## **QI Panel:**

## **Book Talk: Getting Russia Right**

October 23, 2023  
12:00-1:00 PM EDT

**Anatol Lieven 0:49**

Hello, everyone. I'm Anatol Lieven, director of the Eurasia program at the Quincy Institute. And it's my great pleasure today to introduce Thomas Graham to talk about his new book, Getting Russia Right. Before doing so, I'd just like to say a couple of other things. First, questions, Tom and I will talk for about half an hour. And then I will pass on questions from the audience. Could you put them please in the q&a, which you will see at the bottom of your screens. And secondly, just to flag two panels coming up? Tomorrow, I will be moderating one on the latest conflict in well, what used to be Nagorno Karabakh. And then on Thursday, my colleague, Steven Simon, will be moderating a panel on the war in Gaza, and what it means for the Middle East, and for US policy, so two Quincy panels this week, which I hope you will be able to attend.

**Anatol Lieven 1:48**

Now for today, a great pleasure and honor to introduce an old friend, Thomas Graham. Tom is a distinguished fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and a research fellow at Yale University. He was Special Assistant to the President and senior director for Russia at the National Security Council. And when I was there as a journalist in the 1990s, Tom was acting political counselor at the US Embassy in Moscow. And Tom has just published a book on the basis of this long experience as one of America's leading practitioners and commentators on relations with Russia, Getting Russia Right. Tom, welcome.

**Thomas Graham 2:32**

Glad to be here with you.

**Anatol Lieven 2:35**

I'd like to begin by asking, the, you and I both being of a certain age, I mean, I remember, I was there in the early 90s, when there were these tremendous hopes, convictions even for a future of amicable us Russian relations. And it seemed to me at the time that given that America and Russia, as opposed to Soviet Union had never had any serious, really serious problems. Historically, there was no reason not to expect that. Now, of course, in retrospect, this looks like a complete fantasy. But do you think that the, the collapse of relations was in some sense foreordained, given the basic positions of both sides? Or could it have been avoided?

**Thomas Graham 2:37**

Well, I think in many ways, we misread the situation that the, at the end of the Cold War, we did look forward to amicable relations. We were very confident that because the in our mind, the Cold War, it spells the victory of liberal democracy of communism, 50 years after we defeated, defeated fascism in the Second World War, that a country in order to survive and thrive into the 21st century needed to develop free market democracy. We thought this was particularly true of Russia. As you know, there were certainly Russian leaders who said that the direction in which they wanted to move, we were caught up by the end of history, globalization. And we made a tremendous effort at that time to assist Russia in its transition to free market democracy. I think we miss misread the situation. Because if you look at what really happened in Russia, what we saw was not a Democratic Revolution so much as a power struggle that was won by the by the Russian political elite over there, remnants of the Soviet political elite. And that elite, by and large, was really in tune in its basic attitudes with the Soviet elite. That is it believed in a strong Russian state. It believed in Russia as a great power. Our and so the fundamental contrast between our two positions was the United States really wanted to change Russia wanted to transform it into a liberal, Western democracy. The Russian political elite, despite what some of its leaders were saying, was focused on rebuilding Russia's power reasserting itself on the global stage. Those are two fundamentally different attitudes that soured relations over time. Second point I would make, I think, Anatole, you're absolutely right. That we had antagonism during the Cold War. But I think if you look back, historically, not so much to the beginning of us Russian relations, but the late 19th century, you will see that there were the beginnings of rivalry on the global stage. Two expansionary powers that came into conflict, not in Europe, but actually out in the Far East dementia Korea, at that point. And attitudes towards Russia began to sour at that point. And we began, what became a relationship of rivalry from that time, obviously intensified during the Cold War because of differences, ideological differences, but reemerged slowly, in the post Cold post Cold War period. And that, I would argue, is where we are right now.

**Anatol Lieven 6:28**

Do you think It sometimes seemed to me that what has been called the wolf of its doctrine, which called for, I mean, essentially, US primacy in every region of the world, and that no other country would have any influence beyond its borders, except that explicitly allowed to it by the United States in oil down? I think it's fair to say, That's what Wolfowitz was calling for, and that that, in many ways actually became the standard operating procedure of all succeeding US administrations, perhaps qualified to a degree under Obama. And that, it seems to me was always going to be quite unacceptable to any country, which was, or whose establishment was was absolutely imbued with the notion that its country must be a pole of a multipolar world. Something which is true, of course of China, of Russia, also of India, by the way, was, were those basic positions always likely to lead to conflict, or could it have been? Could could that have been moderated or nuanced by better diplomacy, better policies?

**Thomas Graham 7:43**

Well, look, Anatol, you're absolutely right. Russia was never going to accept the role of a of a junior partner in a US led world order. It thought of itself and continues to think of itself as a great power. And that is a country that pursues an independent foreign policy to advance its own its own national interest. So it would have had to been something different. And we required a certain modification in the goals that the United States was going to, to pursue at that point. I think the question that we need to ask at this point is whether it was possible to construct a a foreign policy relationship with Russia, that wouldn't have been won a strategic partnership. I don't think the the conditions were in place for that. But whether we could have avoided the adversarial relationship that we had today. Even if we were in competition, we were rivals to some, to some extent, could that have been a constructive rivalry kept within bounds that would have left us in a much better position than the one we're in today? And I think the short answer to that is, yes. A different set of policies pursued with with some strategic patience, beginning, in the early years after the breakup of the Soviet Union, into the 2000s, quite likely would have led to a more constructive relationship between our two countries than the one that we have today.

**Anatol Lieven 9:19**

To what extent do you think on both sides, purely irrational factors played a role because for many years, of course, it's been hard to watch Russian television without falling over extreme instances of paranoia and hatred directed at the United States. But I have to say that when I first came to Washington as a visiting fellow in 96 to 97, I was, at a time when America appeared of course, to be completely safe and all powerful in the world, I was struck by the the degree of I have to say I mean, visceral in some individual cases, hatred would not be too strong a word, I think, for Russia in sections of the Washington, elites, or at least, perhaps hatred is too strong, obsessive dislike something of the sort. Is that fair? Or do you think that that actually more, what do you call it more more thought out policies were to blame?

**Thomas Graham 10:31**

Look, it was a very complicated situation complex at that time. I mean, you need to remember that the American national security establishment was pretty much built on pushing back against the Soviet Union, that is Russia. You know, the fundamental national security agencies were established in the late 1940s, in the 1950s, people made their careers fighting the Soviet threat. And that lingered into the post Soviet period. So it's, it's true that you found in elements of the of the defense establishment, the intelligence community, people that had an abiding suspicion of Russia, and that was reflected in the way they, they thought the types of policies they pursued and so forth. You know, all that said, there were elements in the in the policymaking community that did believe that Russia had to move in a free market, democratic direction, that this would be good that it was possible to build an enduring partnership with Russia. So there was always tension between the two that reflected itself in policy. And clearly this is also something that the Russian side, the Kremlin, also sensed as it as it dealt with various elements of the United States in the 1990s, in the 2000s.

**Anatol Lieven 12:01**

I suppose also, part of the problem as far as the Russian masses were concerned was precisely that the Well, as you say, the not very or questionably democratic, and ostensibly or in would be free market reforms of the 1990s turned into such a disaster, as far as most ordinary Russians were concerned.

**Thomas Graham 12:28**

Well, it wasn't only that there are a couple of things here. Obviously, the the economic reforms did lead to a serious socio economic crisis that impacted on the Russian population in in very profound ways, almost all negative. What was the functioning Soviet middle class was basically eliminated by by the economic reforms, you know, teacher's professional classes became destitute during that period. But it's also true that one of the United States was preaching democracy, we tend to overlook sort of democracy when it ran contrary to our interest in Russia. Few people remember that the freest and fairest elections in Russia probably occurred in the late Soviet period, under under Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, that the conflict in 1993 that erupted between Yeltsin as president, and the then Congress of People's Deputies, was presented as a conflict between Democratic reformers and red brown communists and nationalists Retrogrades, up with that Congress of People's deputy was actually democratically elected. When the conflict was resolved in Yeltsin's favor, they ran, they put in place a new, competent constitution, and ran elections in 1993, who won the communist and the nationalist. But that had no impact on policy. Policy continued to be the radical reform supported by the United States with our support. And so what the Russians learned was that democracy had its limits, that if we participated in these elections and voted for certain individuals, that would have no impact on the actual policy that the government pursued. So they lost faith in free market reforms. They lost faith in democracy in the 1990s, in part as response to policies that the United States pursued at that time.

**Anatol Lieven 14:44**

Yes, it probably would not be a good idea to look too closely into the the management of the 1996 presidential elections, which is why did Western governments didn't look too closely into that issue. I was told quite explicitly that we certainly didn't want to know if Yeltsin had rigged them, since we wanted him to win. Were you surprised that 9/11 did not lead to a restoration of better relations? Senior Russian officials I've talked to and from what I gather Putin himself, genuinely were surprised, because they thought that this would, you know, would lay the basis for a new relationship. And yet, the Bush administration doesn't appear to have really seriously considered that at all, at least if it came to modifying its policy towards Russia?

**Thomas Graham 15:46**

Well, you know, I'm not so sure that that's fully the case, in a relationship did improve, in many ways after 911. You know, it led to a, the signing of a of a joint declaration, in the spring of 2002, that actually laid out a framework for strategic partnership going forward. You know, this is the the moment in which we set up the NATO Russia council that was supposed to give Russia a voice in NATO affairs, it not a veto, as we always had at that point. You know, I think the problem was that there were certain assumptions made about how we would conduct a counter terrorist campaign together. And it turned out that the, the ideas on the both sides differed in radical ways. If you remember, after 9/11, the United States, and President Bush presented a binary choice, you're either with us or you're with a terrorist. That didn't apply when it came to church. And new on it? Well, you know, a lot about this event, having spent some time on the ground. But, you know, the position of the US government was that there were Chechen rebels who have legitimate grievances. And even if they were working together with elements that we consider terrorist, we were not prepared to condemn them as terrorists the way we were the only bond for the work with al Qaeda, the Russians saw all the rebels is terrorists of some sort. And they expected fairly firm us cooperation in dealing with jet ship. And as that inability to come to a common agreement and how to deal with the Chechens. I think that undermined, certainly in the Kremlin, the view that, that the United States was prepared for an equal partnership with Russia. And so the bestline terrorist attack when a small group of Chechen or not Chechen Caucasian terrorists overtook the public school in opening day to hundreds of people hostage that ended in a in a rescue operation, if that's what you want to call it that left over 300 people dead, many of them children, the Russians saw us and in that, I think that's incorrect. That's certainly what the Kremlin did. And that led to a souring of the relationship with the United States and a reassessment of how to conduct the relationship going forward.

**Anatol Lieven 18:28**

Yeah, so I mean, it wasn't just the Kremlin, I remember a Russian member of the sort of liberal state establishment, I suppose you would say, who was livid with fury at the way in which parts of the US media really did tie themselves in knots, trying not to call Beslan a terrorist attack, Calling it a siege and really trying to blame all the bloodshed on the Russian forces. That cause, I mean, real, real anger in sections of Russian society.

**Thomas Graham 19:08**

Right and ran contrary to the way we talked about terrorism and when it was directed against us, against our allies. And actually, President Bush was quite clear on this, that the terrorists were responsible for the deaths that occurred afterwards, he said that about Beslan as well. But you're right. There are elements of the American press that didn't buy that story. There were elements in the American press that were sympathetic to the Chechen rebels. Now, it's a very complicated situation. And you cootteruld make an argument in favor of the Chechen rebels, to where legitimate grievances you look at the history of Moscow's relations with the Chechens going back to the 19th century.But that's not the point. The point was that it was contrary due to the way we spoke of and frame the the terrorist attacks, so the Russians expected a different reaction. And when they didn't get that reaction that led to the reassessment of the relationship with the United States.

**Anatol Lieven 20:16**

In the Middle East on that score, I sometimes argued myself that it would have been better not just for the Middle East, but for the United States itself. If on occasions, America had followed Russian policy or Russian advice. And, once again, I found real bewilderment in Russia over the western stance, both on Syria and on Libya. Because people said to me, but look after the disaster of Iraq, how, how can they still be be mean, whatever, you know, the the horrors of the Syrian regime, how can they be trying to destroy more middle eastern states and open the way, you know, perhaps for, for terrorism? There was I mean, it seemed odd, frankly, even to me, but certainly, I mean, it caused because measure of once again, bewilderment.

**Thomas Graham 21:17**

Remember, there's a as you know, I mean, there is a large dose of ideology in American foreign policy. And what happened in in the Middle East, starting in 2010 2011. For many Americans was the functional equivalent, what happened in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. Right, so Eastern Europe, breaks out of the Soviet bloc, you have, in the American view, successful reforms, you know, most of those countries that joined NATO or the EU, by 2011. And the immediate reaction to the Arab Spring was this is the functional equivalent. This is the liberal democratic revolution unfolding in the Middle East. And then we supported various people, rebel forces with that, with that framework in mind, it turned out that it was much more complicated, that there were other forces that are at play in the Middle East, far from democratic and orientation. And by the time we figured this out, the worst had happened in Libya, and Syria, for example. So, you know, part of this is an inability of the American political elites to understand what the real dynamics are on the ground, but the want to see democratic revolutions, because that's what we're hoping for, and overlooking the other elements that lead to a different type of outcome.

**Anatol Lieven 22:53**

Well, having discussed one immortal question, we've come to the next. In your your book, you have a number of very interesting ideas for how relations could to some extent, be repaired, or at least prevented from continuing to head towards complete disaster? Could you tell us something about your thoughts on how we might get out of the present mess?

**Thomas Graham 23:26**

This is more than a one step process. To put it mildly. And there are two elements to this. I mean, we have the current conflict in Ukraine, and we have a longer term relationship with with Russia, those two are related. You know, the first part of this is we need to find a way to resolve the current conflict. So that we've also laid the basis for a longer term relationship with Russia. You know, we have done I think, to my mind, a good deal of what is proper in supporting Ukraine, in preventing the Russians from over running the country. Where we have fallen down is that we've lacked a diplomatic element to this, that we need, in some ways to find a way to reach out to the Russians to push this store some sort of diplomatic were negotiated settlement, it's sometime in the near near term, to the extent that we can or produce a or help birth a Ukraine that is strong, prosperous, democratic, anchored in the West, we will have succeeded in Ukraine, even if Ukraine doesn't regain all the territory that it's lost since 2014, what I would underscore here, this is a long term project. This is not something that you achieve in one or two years. And it certainly goes well beyond anything that happens on the battlefield. So we need to prepare for the long run. But that would, I think, send an important signal to Russia, that we know what we're about, we know where we want to go. And that we're prepared now to sit down with Russia, and talk about the things that we need to deal with over the long term, strategic stability, European security. And, and I would argue, China, obviously, there's a role for the United States and Russia and strategic stability, no matter how much the job, political and strategic landscape has changed and is changing. We still are the two largest nuclear powers in the world, we have a special responsibility to ensure that those weapons are not used or not used in anger. So we will have to figure out a way to reach restart strategic stability talks, think through what strategic stability means, in the current environment going forward, we'll need to figure out a way to rebuild European security, not as a, an effort directed against Russia, but as a cooperative effort. And we'll need to figure out a way to work with one another, to ensure that China's growing role on the international stage is consistent with our interest. And with Russia's interest going forward.

**Anatol Lieven 26:41**

Yes, I think you've put your finger on something terribly important, though, which is that the overwhelming assumption in Washington at the moment seems to be that helping Ukraine by definition involves weakening Russia, or continuing to weaken Russia. But another way of looking at this would be to say that it would be very difficult, in my view, for Ukraine to prosper and advance and move towards the European Union, as long as a war or even a semi frozen conflict with Russia exists. One cannot think of an example of a country that has moved towards membership of the European Union, for example, in circumstances like that, I mean, especially, of course, given both the underlying poverty of Ukraine, but also the destruction done by the the war. So is it necessary to shift a basic mindset there on what, what helping Ukraine involves?

**Thomas Graham 27:46**

Well, you know, I would agree with you on that. And it would help, we need to shift our mindset as to what how we're going to define a victory or what our goals are, in this regard. And as I've already said, the goal should not be the restoration of Ukraine, within its boundaries of 1991. It should be focusing on what Ukraine needs to do, in order to prepare itself for membership in the EU, for anchoring itself in the West, that is a long term project. The territorial issue in that regard becomes secondary, if not insignificant, that, you know, you need to move this conflict to towards some sort of resolution for precisely the reason that, that you stated, it's hard to imagine a country to end in the EU. If it's still at war with another country, that simply isn't going to happen. It's also going to make it very difficult to provide the long term types of security guarantees that the Ukrainians are looking for. So a precondition for anchoring, finally, Ukraine in the West, is a resolution of the conflict in the east. That's part one of this second part is, you know, one ought to be careful what they wish for when it comes to weakening Russia. And one of the points that I make in the book is that, you know, post conflict, we'll still need a Russia that is strong enough to maintain, maintain reliable command and control of its nuclear weapons, or Russia that is strong enough to effectively govern its territory. So that the instability there does not spill over into other areas. We need a Russia that is strong enough to be able to take on and implement obligations as far as climate change is concerned. And then the point that is more, I think, controversial, but one that I think is extremely important is we need Russia to be strong enough to act as a as a play are in these various types of ad hoc regional coalition's we're going to try to establish to maintain stability and equilibria in strategic parts of the world. And it's going to be much more difficult to do that if Russia is not part of it, particularly if you think about Northeast Asia, you think about the Arctic.

**Anatol Lieven 30:22**

Yes, George Beebe and I made this point about the Middle East in a piece last week, in which we we pointed out that, you know, because of fear of terrorism, Russia has actually some good reasons to play a stabilizing role there, if we can encourage it to do so. But tell me, a rather gloomy question, but do you think that President Biden's latest address has in fact, simply foreclosed our hopes for this kind of US policy towards Russia for the foreseeable future?

**Thomas Graham 31:00**

I think that's certainly the case. You're not going to see any any outreach to Russia, in the near near term, I would argue, you know, the Russians themselves. I mean, to be fair to the Biden administration, don't seem to be particularly interested in negotiation at this point, I'm sure that factored into the way the President articulated America's goals last Thursday, last Thursday. You know, it's hard to envision a significant improvement or change in course, before the presidential elections in November of next year. I think the Russians are focused on that election as an important point in determining what the direction of American policy is going to be for what their options are. And clearly, given the differences between the presidential candidates at this point, it will also have a significant impact on how the United States pursues its goals in the world, depending on whether a President Biden is reelected, or we get another Trump administration.

**Anatol Lieven 32:27**

When the questions from the audience on the first you participated earlier this year in a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, something that has attracted a great deal of unfavorable criticism in America. But could you tell us anything about that? And also, is there a role at present for track two meetings of this kind? Or do attitudes on both sides and policies on both sides make this impossible?

**Thomas Graham 33:03**

Well, look, the first point to make is that the meeting with Lavrov was not track 1.5, it wasn't track two. Foreign Minister Lavrov, like Secretary Blinken, when he travels to various capitals often asked to meet local experts to exchange views on what is happening in the world. That's pretty much what happened with the meeting in the spring of this year with Lavorw. So this is not a negotiation. It's not passing messages. It's an exchange of views on what's happening more broadly in US Russian relations. So I think it was misread by many people on the on the outside, as far as Track twos are considered. You know, they may not have a dramatic impact on government policy at this point. But I would argue that it's it's critical that we maintain lines of communication, you know, particularly between the expert communities, if that's if relations have for all practical purposes been severed at the official level, we need to have a better understanding of how Russians are looking at the world, what they see as their goals, what they what they think about the United States. All of this is essential to avoiding the types of misunderstandings and misperceptions that can turn a crisis into a into a direct military confrontation that neither neither side wants. So I encourage it. I think this is good, it would be helpful if the US government were more supportive, and its public comments about contacts between the expert community and obviously would help with the Russian government. We're saying the same thing. My sense is that with both Washington and Moscow, there is probably Shouldn't not to do these types of things. I think that works to the disadvantage of both countries over time.

**Anatol Lieven 35:07**

Yeah, so I mean, in a way, it's not surprised, so surprising on the on Moscow's side, maybe prejudice, but rather, shall we say, traditions at work here. But as somebody who remembers the Cold War, and my father was head of the BBC Russian service, and we were, you know, officially, so anxious to try to find out what the Soviets were thinking we were actively trying to promote such meetings and encounters. Oh, of course, it was the it was the Soviet Union that was blocking it. It seems damned odd, to be honest, this attitude, I mean, even from, you know, the standpoint of Know Your Enemy, that any kind of contacts are automatically illegitimate.

**Thomas Graham 35:55**

Right? I would agree with that wholeheartedly. But remember, in the United States, it's not only the US government, that is not the US put it mildly enthusiastic in its support for these types of things. Although I think there's an element that understands that these are important, that is informative, interested in what these what these contacts produce and what is learned. But also, there's a broader political class in in the United States, particularly in Washington, that has made Russia toxic and believes that search contacts are inappropriate, at this moment, to say the least, and make a an explicit effort to discourage those types of contacts. So that's not helpful, either. And you're absolutely right, you would think, given our experience in the Cold War, given the way we have thought about how you project American values and attitudes, that you would be encouraging these types of conflicts, particularly now as a way of maintaining channels of communication as a way to ensuring that Russians have a clearer understanding of what we're trying to achieve what we're trying to, and why we're trying to achieve that, and how we see relations with Russia, not only in the current situation, but over the longer term. I think that would be good for the United States, and would help prepare the ground for a more constructive relationship with Russia, certainly post conflict.

**Anatol Lieven 37:34**

The question about Ukraine has the conflict that had been produced by the pursuit of maximal or maximalist goals by both the United States and Russia? And do you see any signs that either or both are backing away from those maximal goals? Because, certainly, I mean, if if they continue to be pursued, then any kind of compromise becomes by definition impossible.

**Thomas Graham 38:02**

Right. But let's not forget the Ukrainians in all of this, right. They're central. They have very explicit goals that have been well articulated. You know, the question we should be asking is whether they're achievable or not. But certainly public opinion polls in Ukraine indicate support for this continuing this conflict and belief that the Ukrainians can expel the Russians from all the territory. When you look, just

**Anatol Lieven 38:33**

I’d just like to say that, I mean, majority support, not unanimous,.

**Paul Robinson 44:49**

No, no, but but majority counts, and, and something that is, has a goals of being a democratic society. And it's not, you know, it's not a 50 plus one attack the split, it's more 60/40, 70/30 at this point. So that's significant. You know, when I find sort of curious about this conflict, when you're speaking about Russia and the United States, is that neither side has articulated clearly either a theory of victory or a theory of defeat. We don't know what Russia's ultimate goals are in Ukraine. They certainly had been ambiguous about that. We don't know under what conditions Russia would decide to throw in the towel saying, you know, the military effort is no longer worth it because we can achieve whatever our goals are. So in a strange situation where you can't define victory, and you can't define defeat, it's always better to continue the conflict, right? Because we may be marching towards victory, nd we may be warding off defeat, same things true in the United States. The position of the United States is, we will be there for as long as it takes without defining what it is. You're seeing some debate open up in the United States. Polls are, in part based on what we think is achievable at this point, but yet still don't have a clear articulation of what they would like to see happen over the long term. When will we know that we've achieved our goals in Ukraine? Or when will we know that those goals are achievable? Not clear at all.

**Anatol Lieven 40:25**

Yes, of course, history is a long business. Even 40 years ago, we would have considered a situation in which 80% of Ukraine was independent of Russia and at least desirous of joining the West as a tremendous victory and anything beyond that as hubris. Where we will be 40 years from now, or 100 years from now. In terms of of relations with Ukraine, another question, what could Russia ever accept? But I think it's maybe the first one is clear. Ukrainian membership of NATO or the European Union? Or would would Russia always act to do whatever was necessary to frustrate those those goals?

**Thomas Graham 41:37**

Well, I think Russia would try to frustrate those goals. The question is, what would it accept that the end of the day, and so much depends here on what Western policy is what American policy is? How the Ukrainians themselves, undertake the reforms that will be necessary to join both NATO and the EU? You know, one of the reasons that the Russians have always been concerned about Ukraine, just because the Russians feel vulnerable, you know, no matter how difficult it may be for us to understand that or appreciate that when you look at Russia, this massive country, right 11 Time Zones? How could they think that they don't have enough strategic depth? How can they believe that they're vulnerable to attack from the West will help? There's a lot of history that underscores that vulnerability. The question, I think, is how do you think of strategic depth in the current situation, which may not be measured so much in territory, as it will over time, be measured in dislocation and military forces, that's where arms control comes in. This is where how we dealt with the issue of strategic depth, in many ways during the Cold War. So a solution to the problem long term, will have to be arms control and agreements that prevent the concentration of forces along this long NATO Russia frontier, what the distance will be as a matter of negotiation, the other sort of Confidence Building Measures to have to be security guarantees for Ukraine as to the security guarantees for Russia going forward. So it's a complex situation, but certainly not one that is beyond the capabilities of good diplomats, serious strategists to develop the types of institutions arrangements that are necessary to minimally satisfy the goals that Russia has, as well as the minimal goals that Ukraine has.

**Anatol Lieven 43:50**

Yes, on the score of diplomacy, rather depressing question about just how good is U.S. diplomacy by now? Or has in fact that been a severe decline in the quality of the of the State Department and the Foreign Service since since you served in it?

**Thomas Graham 44:14**

Well, I think if we’re being frank, we would say that the deterioration in US diplomacy actually began with the with the end of the Cold War. I mean, if you look back in the decades before the end of the Cold War, you can name a number of first rate foreign secretaries of state, for example, strategic thinkers that put in place policies, again, with the help of the President, obviously with Alfred the President, that produced outcomes that were deeply advantageous to the United States. It's hard to think of, to name a Secretary of States that has played that role in the post Cold War world. There's been a, I would argue a a general degradation in the quality of our strategic thinking, our ability to understand the way the world functions and position ourselves in the world in a way that advantages or advances American interest. You've also seen, I would argue, some decline in the quality of people who go into the Foreign Service, into our diplomatic corps, there's much more competition from the business sector, for example, government service doesn't pay that well, I would argue. But I also think that the the Foreign Service itself has reformed its internal processes in ways that disadvantage people who are ambitious, and clear thinkers, because it's made it much more difficult to advance up the ranks. And so those people have tended to leave it to employ their talents elsewhere. So short answer is, the United States needs to get serious about diplomacy. We need to reform the way our Foreign Service operates. And we need to do a much better effort at recruiting the best and brightest of the upcoming generation, and persuade them that government service is both important and can be extremely rewarding, something that we have failed to do over the past 30 years.

**Anatol Lieven 46:48**

Yes, I was struck by a piece, where was it? Maybe in the Financial Times, or I can't remember about the the President Biden cabinet and senior officials saying that at the next, you know, after the next elections, so many of them are going to leave to the private sector, again, either only to be fair, because they're worn out or simply for greater pay. And nobody in Washington, it seems, finds this at all odd. But given that these people have been, you know, talking up the intense crisis in which America allegedly finds itself in the world, you would have thought there would be some, some inhibition against leaving the service of the state at that moment, if you actually believe what you would have been saying.

**Thomas Graham 47:56**

There needs to be a sense that we that the need to do these things long term, particularly given the nature of the challenges that we face, you know, one of those challenges is, in fact, to lay out a clear direction for American foreign policy in a world that's much different from, you know, the one that we experienced in the 1990s in the 2000s. You know, the fact is, the United States cannot dominate the global environment. The way we had previously, that, you know, whether the world is becoming multipolar poli centric, how many Poles there are, and so forth, it is clear that power is much more diffused now than it was in the past. That it requires, the United States doesn't have the the economic technological advantages that it had in the past. And so it is going to require much depth or foreign diplomacy in order to advance its interest. The way forward has to be laid out in the next in the next couple of years. And President Biden has talked about an inflection point, it's an inflection point, we need to reconsider how we're going to deal with the situation on the other side of that inflection point, putting that policy in place, and then making it more or less permanent in the American situation requires more than one term. So you would hope that people would come in with the sense that I'm prepared to do this for a full two terms on the assumption that the President I'm working for gets reelected, that will be critical to I think, advancing or articulating clearly what America's goals and mission is and and then putting that in place plus institutionally and intellectually in the years ahead. So yes, short answer. I would like to see people more dedicated to the long term, and then think about writing their memoir somewhere too, later in life than that is usually the case.

**Anatol Lieven 50:03**

Yeah. The question about compartmentalization, Washington for many years argued that we should oppose Russia where necessary and cooperate where possible, is such compartmentalization of our disagreements possible after the invasion of Ukraine, or is or in fact, is managing our differences over Ukraine, a precondition for progress on other matters, arms control, climate.

**Thomas Graham 50:30**

So I never thought that you can compartmentalize this relationship. Yes, to a certain extent, the strategic equation, because of the existential nature was something of an exception. But even then, you know, what happens elsewhere in the relationship does impact on the ability to agree on certain conditions within the strategic framework, that's always been always been true. You don't know. You know, everything is connected in one way or another. You can't compartmentalize, we certainly can't develop a relationship with Russia where we only work on things that we're interested in and ignore the things that they're interested in. So you've got to deal across the full range of issues. The you know, those where we may share interests, those where we're, we're competitive, and then try to find the appropriate balance, what happens in Ukraine, how we position ourselves in Ukraine is going to impact on the way the Russians think about nuclear arms control agreements, their definition of strategic stability goes well beyond simply managing the nuclear relationship to managing the potential or managing great power competition. So these two things are inevitably linked in the real world. We're not going to be able to separate them. Because we find that convenient. For ourselves, and the Russians, I think will continue and insist that we talk about all these things together. A question about a central theme of your book and its recommendations, can you comment on Russia's calculation of the risks associated with being China's increasingly junior partner, given the historical relationship between the two countries? Is this still an issue for the Russian elites, in your view? Or has the West come completely to eclipse those older fears?

**Anatol Lieven 52:17**

A question about a central theme of your book and its recommendations. Can you comment on Russia's calculation of the risks associated with being China's increasingly junior partner, given the historical relationship between the two countries? Is this still an issue for the Russian elites, in your view? Or has the West come completely to eclipse those older fears?

**Paul Robinson 52:49**

No, I think this is still a an issue for for Russians. You know, obviously, they are looking towards a a closer relationship with China now to deal with the problems that they have with the West. I mean, the whole motivation for a turn to the east, was initially to counterbalance an excessive reliance on the west, open up space for Russia to maneuver on the on the global stage, it became one dimensional as the estrangement with the the West grew in the in the 2010s, I would argue, and then became almost complete with the, with the Russian full scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Obviously, there is a strategic alignment now, that is based on both countries concern about the US role in the world, the complementary aspects of their economy, the types of the, you know, the their political system and the personal relationship between Xi Jinping and a presidential idiom or Putin, but none of the tensions in the relationship have disappeared either. The historical grievances territorial grievances Chinese have the role that nationalism and racism plays in both countries as they look at the the countries ahead at the centuries or the time ahead. And for the Russians, the challenge that they face over the long term in dealing with a, a much bigger country to the east, you know, little factoid that I always find of interest. In 1992, the Russian economy and the Chinese economy were roughly the same size. Today, the Chinese economy is 10 times greater. And it's growing and that gap is growing. You know, the Chinese just landed a lunar probe and the Dark Side of the Moon, the Russian lunar flash, but Africans in the moon surface, the Russians are incapable of doing something now that they could do 50 years to GM. So they're going to face a challenge with China going forward. And the question they have to ask and I've heard Russians ask this, even now is how are you going to counterbalance against China over the long term? The thought is that we can use the global south Eurasian. That's what the Shanghai Cooperation Forum is about. To some extent, that's what the BRICS are about, to some extent, I would argue that you can't really form a reliable counterbalance to China among the countries of the global South, they simply don't have the military technological, or economic wherewithal for that. The only place you find a counterbalance is in the West, and particularly United States. Conclusion for Russia's own long term interest, they have to find a way to rebuild the relationship with the United States. We, by the same token also have an interest in rebuilding a relationship with Russia, that enables us to work with Russia and other countries, in order to channel Chinese energies in ways that aren't detrimental to our interests. So there's this strategic logic for a better relationship, and both capitals are simply not in a position where anyone is prepared to operate on that assumption right now. I think eventually, we'll get there. Our ability to articulate that in public is also an important, I think, element in preparing the grounds for the reopening of channels of communications between our two countries, and bringing the crisis in Ukraine to to a resolution at Russia, Ukraine, and we can live with God willing.

**Anatol Lieven 56:42**

Final question. Can you give us your evaluation of the role of Putin's personality and perspectives in everything that's happened? Would the world be very different if he had retired or departed the scene 10 years ago? In your view?

**Thomas Graham 56:59**

Short answer is yes. And I think Putin himself has changed over time. When he first came to power, I would argue that Putin fell well within the parameters of Russia's strategic thinking, very pragmatic, I think, acutely aware of the balance of power, and acted in ways to advance Russia's interest without running undue risks. You know, since he returned to the Kremlin in 2012, I think particularly since his very profound isolation during the the COVID pandemic, that he has moved from a pragmatic view the world to something that I would call a messianic view of the world. And has begun to think of himself in a much different way that goes beyond the parameters of traditional Russian foreign policy thinking, clearly sees himself in the line of former of great czars he wants to regain. or expand Russia, his territory is also presenting Russia, and himself as a leader of a global anti colonial movement, despite the fact that there's very little evidence that the global South wants a full rupture with the West or they want to follow Russia down this path. Messianic thinking has almost always led to overstretch and strategic setbacks from Russia, historically. And I think that's what you're seeing play itself out right now. So he, his personality is important. All that said, Even absent Putin, Ukraine would be an issue for the Russian political elites, it will continue to be an issue. But what we can hope for is that after Putin, we see the emergence of a Russian leader, that is more pragmatic returns to the traditional patterns of Russian, Russian strategic thoughts, Russia will still be a rival. But there will be an opportunity to talk and build a much more constructive relationship with that new with that new with that new leader. So we have what we have at this point, it's very difficult to see radical change, as long as Putin has is that the element as long as we made, ensconced in the way we think about the future, but one hopes in the not too distant future, a new leader will emerge in Russia. And we will be begin to degree rethink our, our position in our relationship with Russia. And as I said, move from an adversarial relationship to something that I call constructive competition.

**Anatol Lieven 59:50**

Let's hope Well, Tom, thank you so much. That was a fascinating discussion. I urge everybody to read Tom's book Getting Russia Right, it’s an exceptionally important document concerning U.S.- Russian relations. And I'm sorry I couldn't take all your questions. Time is limited. And I hope to see some of you at least at our panels, same time tomorrow on Nagorno Karabakh, and on Thursday on the Middle East. So Tom, thank you so much.