INTERVIEW: JENS JØRGEN NIELSEN

Why the U.S. and NATO Should Sign the Treaties Proposed by Putin

The following is an edited transcription of an interview with Russia expert Jens Jørgen Nielsen, by Michelle Rasmussen, Vice President of the Schiller Institute in Demark, conducted December 30, 2021. Mr. Nielsen has degrees in the history of ideas and communication. He was a Moscow correspondent for the major Danish daily Politiken *in the late 1990s. He is the author of several books about Russia and Ukraine, and a leader of the Russian-Danish Dialogue organization. In addition, he is an associate professor of communication and cultural differences at the Niels Brock Business College in Denmark.*

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Jens Jørgen Nielsen

Michelle Rasmussen: Hello, viewers. I am Michelle Rasmussen, the Vice President of the Schiller Institute in Denmark. This is an interview with Jens Jørgen Nielsen from Denmark.

The Schiller Institute released a memorandum December 24 titled "Are We Sleepwalking into Thermonuclear World War III." In the beginning, it states, "Ukraine is being used by geopolitical forces in the West that answer to the bankrupt speculative financial system, as the flashpoint to trigger a strategic showdown with Russia, a showdown which is already more dangerous than the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and which could easily end up in a thermonuclear war which no one would win, and none would survive."

Jens Jørgen, in the past days, Russian President Putin and other high-level spokesmen have stated that Russia's red lines are about to be crossed, and they have called for treaty negotiations to come back from the brink. What are these red lines and how dangerous is the current situation?

Russian 'Red Lines'

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: Thank you for inviting me. First, I would like to say that I think that the question you have raised here about red lines, and the question also about are we sleepwalking into a new war, is very relevant. Because, as an historian, I know what happened in 1914, at the beginning of the First World War—a kind of sleepwalking. No one really wanted the war, actually, but it ended up with war, and tens of millions of people were killed, and then the whole world disappeared at this time, and the world has never been the same. So, I think it's a very, very relevant question that you are asking here.

You asked me specifically about Putin, and the red lines. I heard that the Clintons, Bill and Hillary Clinton, and John Kerry, and many other American politicians, claim that we don't have things like red lines anymore. We don't have zones of influence anymore, because we have a new world. We have a new liberal world, and we do not have these kinds of things. It belongs to another century and another age. But you could ask the question, "What actually are the Americans doing in Ukraine, if not defending their own red lines?"

Because I think it's like, if you have a power, a superpower, a big power like Russia, I think it's very, very natural that any superpower would have some kind of red lines. You can imagine what would happen if China, Iran, and Russia had a military alliance, going into Mexico, Canada, Cuba, maybe also putting missiles up there. I don't think anyone would doubt what would happen. The United States would never accept it, of course. So, the Russians would normally ask, "Why should we accept that Americans are dealing with Ukraine and preparing, maybe, to put up some military hardware in Ukraine? Why should we?" And I think it's a very relevant question. Basically, the Russians see it today as a question of power, because the Russians, actually, have tried for, I would say, 30 years. They have tried.

I was in Russia 30 years ago. I speak Russian. I'm quite sure that the Russians, at that time, dreamt of being a part of the Western community, and they had very, very high thoughts about the Western countries, and Americans were extremely popular at this time. Eighty percent of the Russian population in 1990 had a very positive view of the United States. Later on, today, and even for several years already, 80%, the same percentage, have a negative view of Americans. So, something happened, not very positively, because 30 years ago, there were some prospects of a new world.

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"Putin came along, not to impose his will on the Russian people, but because there was in Russia a will to oppose NATO's extension to the East. His demonization is very bad, for Russians and for us in the West."

There really were some ideas, but something actually was screwed up in the 90s. I have some idea about that. Maybe we can go in detail about it. But things were screwed up, and normally, today, many people in the West, in universities, politicians, etc. think that it's all the fault of Putin. It's Putin's fault. Whatever happened is Putin's fault. Now, we are in a situation which is very close to the Cuban Missile Crisis, which you also mentioned. But I don't think it is that way. I think it takes two to tango. We know that, of course, but I think many Western politicians have failed to see the complicity of the western part in this, because there are many things which play a role that we envisage in a situation like that now.

The basic thing, if you look at it from a Russian point of view, it's the extension to the east of NATO. I think that's a real bad thing, because Russia was against it from the very beginning. Even Boris Yeltsin, who was considered to be the man of the West, the democratic Russia, he was very, very opposed to this NATO alliance going to the East, up to the borders of Russia.

And we can see it now, because recently, some new material has been released in America, an exchange of letters between Yeltsin and Clinton at this time. So, we know exactly that Yeltsin, and Andrei Kozyrev, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs at this time, were very much opposed to it. And then Putin came along. Putin came along not to impose his will on the Russian people. He came along because there was, in Russia, a will to oppose this NATO extension to the East. So, I think things began at this point.

And later on, we had the Georgian crisis in 2008, and we had, of course, the Ukraine crisis in 2014, and, also, with Crimea and Donbass, etc.

And now we are very, very close to—I don't think it's very likely we will have a war, but we are very close to it, because wars often begin by some kind of mistake, some accident, someone accidentally pulls the trigger, or presses a button somewhere, and suddenly, something happens. Exactly what happened in 1914, at the beginning of World War I. Actually, there was one who was shot in Sarajevo. Everyone knows about that, and things like that could happen. And for us, living in Europe, it's awful to think about having a war.

We can hate Putin. We can think whatever we like. But the thought of a nuclear war is horrible for all of us, and that's why I think that politicians could come to their senses.

And I think also this demonization of Russia, and demonization of Putin, is very bad, of course, for the Russians. But it's very bad for us here in the West, for us, in Europe, and also in America. I don't think it's very good for our democracy. I don't think it's very good. I don't see very many healthy perspectives in this. I don't see any at all.

I see some other prospects, because we could cooperate in another way. There are possibilities, of course, which are not being used, or put into practice, which certainly could be.

So, yes, your question is very, very relevant and we can talk at length about it. I'm very happy that you ask this question, because if you ask these questions today in the Danish and Western media at all—everyone thinks it's enough just to say that Putin is a scoundrel, Putin is a crook, and everything is good. No, we have to

get along. We have to find some ways to cooperate, because otherwise it will be the demise of all of us.

NATO Expansion Eastward

Michelle Rasmussen: Can you just go through a little bit more of the history of the NATO expansion towards the East? And what we're speaking about in terms of the treaties that Russia has proposed, first, to prevent Ukraine from becoming a formal member of NATO, and second, to prevent the general expansion of NATO, both in terms of soldiers and military equipment towards the East. Can you speak about this, also in terms of the broken promises from the Western side?

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: Yes. Actually, the story goes back to the beginning of the nineties. I had a long talk with Mikhail Gorbachev, the former leader of the Soviet Union, in 1999, just when NATO started to bomb Serbia, and when they adopted Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary into NATO. You should bear in mind that Gorbachev is a very nice person. He's a very lively person, with good humor, and an experienced person.

But when we started to talk, I asked him about the NATO expansion, which was going on exactly the day when we were talking. He became very gloomy, very sad, because he said,

> Well, I talked to James Baker, Helmut Kohl from Germany, and several other persons, and they all promised me not to move an inch to the East, if Soviet Union would let Germany unite the GDR (East Germany) and West Germany, to become one country, and come to be a member of NATO, but not move an inch to the East.

I think, also, some of the new material which has been released—I have read some of it, some on *WikiLeaks*, and some can be found. It's declassified. It's very interesting. There's no doubt at all. There were some oral, spoken promises to Mikhail Gorbachev. It was not written, because, as he said, "I believed them. I can see I was naive."

I think this is a key to Putin today, to understand why Putin wants not only sweet words. He wants something based on a treaty, because, basically, he doesn't really believe the West. The level of trust between Russia and NATO countries is very, very low today. And it's a problem, of course, and I don't think we can overcome it in a few years. It takes time to build trust, but the trust is not there for the time being.

But then, the nature of the NATO expansion has gone step, by step, by step. First, it was the three countries—Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic—and then, in 2004, six years later, came, among other things—the Baltic republics, and Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria. And the others came later on—Albania, Croatia, etc. And then in 2008, there was a NATO Summit in Bucharest, where George Bush, President of the United States, promised Georgia and Ukraine membership of NATO. Putin was present. He was not President at this time. He was Prime Minister in Russia, because the President was [Dmitry] Medvedev, but he was very angry at this time. But what could he do? But he said, at this point, very, very clearly, "We will not accept it, because our red lines would be crossed here. We have accepted the Baltic states. We have retreated. We've gone back. We've been going back for several years," but still, it was not off the table.

It was all because Germany and France did not accept it, because [Chancellor Angela] Merkel and [President François] Hollande, at this time, did not accept Ukraine and Georgia becoming members of NATO. But the United States pressed for it, and it is still on the agenda of the United States, that Georgia and Ukraine should be members of NATO.

So, there was a small war in August, the same year, a few months after this NATO Summit, where, actually, it was Georgia which attacked South Ossetia, which used to be a self-governing part of Georgia. The incumbent Georgian president, Mikheil Saakashvili did not want to accept the autonomous status of South Ossetia, so Georgia attacked South Ossetia. Russian soldiers were deployed in South Ossetia, and 14 of them were killed by the Georgian army. And you could say that George W. Bush promised Georgian President Saakashvili that the Americans would support the Georgians, in case Russia should retaliate, which they did.

The Russian army was, of course, much bigger than the Georgian army, and it smashed the Georgian army in five days, and retreated. There was no help from the United States to the Georgians. And, I think, that from a moral point of view, I don't think it's a very wise policy, because you can't say "You just go on. We will help you"—and not help at all when it gets serious. I think, from a moral point of view, it's not very fair.

A Coup in Ukraine

But, actually, it's the same which seems to be happening now in Ukraine, even though there was, what I would call a coup, an orchestrated state coup, in 2014. I know there are very, very different opinions about this, but my opinion is that there was a kind of coup to oust the sitting incumbent President, Viktor Yanukovych, and replace him with one who was very, very keen on getting into NATO. Yanukovych was not very keen on going into NATO, but he still had the majority of the population. And it's interesting. In Ukraine, there's been a lot of opinion polls conducted by Germans, Americans, French, Europeans, Russians and Ukrainians. And all these opinion polls show that a majority of Ukrainian people did not want to join NATO.

After that, of course, things moved very quickly, because Crimea was a very, very sensitive question for Russia, for many reasons. First, it was a contested area because it was, from the very beginning, from 1991, when Ukraine was independent—there was no unanimity about Crimea and its status, because the majority of Crimea was Russian-speaking, and is very culturally close to Russia, in terms of history. It's very close to Russia. It's one of the most patriotic parts of Russia, actually. So, it's a very odd part of Ukraine. It always was a very odd part of Ukraine.

The first thing the new government did in February 2014, was to forbid the Russian language, as a language which had been used in local administration, and things like that. It was one of the stupidest things you could do in such a very tense situation. Ukraine, basically, is a very cleft society. The eastern and southern part is very close to Russia. They speak Russian and are very close to Russian culture. The western part, the westernmost part around Lviv, is very close to Poland and Austria, and places like that. So, it's a cleft society, and in such a society you have some options. One option is to embrace all the parts of society, different parts of society. Or you can, also, one part could impose its will on the other part, against its will. And that was actually what happened.

So, there are several crises. There is the crisis in Ukraine, with two approximately equally sized parts of Ukraine. But you also have, on the other hand, the Russia-NATO question. So, you had two crises, and they stumbled together, and they were pressed together in 2014. So, you had a very explosive situation which has not been solved to this day.

And for Ukraine, I say that as long as you have this conflict between Russia and NATO, it's impossible to solve, because it's one of the most corrupt societies, one of the poorest societies in Europe right now. A lot of people come to Denmark, where we are now, to Germany and also to Russia. Millions of Ukrainians have gone abroad to work, because there are really many, many social problems, economic problems, things like that.

And that's why Putin—if we remember what Gorbachev told me about having things on paper, on treaties, which are signed—and that's why Putin said, what he actually said to the West, "I don't really believe you, because when you can, you cheat." He didn't put it that way, but that was actually what he meant: "So now I tell you very, very, very, very clearly what our points of view are. We have red lines, like you have red lines. Don't try to cross them."

And I think many people in the West do not like it. I think it's very clear, because I think the red lines, if you compare them historically, are very reasonable. If you compare them with the United States and the Monroe Doctrine, which is still in effect in the USA, they are very, very reasonable red lines. I would say that many of the Ukrainians, are very close to Russia. I have many Ukrainian friends. I sometimes forget that they are Ukrainians, because their language, their first language, is actually Russian, and Ukrainian is close to Russian.

So, those countries being part of an anti-Russian military pact, it's simply madness. It cannot work. It will not work. Such a country would never be a normal country for many, many years, forever.

I think much of the blame could be put on the NATO expansion and those politicians who have been pressing for that for several years. First and foremost, Bill Clinton was the first one, Madeleine Albright, from 1993. At this time, they adopted the policy of major extension to the East. And George W. Bush also pressed for Ukraine and Georgia to become members of NATO.

And for every step, there was, in Russia, people rallying around the flag. You could put it that way, because you have pressure. And the more we pressure with NATO, the more the Russians will rally around the flag, and the more authoritarian Russia will be. So, we are in this situation. Things are now happening in Russia, which I can admit I do not like, closing some offices, closing some media. I do not like it at

all. But in a time of confrontation, I think it's quite reasonable, understandable, even though I would not defend it. But it's understandable. Because the United States, after 9/11, also adopted a lot of defensive measures, and a kind of censorship, and things like that. It's what happens when you have such tense situations.

We should just also bear in mind that Russia and the United States are the two countries which possess 90% of the world's nuclear armament. Alone, the mere thought of them using some of this, is a doomsday perspective, because it will not be a small, tiny war, like World War II, but it will dwarf World War II, because billions will die in this. And it's a question, if humanity will survive. So, it's a very, very grave question.

I think we should ask if the right of Ukraine to have NATO membership—which its own population does not really want— "Is it really worth the risk of a nuclear war?" That's how I would put it.

I will not take all blame away from Russia. That's not my point here. My point is that this question is too important. It's very relevant. It's very important that we establish a kind of *modus vivendi*. It's a problem for the West. I also think it's very important that we learn, in the West, how to cope with people who are not like us. We tend to think that people should become democrats like we are democrats, and only then will we deal with them. If they are not democrats, like we are democrats, we will do everything we can to make them democrats. We will support people who want to make a revolution in their country, so they become like us. It's a very, very dangerous, dangerous way of thinking, and a destructive way of thinking.

I think that we in the West should study, maybe, a little more what is happening in other organizations not dominated by the West. I'm thinking about the BRICS, as one organization. I'm also thinking about the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in which Asian countries are cooperating, and they are not changing each other. The Chinese are not demanding that we should all be Confucians. And the Russians are not demanding that all people in the world should be Orthodox Christians, etc. I think it's very, very important that we bear in mind that we should cope with each other like we are, and not demand changes. I think it's a really dangerous and stupid game to play. I think the European Union is also very active in this game, which I think is very, very— Well, this way of thinking, in my point of view, has no perspective, no positive perspective at all.

White House/Adam Schultz

Nielsen's advice to President Biden: "The game you are playing with Russia is a very dangerous game. Support Putin, or deal with Putin, engage with Putin, and do some diplomacy, because the alternative is a possibility of war, and you should not go down into history as the American president who secured the extinction of humanity."

Diplomacy to Avert Catastrophe

Michelle Rasmussen: Today, Presidents Biden and Putin will speak on the phone, and important diplomatic meetings are scheduled for the middle of January. What is going to determine if diplomacy can avoid a disaster, as during the Cuban Missile Crisis? Helga Zepp-LaRouche has just called this a "reverse missile crisis." Or, if Russia will feel that they have no alternative to having a military response, as they have openly stated. What changes on the Western side are necessary? If you had President Biden alone in a room, or other heads of state of NATO countries, what would you say to them?

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: I would say, "Look, Joe, I understand your concerns. I understand that you see yourself as a champion of freedom in the world, and things like that. I understand the positive things about it. But, you see, the game you now are playing with Russia is a very, very dangerous game. And the Russians, are a very proud people; you cannot force them. It's not an option. I mean, you cannot, because it has been American, and to some degree, also European Union policy, to change Russia, to very much like to change, so that they'll have another president, and exchange Putin for another president."

But I can assure you, if I were to speak to Joe Biden, I'd say, "Be sure that if you succeed, or if Putin dies tomorrow, or somehow they'll have a new President, I can assure you that the new President will be just as tough as Putin, maybe even tougher. Because in Russia, you have much tougher people. I would say even most people in Russia who blame Putin, blame him because he's not tough enough on the West, because he was soft on the West, too liberal toward the West, and many people have blamed him for not taking the eastern southern part of Ukraine yet—that he should have done it.

So, I would say to Biden, "I think it would be wise for you, right now, to support Putin, or to deal with Putin, engage with Putin, and do some diplomacy, because the alternative is a possibility of war, and you should not go down into history as the American president who secured the extinction of humanity. It would be a bad, very bad record for you. And there are possibilities, because I don't think Putin is unreasonable. Russia has not been unreasonable. I think they have turned back. Because in 1991, it was the Russians themselves, who disbanded the Soviet Union. It was the Russians, Moscow, which disbanded the Warsaw Pact. The Russians, who gave liberty to the Baltic countries, and all other Soviet Republics. And with hardly any shots, and returned half a million Soviet soldiers back to Russia. No shot was fired at all. I think it's extraordinary.

"If you compare what happened in the dismemberment of the French and the British colonial empires after World War II, the disbanding of the Warsaw Pact was very, very civilized, in many ways. So, stop thinking about Russia as uncivilized, stupid people, who don't understand anything but mere power. Russians are an educated people. They understand a lot of arguments, and they are interested in cooperating. There will be a lot of advantages for the United States, for the West, and also the European Union, to establish a kind of more productive, more pragmatic relationship, cooperation. There are a lot of things in terms of energy, climate, of course, and terrorism, and many other things, where it's a win-win situation to cooperate with them.

"The only thing Russia is asking for is not to put your military hardware in their backyard. I don't think it should be hard for us to accept, certainly not to understand why the Russians think this way."

And we in the West should think back to the history, where armies from the West have attacked Russia. So, they have it in their genes. I don't think that there is any person in Russia who has forgot, or is not aware of, the huge losses the Soviet Union suffered from Nazi Germany in the 1940s during World War II. And you had Napoleon also trying to—You have a lot of that experience with armies from the West going into Russia. So, it's very, very large, very, very deep.

Michelle Rasmussen: Was it around 20 million people who died during World War II?

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: In the Soviet Union. There were also Ukrainians, and other nationalities, but it was around 18 million Russians, if you can count it, because it was the Soviet Union, but twenty-seven million people in all. It's a huge part, because Russia has experience with war. So, the Russians would certainly not like war. I think the Russians have experience with war, that also the Europeans, to some extent, have, that the United States does not have.

Because the attack I remember in recent times is the 9/11 attack, the twin towers in New York. Otherwise, the United States does not have these experiences. It tends to think more in ideological terms, where the Russians, certainly, but also to some extent, some people in Europe, think more pragmatically, more that we should, at any cost, avoid war, because war creates more problems than it solves. So, have some pragmatic cooperation. It will not be very much a love affair. Of course not. But it will be on a very pragmatic—

The Basis for Cooperation

Michelle Rasmussen: Also, in terms of dealing with this horrible humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and cooperating on the pandemic.

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: Yes. Of course, there are possibilities. Right now, it's like we can't even cooperate in terms of vaccines, and there are so many things going on, from both sides, actually, because we have very, very little contact between—

I had some plans to have some cooperation between Danish and Russian universities in terms of business development, things like that, but it turned out there was not one crown, as our currency is called. You could have projects in southern America, Africa, all other countries. But not Russia, which is stupid.

Michelle Rasmussen: You wrote two recent books about Russia. One is called, *On His Own Terms: Putin and the New Russia,* and the latest one, just from September, *Russia Against the Grain*. Many people in the West portray Russia as the enemy, which is solely responsible for the current situation, and Putin as a dictator who is threatening his neighbors militarily and threatening the democracy of the free world. Over and above what you have already said, is this true, or do you have a different viewpoint?

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: Of course, I have a different point of view. Russia for me, is not a perfect country, because such a country does not exist, not even Denmark! Some suppose it is. But there's no such thing as a perfect society. Because societies are always developing from somewhere, to somewhere, and Russia, likewise. Russia is a very, very big country. So, you can definitely find things which are not very likable in Russia. Definitely. That's not my point here.

But I think that in the West, actually for centuries, we have—if you look back, I have tried in my latest book, to find out how Western philosophers, how church people, how they look at Russia, from centuries back. And there has been kind of a red thread. There's been a kind of continuation. Because Russia has very, very, very often been characterized as our adversary, as a country against basic European values. Five hundred years back, it was against the Roman Catholic Church, and in the 17th and 18th Centuries it was against the Enlightenment philosophers, and in the 20th century, it was about communism—it's also split people in the West, and it was also considered to be a threat. But it is also considered to be a threat today, even though Putin is not a communist. He is not a communist. He is a conservative, a moderate conservative, I would say.

Even during the time of Yeltsin, he was also considered liberal and progressive, and he loved the West and followed the West in all, almost all things they proposed.

But still, there's something with Russia—which I think from a philosophical point of view is very important to find out—that we have some very deep-rooted prejudices about Russia, and I think they play a role. When I speak to people who say, "Russia is an awful country, and Putin is simply a very, very evil person, is a dictator," I say, "Have you been in Russia? Do you know any Russians?" "No, not really." "Ok. But what do you base your points of view on?" "Well, what I read in the newspapers, of course, what they tell me on the television."

Well, I think that's not good enough. I understand why the Russians—I very often talk to Russian politicians, and other people, and what they are sick and tired of, is this notion that the West is better: "We are on a higher level. And if Russians should be accepted by the West, they should become like us. Or at least they should admit that they are on a lower level, in relation to our very high level."

And that is why, when they deal with China, or deal with India, and when they deal with African countries, and even Latin American countries, they don't meet such attitudes, because they are on more equal terms. They're different, yes, but one does not consider each other to be on a higher level.

And that's why I think that cooperation in BRICS, which we talked about, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, I think it's quite successful. I don't know about the future, but I have a feeling that if you were talking about Afghanistan, I think if Afghanistan could be integrated into this kind of organization, one way or another, I have a feeling it probably would be more successful than the 20 years that the NATO countries have been there.

I think that cultural attitudes play a role when we're talking about politics, because a lot of the policy from the American, European side, is actually very emotional. It's very much like, "We have some feelings—We fear Russia. We don't like it," or "We think that it's awful." And "Our ideas, we know how to run a society much better than the Russians, and the Chinese, and the Indians, and the Muslims," and things like that. It's a part of the problem. It's a part of our problem in the West. It's a part of our way of thinking, our philosophy, which I think we should have a closer look at and criticize. But it's difficult, because it's very deeply rooted.

When I discuss with people at universities and in the media, and other places, I encounter this. That is why I wrote the latest book, because it's very much about our way of thinking about Russia. The book is about Russia, of course, but it's also about us, our glasses, how we perceive Russia, how we perceive not only Russia, but it also goes for China, because it's more or less the same. But there are many similarities between how we look upon Russia, and how we look upon and perceive China, and other countries.

I think this is a very, very important thing we have to deal with. We have to do it, because otherwise, if we

decide, if America and Russia decide to use all the fireworks they have of nuclear [armament] power, then it's the end.

You can put it very sharply, to put it like that, and people will not like it. But basically, we are facing these two alternatives: Either we find ways to cooperate with people who are not like us, and will not be, certainly not in my lifetime, like us, and accept them, that they are not like us, and get on as best we can, and keep our differences, but respect each other. I think that's what we need from the Western countries. I think it's the basic problem today dealing with other countries.

And the same goes, from what I have said, for China. I do not know the Chinese language. I have been in China. I know a little about China. Russia, I know very well. I speak Russian, so I know how Russians are thinking about this, what their feelings are about this. And I think it's important to deal with these questions.

'A Way to Live Together'

Michelle Rasmussen: You also pointed out, that in 2001, after the attack against the World Trade Center, Putin was the first one to call George Bush, and he offered cooperation about dealing with terrorism. You've written that he had a pro-Western worldview, but that this was not reciprocated.

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: Yes, yes. Afterwards, Putin was criticized by the military, and also by politicians in the beginning of his first term in 2000, 2001, 2002, he was criticized because he was too happy for America. He even said, in an interview in the BBC, that he would like Russia to become a member of NATO. It did not happen, because—there are many reasons for that. But he was very, very keen—that's also why he felt very betrayed afterward. In 2007, at the Munich Conference on Security in February in Germany, he said he was very frustrated, and it was very clear that he felt betrayed by the West. He thought that they had a common agenda. He thought that Russia should become a member. But Russia probably is too big.

If you consider Russia becoming a member of the European Union, the European Union would change thoroughly, but they failed. Russia did not become a member. It's understandable. But then I think the European Union should have found, again, a *modus vivendi*.

Michelle Rasmussen: A way of living together.

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: Yes, how to live together It was actually a parallel development of the European Union and NATO, against Russia. In 2009, the European Union invited Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, to become members of the European Union, but not Russia. Even though they knew that there was really a lot of trade between Ukraine, also Georgia, and Russia. And it would interfere with that trade. But they did not pay attention to Russia.

So, Russia was left out at this time. And so eventually, you could say, understandably, very understandably, Russia turned to China. And in China, with cooperation with China, they became stronger. They became much more self-confident, and they also cooperated with people who respected them much more. I think that's interesting, that the Chinese understood how to deal with other people with respect, but the Europeans and Americans did not.

Ukraine, Again

Michelle Rasmussen: Just before we go to our last questions. I want to go back to Ukraine, because it's so important. You said that the problem did not start with the so-called annexation of Crimea, but with what you called a coup against the sitting president. Can you just explain more about that? Because in the West, everybody says, "Oh, the problem started when Russia annexed Crimea."

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: Well, if you take Ukraine, in 2010 there was a presidential election, and the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] monitored the election, and said that it was very good, and the majority voted for Viktor Yanukovych. Viktor Yanukovych did not want Ukraine to become a member of NATO. He wanted to cooperate with the European Union. But he also wanted to keep cooperating with Russia. Basically, that's what he was like. But it's very often claimed that he was corrupt. Yes, I don't doubt it, but name me one president who has not been corrupt. That's not the big difference, it's not the big thing, I would say. But then in 2012, there was also a parliamentary election in Ukraine, and Yanukovych's party also gained a majority with some other parties. There was a coalition which supported Yanukovych's policy not to become a member of NATO.

And then there was a development where the European Union and Ukraine were supposed to sign a treaty of cooperation. But he found out that the treaty

would be very costly for Ukraine, because they would open the borders for European Union firms, and the Ukrainian firms would not be able to compete with the Western firms.

Secondly, and this is the most important thing, basic industrial export from Ukraine was to Russia, and it was industrial products from the eastern part, from Dniepropetrovsk or Dniepro as it is called today, from Donetsk, from Luhansk and from Kryvyj Rih (Krivoj Rog), from some other parts, basically in the eastern part, which is the industrial part of Ukraine.

And they made some calculations that showed that, well, if you join this agreement, Russia said, "We will have to put some taxes on the export, because you will have some free import from the European Union. We don't have an agreement with the European Union, so, of course, anything which comes from you, there would be some taxes imposed on it." And then Yanukovych said, "Well, well, well, it doesn't sound good," and he wanted Russia, the European Union and Ukraine to go together, and the three form what we call a triangular agreement.

But the European Union was very much opposed to it. The eastern part of Ukraine was economically a part of Russia. Part of the Russian weapons industry was actually in the eastern part of Ukraine, and there were Russian speakers there. But the European Union said, "No, we should not cooperate with Russia about this," because Yanukovych wanted to have cooperation between the European Union, Ukraine, and Russia, which sounds very sensible to me. Of course, it should be like that. It would be to the advantage of all three parts. But the European Union had a very ideological approach to this. So, they were very much against Russia. It also increased the Russians' suspicion that the European Union was only a stepping-stone to NATO membership.

And then what happened was that there was a conflict, there were demonstrations every day on the Maidan Square in Kiev. There were many thousands of people there, and there were also shootings, because many of the demonstrators were armed people. They had stolen weapons from some barracks in the West. And at this point, when 100 people had been killed, the European Union foreign ministers from France, Germany and Poland met, and there was also a representative from Russia, and there was Yanukovych, a representative from his government, and from the opposition. And they made an agreement. Ok. You should have elections this year, in half a year, and you should have some sharing of power. People from the opposition should become members of the government, and things like that.

All of a sudden, things broke down, and Yanukovych left, because you should remember, and very often in the West, they tend to forget that the demonstrators were armed. And they killed police also. They killed people from Yanukovych's Party of the Regions, and things like that. So, it's always been portrayed as innocent, peace-loving demonstrators. They were not at all. And some of them had very dubious points of view, with Nazi swastikas, and things like that. And Yanukovych fled.

Credit: Brejnev

Putin: "We will take adequate retaliatory military-technical measures, and react toughly to unfriendly steps…. we have every right to take actions designed to ensure the security and sovereignty of Russia."

Then they came to power. They had no legitimate government, because many of the members of parliament from these parts of the regions which had supported Yanukovych, had fled to the East. So, the parliament was not able to make any decisions. Still, there was a new president, also a new government, which was basically from the western part of Ukraine. And the first thing they did, I told you, was to get rid of the Russian language, and then they would talk about

NATO membership. And Victoria Nuland was there all the time, the vice foreign minister of the United States, was there all the time. There were many people from the West also, so things broke down.

Crimea

Michelle Rasmussen: There have actually been accusations since then, that there were provocateurs who were killing people on both sides.

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: Yes. Yes, exactly. And what's interesting is that there's been no investigation whatsoever about it, because a new government did not want to conduct an investigation as to who killed them. So, it was orchestrated. There's no doubt in my mind it was an orchestrated coup. No doubt about it.

That's the basic context for the decision of Putin to accept Crimea as a part of Russia. In the West, it is said that Russia simply annexed Crimea. It's not precisely what happened, because there was a local parliament, it was an autonomous part of Ukraine, and they had their own parliament, and they made the decision that they should have a referendum, which they had in March. And then they applied to become a member of the Russian Federation. It's not a surprise, even though the Ukrainian army did not go there, because there was a Ukrainian army. There were 21,000 Ukrainian soldiers. 14,000 of these soldiers joined the Russian army.

And so, that tells a little about how things were not like a normal annexation, where one country simply occupies part of the other country. Because you have this cleft country, you have this part, especially the southern part, which was very, very pro-Russian, and it's always been so. There's a lot of things in terms of international law you can say about it.

But I have no doubt that you can look upon it differently, because if you look it at from the point of people who lived in Crimea, they did not want—because almost 80-90% had voted for the Party of the Regions, which was Yanukovych's party, a pro-Russian party, you could say, almost 87%, or something like that.

They have voted for this Party. This Party had a center in a central building in Kiev, which was attacked, burned, and three people were killed. So, you could imagine that they would not be very happy. They would not be very happy with the new government, and the new development. Of course not. They hated it. And what I think is very critical about the West is that they simply accepted, they accepted these horrible things in Ukraine, just to have the prize, just to have this prey, of getting Ukraine into NATO.

And Putin was aware that he could not live, not even physically, but certainly not politically, if Sevastopol, with the harbor for the Russian fleet, became a NATO harbor. It was impossible. I know people from the military who say "No, no way." It's impossible. Would the Chinese take San Diego in the United States? Of course not. It goes without saying that such things don't happen.

So, what is lacking in the West is just a little bit of realism. How powers, how superpowers think, and about red lines of superpowers. Because we have an idea in the West about the new liberal world order. It sounds very nice when you're sitting in an office in Washington. It sounds very beautiful and easy, but to go out and make this liberal world order, it's not that simple. And you cannot do it like, certainly not do it like the way they did it in Ukraine.

Michelle Rasmussen: Regime change?

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: Yes, regime change.

The Importance of Cultural Exchanges

Michelle Rasmussen: I have two other questions. The last questions. The Russian-Danish Dialogue organization that you are a leader of, and the Schiller Institute in Denmark, together with the China Cultural Center in Copenhagen, were co-sponsors of three very successful Musical Dialogue of Cultures Concerts, with musicians from Russia, China, and many other countries. You are actually an associate professor in cultural differences. How do you see that? How would an increase in cultural exchange improve the situation?

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: Well, it cannot but improve, because we have very little, as I also told you. So, I'm actually also very, very happy with this cooperation, because I think it's very enjoyable, these musical events, they are very, very enjoyable and very interesting, also for many Danish people, because when you have the language of music, it is better than the language of weapons, if I can put it that way, of course. But I also think that when we meet each other, when we listen to each other's music, and share culture in terms of films, literature, paintings, whatever, I think it's also, well, it's a natural thing, first of all, and it's unnatural not to have it.

We do not have it, because maybe some people want it that way, if people want us to be in a kind of tense situation. They would not like to have it, because I think without this kind of, it's just a small thing, of course, but without these cultural exchanges, well, you will be very, very bad off. We will have a world which is much, much worse, I think, and we should learn to enjoy the cultural expressions of other people.

We should learn to accept them, also, we should learn to also cooperate and also find ways—. We are different. But, also, we have a lot of things in common, and the things we have in common are very important not to forget, that even with Russians, and even the Chinese, also all other peoples, we have a lot in common, that is very important to bear in mind that we should never forget. Basically, we have the basic values we have in common, even though if you are Hindu, a Confucian, a Russian Orthodox, we have a lot of things in common.

And when you have such kind of encounters like in cultural affairs, in music, I think that you become aware of it, because suddenly it's much easier to understand people, if you listen to their music. Maybe you need to listen a few times, but it becomes very, very interesting. You become curious about instruments, ways of singing, and whatever it is. So, I hope the corona situation will allow us, also, to make some more concerts. I think it should be, because they're also very popular in Denmark.

Michelle Rasmussen: Yes. As Schiller wrote, it's through beauty that we arrive at political freedom. We can also say it's through beauty that we can arrive at peace.

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: Yes, yes.

The Role of Schiller Institute

Michelle Rasmussen: The Schiller Institute and Helga Zepp-LaRouche, its founder and international President, are leading an international campaign to prevent World War III, for peace through economic development, and a dialogue amongst cultures. How do you see the role of the Schiller Institute?

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: Well, I know it. We have been cooperating. I think your basic calls, appeals for global development, I think it's very, very interesting, and I share the basic point of view. I think maybe it's a little difficult. The devil is in the details, but basically, I think what you are thinking about, when I talk about the Silk Road, when I talk about these Chinese programs, Belt and Road programs, I see much more successful development than we have seen, say, in Africa with European programs, because I have seen how many western-dominated development programs have been distorting developments in Africa and other parts of the world. They distort development.

I'm not uncritical to China, but, of course, I can see very positive perspectives in the Belt and Road program. I can see really, really good perspectives, because just look at the railroads in China, for instance, at their fast trains. It's much bigger than anywhere else in the world. I think there are some perspectives, really, which I think attract, first and foremost, people in Asia.

But I think, eventually, also, people in Europe, because I also think that this model is becoming more and more—it's also beginning in the eastern part. Some countries of Eastern Europe are becoming interested. So, I think it's very interesting. Your points of view. I think they're very relevant, also because I think we are in a dead-end alley in the West, what we are in right now, so people anyway are looking for new perspectives.

And what you come up with, I think, is very, very interesting, certainly. What it may be in the future is difficult to say because things are difficult.

But the basic things that you think about, and what I have heard about the Schiller Institute, also because I also think that you stress the importance of tolerance. You stress the importance of a multicultural society, that we should not change each other. We should cooperate on the basis of mutual interests, not changing each other. And as I have told you, this is what I see as one of the real, real big problems in the western mind, the western way of thinking, that we should decide what should happen in the world as if we still think we are colonial powers, like we have been for some one hundred years. But these times are over. There are new times ahead, and we should find new ways of thinking. We should find new perspectives.

And I think it goes for the West, that we can't go on living like this. We can't go on thinking like this, because it will either be war, or it'll be dead end alleys, and there'll be conflicts everywhere.

You can look at things as a person from the West. I think it's sad to look at Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and those countries, Syria to some extent also, where the West has tried to make some kind of regime change or decide what happens. They're not successful. I think it's obvious for all. And we need some new way of

thinking. And what the Schiller Institute has come up with is very, very interesting in this perspective, I think.

Michelle Rasmussen: Actually, when you speak about not changing other people, one of our biggest points is that we actually have to challenge ourselves to change ourselves. To really strive for developing our creative potential and to make a contribution that will have, potentially, international implications.

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: Yes. Definitely

Michelle Rasmussen: The Schiller Institute is on full mobilization during the next couple of weeks to try to get the United States and NATO to negotiate seriously. And Helga Zepp-LaRouche has called on the U.S. and NATO to sign these treaties that Russia has proposed, and to pursue other avenues of preventing nuclear war. So, we hope that you, our viewers, will also do everything that you can, including circulating this video.

Is there anything else you would like to say to our viewers before we end, Jens Jørgen?

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: No. I think we have talked a lot now. Only I think what you said about bringing the U.S. and Russia to the negotiation table, it's obvious. I think that it should be, for any prudent, clear-thinking person in the West, it should be obvious that this is the only right thing to do. So of course, we support it 100%.

Michelle Rasmussen: Okay. Thank you so much, Jens Jørgen Nielsen

Jens Jørgen Nielsen: I thank you.