and what that means to peace throughout the world. So it has rallied the world against him. The fact that he has killed so many and is prepared to displace as many as 10 million people, I think that makes it more difficult for a, quote, "off-ramp" for him.

On the other hand, to the extent that he sees more and more people, the Israelis criticizing him, the UAE stepping in, others now criticizing – not only criticizing – you know, it's not just – it's not words. We can all talk words up here. The question is, what are we prepared to do? Are each of those countries prepared to cut off some degree of business with him so that it really hurts him in a way that the Russian people once again take to the streets? So I think it will rally the world opinion against him. That may make it more difficult to find off-ramps, but I think the more he does this the less options he's going to have. And I don't know how it ends well. See, I worry about waging a long-term insurrection – or I should say insurgency – against him because I think he can't afford to have that happen; he can't afford to have all of these weapons coming in from all of these different states without declaring war against them as well.

So maybe, in the short term, if other major powers step in and give him counsel, saying, let's find Leon's way out of this. This could have been done from the beginning, by the way. All of this could have been done – what Leon has just – from the very beginning. We could have said from the beginning that – too early to be talking about coming into NATO and you were just visiting the CIA. Bill Burns wrote about this in his book, you know, most recent book, "Back Channel," in which he pointed out back in 2007 he said, this is a red line; you don't want to cross this red line because Putin will react in a very aggressive way. That was good advice then. It's good advice now. But here we are.

So I think it's going to take other powers other than ourselves. It's going to take other powers to help persuade him he's made a big mistake and find a way that he can say, OK, I've made my point; you didn't listen to me; now you're listening to me, and it's a message that the rest of you who want to get into NATO and the EU, I'm still here.

Sec. Panetta:

When the United States and our NATO allies decided and said that we're going to make Putin pay a price, and then made him pay a price for the invasion, it is very important that we understand that this means that we have to make him pay a price. So there isn't a nice guy approach here when you're dealing with a tyrant and a bully like Putin. This isn't one where you can kind of hope that saner minds will kind of take over and try to provide, you know, that kind of diplomatic solution that could happen. This is – this is a situation where, having drawn the line on Putin, we have to stick to it.

And we got to make damn sure that sanctions continue to hit Russia, and that the Russian people are made aware of just how horrible the situation is and begin to continue to undermine his strength back home, which will get his attention a hell of a lot faster than anything else. And we have to continue to arm the Ukrainians so that they're able to do the remarkable fighting that they're involved in. These are small groups that are – I mean, a 40-mile

convoy that has been held up for a long time. Why? Because they're going in and they're blowing up fuel trucks. They're blowing up other trucks as part of it, and basically stalling that convoy, and doing a hell of a job as a result.

And Russians now are facing logistic problems, particularly in the south and elsewhere, in terms of their ability to supply their troops. I mean, now they're supposedly going to be calling in Russian troops from Syria because, you know, they're not – it's not going well. It's not going well. So Putin is about power. And we've got to continue to exercise the power we're involved with. And does it involve risk? You're damn right. This is not only a pivotal moment, this is a dangerous moment. Because when you have that much concentration of military forces, you know, the possibility of a misjudgment or, you know, somebody who decides to send a missile in the wrong direction, it's very probable that you could have something like that happen. And we'll have to deal with the consequences.

So it is – it is dangerous. And there's no question that Putin, you know, who – the Russians have been working with small-yield nuclear weapons. Who the hell knows? But we are in this now. And this is about democracy. This is about whether or not a sovereign country is going to survive. When Hitler went into Czechoslovakia, you know, in many ways Europe stood back. And he continued to go. And he wasn't stopped. We made the decision to stop Putin now. That's what it comes down to. And, you know, I think when you put him in – when power puts him in a difficult position, then, yeah, it could go several ways. He could be cornered and strike out, or he can say, you know, my power is on the line. My ability to lead Russia is on the line. I'm losing my country. See these body bags going back to Russia, I'm sure contributing to the same sense that what the hell are we doing there.

So if it is about saving his neck, then I do think that there are ways that he'll decide he could get away with it. China could help, of course. Others could help, perhaps. But this is Putin that's going to have to make the decision. And the only way I can see now to make him make that decision is to continue to squeeze him. And that's what we're doing.

Sec. Cohen:

Have you noticed how far away he sits from everybody? (Laughs.) You know, we could land an F-35 on that desk. (Laughter.) And it may be that, you know, he is trying to show that I'm in charge; I don't have any advisers around, just me. Putin's – you were saying about I'm in charge. It may be that he's worried about COVID. And it may be that he's worried about something else, people getting too close to him. Whatever it is, I noticed, after we started talking about this, he had all of the airline attendants sitting next to him as he was explaining why they're out of a job for the near future.

We're in total agreement here. We're not having a debate at all. Leon and I are on the same page on this. I still worry about this country mostly, because

when I see a candidate for the United States Senate say that I don't care about Ukraine one way or the other, you know, it's sort of like in the past, World War II, where's Prague? Where's Bucharest? And for people to say they're over there, we don't care about them – it's not just about Ukraine. It's about democracy here as well.

And that's why maybe we're going to get to this debate about how do we educate ourselves. We don't talk civilly to each other. We have entered an era of crudeness and crudity and coarseness in our speech and our conduct toward each other that is uncivilized. It really is uncivilized that we see each other as enemies, that we can't sit down and have a conversation, and that members of Congress now see each other as the enemy camp. And it's all about how can we get back in power. To do what? You want to get back in power to do what?

And, you know, I'm a strong supporter of Joe Biden. He and I went to Congress the same year – I hate to say this – 1972. He went to the Senate. I went to the House. And he has been a friend ever since that time. He has a good heart. He is somebody who is necessary at this point in our lives, because he wants to bring us back together. And we have been really divided and rejoicing in that division. And you see what happens when you simply are divided so to the core that nothing gets done.

And, you know, authoritarians love this. They love this, because they can ride in on a white horse and say look at the chaos. Democracy, what have you done for yourselves lately? You can't reach an agreement. It took you a long time with infrastructure; can't reach an agreement on climate change. You can't reach agreement on any of these major issues. Therefore, only I can solve this. Only Putin can solve this. Only Xi Jinping can solve this. Only Erdogan can solve this.

So again, we've been seeing this drift. And it really is kind of on the geopolitical landscape saying what's the best principle of organization in our lives today? Is it democracy, with all of its strengths but all of its weaknesses, where they can't reach decisions in a timely way? Or is it with strongmen and putting – concentrate that power in the executive branch so all of that power is in the executive branch and that president, whoever it is.

I just wrote a piece with former Senator Gary Hart – I don't know if it's going to get published or not – on something called PEADS – Presidential Executive Emergency Declarations (sic; Presidential Emergency Action Documents), something that we don't know about because it's never shared with the public. You haven't seen it. It's all classified. And yet when you start looking, some insights have been gained to it. You start looking at what can they do – the suspension of habeas corpus, control of the media, arrest of individuals. All of these things can take place in the name of continuity of government.

I mean, these are all things that are out there that we don't talk about enough, but it comes back to civic education. What is the reason that we have this country? What is the reason we call ourselves the United States of America, when there's so much division economically, racially, religiously, culturally? And we haven't come to grips with that.

We talk about, well, people in this country are fearful; here again, fear, honor, interest. People are fearful of what? Demographic change. What does that mean? It means brown people are coming into power. That's what that means, that the White world as such that's here in this country how did all these people who are Black and brown get all these positions – I thought they weren't smart enough or they weren't good enough or they were inferior. And now we see them everywhere. They've been allowed to have an education and now they're occupying positions of power and we're losing power. Therefore, demographic change is just a word for brown people and Black people are coming for your jobs, and some members of Congress and presidential candidates are preying upon that. Now, I'm getting – here we go again. I'm getting into the senatorial speech so I'll stop here. But –

Sec. Panetta: Let me give you – let me give you some hope, OK? (Laughter.) Because, I mean, look, Bill and I saw Washington at its best and I think we've seen Washington at its worst. I mean, the good news is we saw Washington work and that there were Republicans and Democrats willing to work together. Even though they had their political differences they were willing to work together on major issues.

When I got elected to Congress, Tip O'Neill was the speaker. Democrat's Democrat from Massachusetts, but he had a great relationship with Bob Michel.

Sec. Cohen: He's an old Republican. Don't let him forget that.

Sec. Panetta: Yeah, that's right. (Laughter.) And Bob Michel was, you know, from Illinois and they had their political differences but they were friends, and they made the decision that when it came to major issues, no matter who was president they were going to work together to solve those issues.

And I was there at the time and I, you know, was part of that process. And there's no question that of late we're extremely polarized and it does – our inability to govern is a national security issue and it is extremely important that we understand that the purpose of getting elected is to govern. It isn't just to pound your shoe on the table and engage in politics.

Now, I don't – I'm not sure this is going to change from the top down. I tell the students at the Panetta Institute we govern either by leadership or by

crisis. If leadership is there and willing to take the risks associated with leadership, we can avoid crisis. If not, we'll govern by crisis, and of late we've, largely, governed by crisis. The budget's the best example of that. You know, we're still working on a damn CR and it's likely we'll get another CR in order to get by. So rather than dealing with it, they're dealing with it through crisis.

Now, ultimately, I really do think that although this may not change from the top down that it will change from the bottom up because there are a lot of people who are getting elected – and I can say that because my son is a member of Congress – there are those who have gotten elected, particularly those who have been in the military, who say, I'm not going to Washington just to play a political game. I'm going to Washington because I want to govern.

And so there's things like the Solutions Caucus in the House – 25 Democrats, 25 Republicans, willing to work together on issues. It's a start, and they're having an impact. And there are moderate members on the Senate side who are interested in governing as well.

I think this event that we're in with regards to what's happened in Ukraine could very well be – and I wish the president had stressed this – the unity we're showing in Ukraine ought to be the kind of unity we need to build back home.

And we can do that. Why? Because I still believe very much in the spirit of the American people. That, really, is the fundamental strength of our country. It doesn't lie here in Washington. It lies in the spirit of the American people, and they care about their family. They care about giving their kids an education. They do care about the rule of law. They do care about trying to be able to get a decent house and take care of their parents with health care. Those are common issues, and we can build on that.

But my hope is that what's happening today – and it has produced some bipartisanship at least on that issue – but that it could become, hopefully, a turning point to begin to focus on other issues that we need to unify on.

And, you know, Donald Trump has become a hell of a lot more isolated as a result of the stupid things he's saying and that gives me some hope that perhaps, you know, we're going to be able to see new leadership come to the Republican Party and, hopefully, new and younger leadership be a part of the Democratic Party as well. There is hope here, but we have to work at it. It's not going to happen by itself.

Sec. Cohen: I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to associate myself with the remarks made by the gentleman from California. (Laughter.) And his son, who we take great hope. (Laughter.)

Ms. Spaulding: Well, and I am thrilled at both of your remarks just now, both in terms of sharing with us that sense of hope, but also in pushing for civic education and a rediscovery of our shared values. It's an issue very near and dear to my heart that we've been working on for the last several years here at CSIS. And I will say, it is also a sign of hope, Frank Luntz, who is a Republican pollster, did a survey, a poll, and it was one of the only polls I've seen in the last several years where there were an equal number of Democrats and Republicans who agree on one thing. And that is that the best way to restore a sense of national identity is to teach civics education. And nearly 60 percent, identical percentage of Republicans and Democrats. So despite efforts by some to pull the reinvigoration of civics into the culture war, my sense is that there is bipartisan support for this, and it's something we can move forward on.

So on that optimistic note, I'm going to turn it over for questions. I'm sure that folks in the audience have some questions. I hope you do.

Sec. Panetta: If you don't, we'll keep talking. (Laughter.)

Q: Hi. Thank you guys for having such a great discussion.

I'd like to ask about how we can maintain the integrity of institutions without a crisis? Because we've seen, as you guys referenced, that NATO is really strong because we're in a crisis. But that's not really a sustainable solution.

Sec. Cohen: One thing we have to do is to restore respect for our institutions. Some – many years ago there was a book written by John Gardner called “The Recovery of Confidence.” It was one of my favorite little books, in which he talked about the need for us to restore a sense of confidence in our ability to govern. And that means respecting the institutions and what they stand for. Again, I'm trying not – trying not – very hard to not make this partisan in nature. But when the former president came into office, the first thing he said was: I want my judges, I want my generals, I want my State Department, I want my military. And so what it was is to take away the reverence for the independence of the institutions.

You know, they're all a political role in that sense, but they basically have been constructed in a way that you have – you have respect for it, including the Supreme Court in years past. Today the Supreme Court is seen more as being a partisan institution, which will reduce respect for the institution. You know, I always used to say, you know, I disagree with that decision. It's five-

four and six-three. But it's the Supreme Court. I accept what they've done. Today I don't think that people feel the same way, that they respect the – or, it's seen as being purely political and partisan in that nature.

So I think as part of our civic education we have to get back to saying, no, Mr. President. This is not your military. This is not your Justice Department. This is not your attorney general. We have to go back to saying: These institutions have been created so that the majority of the American people can really enjoy the benefits of freedom, the ability to prosper, and to make contributions to society. I think unless we do that we're going to be back to a power game. And we are all going to fail as a result of it.

I do share Leon Panetta's sense of optimism that we can do this. And his spirit is something. And he's been running an institute out in California where he's talking to young people like you all the time. And basically that's something that we have to depend upon, you asking questions of people who are running for office at the local level, the state level, and federal level.

Sec. Panetta:

Look, democracy, you know, is – has never been easy, because it is government of, by and for the people. And people bring their different viewpoints, their different sense of values, their different sense of, you know, what's right about our country. They always – they bring that to the table. And the ability to kind of be able to have that exchange, and then to be able to find consensus or find compromise is at the heart of what our democracy's all about, and that leadership, to do that, means you have to be willing to take risks. You have to take risks, which means that, you know, there are going to be times you're going to decide something that could very well wind up losing your election. That's a fact. And yet, you make the right decision because it's right for the country and that – we have to get back to that attitude that you're not elected to come back here in order to develop a career job in which you'll never leave. These jobs in Washington, you know, are jobs where you come back, you do your very best, you make the right decisions, and yeah, you may lose your next election. There's nothing wrong with that. That's why you're elected is to come back here to govern, to make tough decisions.

And, you know, I was elected in what was a Republican district – (laughs) – and I'll never forget: First time I came back, Tip O'Neill said that the first vote I had to do was a vote for a pay raise, and I said, I can't do that; I just got elected. And the economy was not doing well. I said, the last damn thing I'm going to do is to vote to give myself a pay raise, and Tip, you know, in his Irish approach, said basically, ah, don't worry about it; nobody ever has lost their election because of a vote on a pay raise. And I said, I can't do that; I can't go back to my constituents, stare them in the face, and say I've just given myself a big pay raise when they're having a hell of a time surviving every day. So I voted against the pay raise and, you know, it passed, and

instead of taking the pay raise, I gave it back to the Treasury. I wrote a check to the Treasury. It was the best campaign ad – (laughter) – I ever had in my re-election.

You have to make those kinds of decisions and I think somehow we've got to get back to that because the whole rule in politics these days is don't make those tough decisions. The leadership sometimes don't make those tough decisions. "It may offend our base." That's not what it's about. The issue is, is it the right thing to do for the country? And I have to say, the leadership that was in the Senate, the leadership that was in the House made decisions based on what they thought was in the best interests of the country. That's what we have to get back to. We've got to get back to that mentality, because if it's just – if you're just getting elected to come back here to worry about saving your seat, don't bother. Don't bother. Come back here to govern, to make tough decisions, and yes, you take the consequences. But that is what democracy's all about and it's those signs of courage that are what will make our democracy strong. It isn't about saving each other in a political campaign; it's about the decisions we make.

Sec. Cohen: I had a very different relationship with Tip O'Neill. (Laughter.) When I stepped onto the House floor, he gave me a note to take to Carl Albert. He thought I was a page. (Laughter.)

Q: Hi. So you talked a little bit about the distinction between bottom-up versus top-down solutions and how in America and democracy we really emphasize, you know, bottom-up, very Tocquevillian view that I sympathize a lot with and I think is very important. But do you think there are sort of top-down changes, practical changes, that can be made that would actually be effective? Because what concerns me is just the way that certain institutions function, they reinforce polarization from the top down that reverberates across society. So it's from the bottom up but it also is coming from the top. So I'm curious to hear your perspective on various tweaks that have been proposed, such as, you know, open primaries, the filibuster for example, mixed-member majoritarian, all these other different things that proponents say would reinforce the right kinds of norms we're looking for. Thank you.

Sec. Cohen: I'll try to make this as short as I can. There are things that can be done. I think Joe Biden is trying to do those. He's trying to say come back together so we can reach an agreement that we can pass legislation that will do what? That will benefit people's lives. We're going to change your life for the better. Government has a role to do this.

Republicans and Democrats can disagree about the role of government in our lives. Democrats are always going to believe that government can take a more aggressive role in helping to alleviate poverty and all of the disparities

that exist in our society. Republicans will always say we want fiscal responsibility, balanced budgets, and less government involved in our lives. But there is and there always has been – if you look back in the history that we were there, there were always Republican and Democrats who could agree.

Bob Dole, conservative as they come, could reach an agreement with George Mitchell, as liberal as they come. Bob Michel that you mentioned before – Bob Michel could reach an agreement with Tip O'Neill, even though they had fundamentally different philosophical positions. So we can do – we have to show that government can work.

And I touched upon this just briefly and with a collateral issue, but it's not collateral in the lives of most people. Globalization has done great things for billions of people on the planet. It has also created great disparities here in this country. And I don't think we who were in office, myself included, were – cared enough about what the impact would be if we simply outsourced jobs to China. In other words, we didn't think about the consequences. Yeah, these great companies, they can make a profit by investing or doing business in a low-cost country. They can produce all these lower-cost items much cheaper, and therefore we can generate prosperity, et cetera. We really didn't think the – through the consequences – what does it mean when Detroit no longer exists as a manufacturer of cars, when you don't have all of these centers who have jobs. Because the anger you see out there right now is for people who feel that we didn't really care about them; that we, the elite, the snobs here in Washington, New York, the major cities really look down our noses at those who are at the working level who no longer have hope. And that has been one of the causes that we've seen with people rising up, now saying we trust Mr. Trump because he speaks for us.

And so what we have to do is show that government really is an instrument for helping to produce prosperity, and so we have to enlarge the prosperity. And we have to have a way, whether it's Ray Dalio of CSIS – who's a member of the Board of Trustees – who says, well, capitalism as it is may not be able to survive – not survive, but prosper – unless we make some changes. So how do you make changes in capitalism without being accused of being a socialist? So we've got those things that we have to, again, educate ourselves, what kind of changes can be made in the capitalist system that takes into account the great disparity of wealth in our country.

As John Kennedy once said, you know, if we cannot help the many – the millions who are poor, we can't save the few who are rich. Well, that disparity is getting greater and greater. And what does that mean for the people who have to live with that disparity? They get angry. They take to the streets. They're driving around the Beltway. So we have to do things at the governmental level to show that we really can work these things out. And

when we do that, you'll have less anger, less self-interest as such, more of a general interest in the greater common wheel, the greater wealth of the community.

Sec. Panetta: You know, look, there's no question reforms can be made, and those reforms might – you know, might provide some improvement. But I have to tell you, from my experience both on Capitol Hill and in the administration, that it is the quality of humans in those jobs that makes the difference. And you know, I've – when I was in the administration there was always the idea, well, you know, we need to reorganize the department or we need to move the boxes around. Moving the boxes around didn't do a damn thing. Why? Because you had the same people that were there are part of the boxes. And they didn't do a damn thing. They just moved stuff from the in box to the out box.

And so, you know, the lesson I learned, particularly in the administration, and particularly as chief of staff, was that if the president wanted something done; I had to find the right person who could cut through all the BS and get it done. And if I found somebody who had that leadership ability and that was willing to do that, that's how you got it done.

And I have to tell you, the same thing's true in the Congress; the quality of people - you know, and you can reform things in Congress as well, I understand that. But it's the quality of people who are elected and whether they really care about what their job is about and that they're there to try to solve problems, not to try to stop the other party or create a conflict. They're there to stop it.

And we had some decent members who were willing to do that from both sides of the aisle. That's why, you know, Bill and I come from an era where Republicans and Democrats were, in fact, working together to get things done. And, you know, it wasn't because the rules told them to do that. It's because there were good people getting elected.

Elections have consequences. You know, if the American people are going to elect poor representation, there isn't a damn thing we can do about the ultimate impact here in Washington. It's going to be lousy. If they, in fact, elect people that really do bring the right qualities to the job, then that's how you make our democracy function.

So, you know, we've got to get that message back to the American people. The ultimate check in our democracy is the right to vote. And that's going to tell you what kind of democracy you have or you don't have.

Ms. Spaulding: So the quality of people in government critically important. The quality of people engaged in civic conversation outside of government equally important. And I feel more confident about the state of our democracy

knowing that the two of you have continued to be engaged as very quality voices in our civic conversations, whether it's conversations with young people, making time to come and have a conversation at a forum like this, you know, being on television, talking about the strength of democracy and the importance of our shared values.

So I am so grateful to both of you, not only for being with us here today, but for your continued engagement in helping steer us. We are, as Dr. Hamre said, in a time of perhaps fundamental shift in our world. And how we steer our way through it needs to be informed by wise and experienced voices like yours. So thank you very much.

Please join me –

Sec. Cohen: That's the most graceful get the hook that I've ever had. (Laughter.)

Ms. Spaulding: I wish we could go on all afternoon, but we can't.

Sec. Panetta: Thank you very much. (Applause.)