**Angela Stent talks with Michael Morell on "Intelligence Matters"**

May 29, 2019, CBS News. Retrieved at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/transcript-angela-stent-talks-with-michael-morell-on-intelligence-matters/>

MICHAEL MORELL:
You know, one of the key national security issues facing the United States is the international behavior of the Russians. And you've just published I think a very important book on why Russia does what it does. It's called Putin's World: Russia Against the West and with the Rest. Perhaps the place to start, Angela, is to get your perspective on, what are the Russians actually doing in the world, you know, from a kind of big-picture perspective? And then we can dive into why they're doing it and what we should do about it, right? And then maybe also get into a little bit about Moscow's approach to different parts of the world. But how you would you, to start, how would you characterize what they're doing in the world?
ANGELA STENT:
So Putin came in as president with one of the goals was to restore Russia as a great power. And to put behind Russia what he considered the humiliation of the 1990s. So one thing they're doing is showing the rest of the world that they are a great power, despite their economic weakness.

And that they need to have a seat in the global board of directors. They should be asked about any important international decision. So that's one thing they're doing, showing their presence and saying to the world, "You cannot ignore us. You have to treat us with respect and to take our interests legitimately."
MICHAEL MORELL:
And what are the specific things that they do to that end? Like, Syria, for example?
ANGELA STENT:
Right. Well, in Syria, you know, the West tried to isolate Russia after the annexation of Crimea and the Russians launching a war in Southeastern Ukraine. And Putin's answer to that was to go and start bombing in Syria. He was concerned that Assad might be defeated, which indeed, he might have been. And Russia has saved him.

Russia is now, you know, a major power there. Back in Syria, and it was again, done by bombing. And in many ways, the way they do this is by disrupting. You can see this now even in Venezuela or a country like that. It's to go back to areas maybe where Russia withdrew after the Soviet Union collapsed. But just to make it difficult for the West to achieve its goals.
MICHAEL MORELL:
Yeah, so great power. Anything else? Pursuit? Or is that the driving force here, the driving objective--
ANGELA STENT:
Well, I mean, there's also a domestic imperative. This is a group of people that want to stay in power. They've accumulated a very large amount of money which they don't want to lose. They don't know what's going to happen in the next leadership succession.

So it's also using the foreign policy to try and keep themselves in power. And Putin has very skillfully appealed to the Russian population, to their patriotism, you know, to increase his popularity numbers. Because they were falling, for instance, before the Crimean adventure.
MICHAEL MORELL:
And how does that play out? So that plays out in a place like Crimea. Does that play out in other places?
ANGELA STENT:
It's played out particularly in Crimea, to some extent in Syria. In the beginning, again the Russian population apparently was proud that Russia was back there, was showing the Americans that they couldn't push them around. I believe there're somewhat diminishing returns with that now. And maybe we can come back to that later, given the economic state of the country. But that is still something that apparently appeals to the Russian population.
MICHAEL MORELL:
So you say something very important in the book, Angela. And that is that, most people focus on Putin the man in explaining Russian behavior. But you think, you know, that's obviously important, but you also think that there's a bigger issue here. And that's Russian the nation, Russia the nation state. Can you talk about that a little bit?
ANGELA STENT:
Yes. I think Putin sort of exemplifies forces that have been at work in Russia for hundreds of years. And that is, first of all, the Russian sense that they are an exceptional civilization. They're different from the West. The Russian sense, and I quote a famous 19th century poet there, that "The West will inevitably be their enemies." That they are going to be opposed to the West. That the West isn't really going to serve their interests.

And I think the other thing is, the sense of Russian insecurity, because it has no clear borders, except in the North. And you've always had this tradition for hundreds of years of expansion of Russia's borders absorbing its neighbors, then retreat when it's defeated, and then reabsorbing those neighbors again. Yeah.
MICHAEL MORELL:
Well, where does this sense of exceptionalism come from?
ANGELA STENT:
Oh, I think you probably have to go far back in history. The way that the Russian state was formed, the role of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the fact that, you know, Russia has developed a civilization that is different from that of its Western European neighbors.
MICHAEL MORELL:
So does this mean that Putin doesn't matter that much? That if it wasn't Putin, it would be somebody else like Putin? You know, how much of this is history and tradition and culture and worldview on the part of Russia, and how much of this is Putin?
ANGELA STENT:
So I think any leader who would have taken over from Boris Yeltsin, because the '90s was a time of chaos, of impoverishment in Russia. And you had a leader who wasn't very well towards the end of his tenure in office. So I think anyone who would have taken over from him would have wanted to restore a stronger state and would have wanted Russia to resume at least a regional, if not a more global role. But to restore Russia as a power that mattered in the world.

I think the particular way that it's happened under Putin is unique to him, given his background. You know, a mid-ranking K.G.B. official, a case officer who served in East Germany, then someone who served in the office of the mayor in St. Petersburg. The mayor was sort of democratic leaning, but that's when they began this sort of rather corrupt system of acquiring assets of the economic system we see in Russia today.

And Putin, like many leaders, has surrounded himself with people who come from a similar background. So he rules with those close to him, many of whom are from the security services. And so I think that has made a difference. Because I think if you'd had someone who did not come from an intelligence background, it's possible that their relationship with the West wouldn't be quite as bad as Russia's is today.
MICHAEL MORELL:
So can you describe him? What kind of person he is, what his personality's like, personality traits, characteristics. How would you describe Putin the man?
ANGELA STENT:
So I mean, my encounters with President Putin have been at these annual Valdai Club meetings in Russia, where they bring over foreign experts on Russia. And we meet with various leaders, including President Putin. This is someone who's pretty well-informed on issues.

When he's in smaller groups and you ask him questions, he doesn't refer to some assistant who's standing next to him. He's particularly interested in things like economics and energy. He can reel off statistics. He has some very strange notions of history which are quite amusing sometimes. But I would say, this is someone who's in command of the facts. Can be quite direct and almost rude to people when he wants to be, but seems to, he exudes by now, self-confidence.
MICHAEL MORELL:
So looking back at his experiences, both as a young man, and then as a K.G.B. officer and then as you said in the mayor's office in St. Petersburg, how did those experiences shape him?
ANGELA STENT:
So he grew up poor, in post-war Leningrad. And this is just a little more than a decade after the Siege of Leningrad had occurred, when the Nazis tried to starve out the city, and a million of its inhabitants died in Leningrad. And his parents lived in a communal apartment like most people did in those days in the Soviet Union.

So they were poor, and apparently he was an indifferent student in school. And then what apparently raised it up was when he decided to take up Judo. And in an autobiographical series of essays that was published when he first became president in 2000, he refers to the playing Judo, I mean, the learning Judo, and that that was the sport that enabled him to transcend this rather mediocre, if you like, background.

And then also apparently learning German, which he then did very well. He had a German teacher who saw the promise in him. So if we're to believe this book, this is how he then managed to do reasonably well in school. And then got himself into Leningrad State University to study law.

And we also know again from this book that he had wanted to join the K.G.B. as a young age. And at age 16, he presented himself to the K.G.B. And they said, "Come back, and you know, we'll talk to you later." So I think growing up, I mean, another book has been written about Putin, describing him really as a survivalist. And I think that's part of it, growing up in this post-war Leningrad in poverty and in rather bleak circumstances.

And then he went to East Germany. He was a young man in his 30s. And I think what really influenced him there was, first of all, he enjoyed living in East Germany. It had a much higher standard of living than the Soviet Union did. He lived better there.

But then, what happened to him, of course, in 1989 was, when the Berlin Wall came down, he was in a building co-located with the East German Security Services, and, you know, the mob came up and demanded the files. They wanted all their files. They wanted to know what was going on. And so he describes again, how spending all night in this building burning papers so that nobody could get hold of them. And saying that, no one in Moscow was there to help him. In other words, profound feeling of being abandoned by the Gorbachev people after all of this happened.

And then leaving East Germany earlier probably than he would have, and coming back to as it then was still Leningrad, but without a job really. And then, finally finding work in the mayor's office, and there, this was something new. He was in charge of foreign economic contacts. And that's when we know he got together with, you know, a group of his friends. They all bought dachas, country houses, in the same place on the outskirts of then what became St. Petersburg.

And they apparently started to accumulate wealth. He had all these contacts with foreign business people. And that was the time when he first met Henry Kissinger, for instance. But apparently, he was his driver when he was driving around St. Petersburg. So you have these dual biographies there.

And then, he was brought to Moscow in the mid-1990s. Another thing that I think affected him was, in 1996, the mayor for whom he worked, Mr. Sobchak, there was a rather dirty reelection campaign, and Sobchak lost. And that was also something that apparently influenced Putin. And he realized that, if you have an election and you don't know who's going to win, you know, that can turn out badly. And so then again, he was out of a job, but then he was brought to Moscow. And the reason why Yeltsin picked him apparently was because he was persuaded that this was going to be a loyal man. He promised President Yeltsin and his family that nothing would happen to them. Once--
MICHAEL MORELL:
How well did he know Yeltsin prior to being chosen?
ANGELA STENT:
I don't think he knew him that well. I think it was people around Yeltsin like Boris Berezovsky and others who recommended Putin to him. I don't think he knew him that well.
MICHAEL MORELL:
And do you have a sense of whether he was successful at his career at the K.G.B.? How he was doing when this all fell apart?
ANGELA STENT:
So if you read the memoirs of the man who used to be in the East German Secret Police as the head of their international operations, Markus Wolf, he'll say, this was someone who was barely on his radar screen. He was in Dresden. Dresden was not one of the major cities in East Germany, it was kind of a backwater, and that he was a mid-level lieutenant colonel in the K.G.B. I don't know how you would judge how well he did, but he certainly wasn't well-known.
MICHAEL MORELL:
So Angela, how are foreign policy decisions made in Russia? You know, is there a process? Who's at the table? Is it really only a small group of advisors, as we hear? You know, so the decision on doing Syria or the decision on Ukraine, how does that actually happen?
ANGELA STENT:
Well, of course, we all wish we knew, and we have some of the finest minds in the United States in the intelligence agency trying to figure this out. This is a government that's run by people who come from the security services. So having said that, what we understand is, there is a national security. There's a security council, which certainly meets regularly and discusses tings.

As far as we understand it, on the very important decisions, it would be President Putin and just a few people around him. It could be the defense minister. It could be the head of the S.V.R., that's the foreign intelligence services. It could be the head of the domestic intelligence services. It could be maybe a few other officials depending on the issue, who will sit with him and will discuss these matters. We know that the foreign ministry doesn't really seem to have much of a say in any of these decisions, and that often the foreign ministry finds out about things, for instance, what happened with the Russia-Georgia War and other issues, after they've taken place.

Unlike even in the Soviet period, there are very few institutions where you can identify, this is what this particular branch, this institution, this office does. On less important foreign policy decisions, it's a wider range of people. But it's very much I think still people believe President Putin and a small inner circle.
MICHAEL MORELL:
In your book, you wrote that the foreign minister wasn't involved in the Ukraine decision, for example.
ANGELA STENT:
Yes, as far as we know, he wasn't. Annexation of Crimea was something they found out about afterwards.
MICHAEL MORELL:
So you believe, Angela, that Putin has largely achieved the objective that you said he was after, right, which is managing to return Russia as a global player. So he's been successful at what he has set out to do. How do you think he thinks about that, and how do you think he thinks about where to go next?
ANGELA STENT:
So in my book, I do also point out there are areas where he clearly hasn't been successful. I mean, the whole episode in Ukraine, he has managed, or Russia has managed through its actions to unite Ukrainians in a way that they weren't united before. There's always been a split between East and West.

That seems to have diminished much more, and Ukrainians seem to have developed a much stronger sense of national identity. And I think, he would probably also look out and acknowledge at some point, that his desire to reintegrate the post-Soviet space has been only partially successful.
MICHAEL MORELL:
And what does he want to do in that post-Soviet space? Does he want to actually physically control it? Or does he just want to have significant influence over it?
ANGELA STENT:
He wants to have significant influence, and he doesn't want any of the post-Soviet states to join any Euro-Atlantic alliances, i.e., N.A.T.O. or to join the European Union. That I don't think, he doesn't want to create the Soviet Union, recreate it, because I think he can't.

But he wants to feel, again, going back to this kind of sense of space and insecurity, that the borders of the former Soviet space are really the security perimeter of Russia. And so that none of Russia's neighbors, particularly Ukraine, should move closer to the West.
MICHAEL MORELL:
You know, it's kind of interesting. The way you described Russia, right, as being this insecure nation and therefore the need to show that it's powerful actually kind of sounds like Putin himself, as a person.
ANGELA STENT:
Yeah, I think that's probably true. (LAUGH) I think, given the fact that he grew up in, you know, the second city in the Soviet Union that he, even when he went to East Germany wasn't sent to East Berlin. So yes, it's trying I think to compensate for some of that too.

And using the skills that he learned, probably both as a Judo-ist, as the Russians call it, and in the K.G.B., using his skills to take advantage of the distraction of the West, the mistake the West makes. In other words, Russia, right, where the per capita G.D.P. is less than that of Italy, which has a declining population, a crumbling infrastructure, its very limited resources, but making pretty savvy use of those resources to reassert Russia.
MICHAEL MORELL:
So maybe now we go to Russian foreign policy region by region here a little bit, which I think you did a fabulous job in your book. Let me throw them out and get you to react to each one of them. The first would be Europe, and I should say that I found it interesting that you talk about, from a Russia perspective, right? You talk about Europe from a Russia perspective as both a model and then N.A.T.O. as the enemy.
ANGELA STENT:
Right.
MICHAEL MORELL:
Can you talk about that? That's fascinating.
ANGELA STENT:
So I would say, traditionally for Russians, Europe has been admired as an economic model. In other words, you get Peter The Great, first of all, in the 17th century setting out incognito, traveling Europe to try and learn how, you know, the Europeans managed to have such an advanced economy.

So there's always been an admiration for that, you know, even under the Communists. What the Russians have been much more wary of is kind of, if you like, the idea of Europe. The ideas that European states have put forward, starting with the Enlightenment, the Renaissance, the Reformation. All of the things that Russia itself never experienced like that. And so those are the ideas of the rule of law, of due process, of individual liberties and human rights.

And their successive Russian rulers at least have been very wary of those. And so what Russia doesn't like about the European Union is first of all, the idea that a group of countries would give up their sovereignty voluntarily. For Putin, absolute sovereignty, the sovereignty of big powers, is very, very important. And then, the fact that all these European countries can get together and agree on things like sanctions.

And even if individual countries don't like the sanctions anymore, if the leading countries like France and Germany believe in them, then they continue. And what the European Union explicitly is, is a community of values. And so whenever the European Union deals with Russia it talks about values. So that's the European Union.

Now N.A.T.O. has always been viewed, you know, since the Soviet times, as the main enemy. And after all, it was founded in 1949 to contain the Soviet Union. And despite the fact that N.A.T.O. after the collapse of the Soviet Union declared that it didn't see Russia as an enemy and it wanted to work with Russia, it established a N.A.T.O.-Russia Council where N.A.T.O. works with Russia. Despite all of those things that wariness really has remained there.

And then, of course, the other thing that the Russians, although they didn't complain about it at the time, but have retroactively complained about it, was the enlargement of N.A.T.O. And starting off with Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in 1999 where Boris Yeltsin didn't really say very much, but they didn't love it. And then, of course, in 2004, when you had a big enlargement which included the Baltic States.

And now-- and since then-- Russia has claimed that, you know, N.A.T.O. is a number one danger. At a time when N.A.T.O. itself said, "We want to work cooperatively with Russia," that's not what the Russians said. But by now, of course, from the N.A.T.O. point of view, Russia is a major challenge and adversary because of what's happened in Ukraine.
MICHAEL MORELL:
Do you think Russian behavior would be any different if N.A.T.O. enlargement didn't come to Russia's border?
ANGELA STENT:
Right. So this is, of course, a subject of big debate. People have said, "If only we wouldn't have enlarged N.A.T.O., this was the original sin, everything would be fine." I'm really not so sure about that, because N.A.T.O. enlargement in the beginning was largely done also to prevent the Central European States who still held a lot of historical grievances against each other, to get them, you know, the Romanians and Hungarians, for instance, to agree that they didn't have territorial claims on each other.

To get the Central European countries to be in an alliance where they accepted the other ones' borders and worked together. If there wouldn't have been N.A.T.O. enlargement, what would have happened to all of those countries? They would have just been kind of bouncing in a no-man's land in between. And then you probably would have had the temptation for Russia to reassert its influence there. So I am not convinced that if there hadn't been N.A.T.O. enlargement, we'd have a much better relationship with Russia.
MICHAEL MORELL:
The Middle East. How do you think about Russian foreign policy in the Middle East?
ANGELA STENT:
So there I see that as one of Putin's two successes really. And that's the return to the Middle East in fact, probably a more successful way than the Soviet Union was ever there. Because under Putin, Russia hasn't chosen sides. The United States has chosen sides, right? We see Iran as a major adversary, and a lot of our policy in the Middle East is directed in that way.

The Russians now are the only power in the region that talks to all sides in all disputes, to Iran and the Shia groups, to all the Sunni states, and of course, to Israel. And it's very pragmatic. It's nonideological. And what I see is, for instance, Russia's two newest partners, if you like, Saudi Arabia and Israel, are both American allies.

They both would like Russia to use its influence to temper Iranian ambitions in the region. Although, I think they overestimate the influence that Russia has. But there you see in the Saudi case, a lot of this is about oil production and oil prices.

And the Russians are now working with the Saudis and O.P.E.C. to try and keep production down. With Israel, it's about the war in Syria and about the fact that 1.3 million Israeli citizens, you know, come from the former Soviet Union. But then, you know, expanding its links with Egypt, for instance by closer ties now, economic and military. And it's seen as an arbiter there, as a neutral arbiter, in the way that the United States is not--
MICHAEL MORELL:
And in a way that we're not.
ANGELA STENT:
Yeah. I mean, the U.S. is obviously much more powerful than Russia, and Russia can't replace the U.S. militarily or economically in the Middle East, but yeah, the U.S. is not seen as a neutral arbiter.
MICHAEL MORELL:
You also talked a little bit about Putin's personal reasons for an interest in relations with Israel, that I thought was really interesting.
ANGELA STENT:
Yeah, so ironically, whatever you can say about Putin's Russia and what it's like to live inside Putin's Russia, from the point of view of their ability to exercise their religion, this is probably the best time that Jews living in Russia have ever had, in terms of religious liberty.

And, you know, he writes about this again in this 2000 autobiographical interview, that he grew up in this communal apartment, and there was an elderly Jewish couple there that was very kind to him when he was growing up, so, and which he talks about. And he's, you know, he's visited the country. Quite often his favorite German teacher eventually emigrated to Israel. So there apparently is some personal reason. And we know that some of the oligarchs to whom he's close are also Jews.
MICHAEL MORELL:
China may be the big enchilada here, China. You talk about growing cooperation between the two. The director of national intelligence at the last Worldwide Threat testimony, made a big deal about the growing cooperation between the two. You note in your book that Xi Jinping last year said, quote, "Putin is my best, most intimate friend," unquote. What's the basis of this relationship? Is it tactical? Is it strategic? How do you think about that?
ANGELA STENT:
So I think it started off being more tactical. But I think now, not to exaggerate it and say it's an alliance, but it is quite strategic. I mean, these are two countries that feel that the post-Cold War order hasn't taken their interests into account. And that they need to have more agency in it. And they're both committed to what they call, a post-West order. Now, I think their ideas of what that is are different.

What Russia wants is probably different from what China wants. Obviously, China as the rising economic power has a different interest in this as Russia. Russia is the junior partner but in this relationship. But, so they share a desire to change the way that really that the world is run. They're very sensitive obviously to any Western attempts to interfere in what they consider their domestic prerogatives. So neither country's going to criticize the other one for lack of democracy and for persecution of human rights--
MICHAEL MORELL:
And that's why both oppose intervention anywhere else in the world.
ANGELA STENT:
Right, exactly, and so the whole concept of what we talk about, humanitarian intervention, they will disagree with this. The only humanitarian intervention the Russians will agree with is helping, you know, the people in Eastern Ukraine who didn't want to be part of Ukraine. So I think it's a worldview that's similar.

It's the Chinese, you know, they need large amounts of energy, and they've now gotten a good deal with Russia. After the sanctions were imposed after the annexation of Crimea, the Chinese were able to negotiate a major gas pipeline deal with Russia on terms that the Russians would not have accepted before the sanctions. But they didn't have any choice.

And for the Russians, you know, the Chinese back them up on all of their major foreign policy issues. The Chinese did abstain when the general assembly voted to condemn Russia for the annexation of Crimea. They did not support the Russians there, but in general, they vote together on the United Nations Security Council. And the Russians support the Chinese on all of their major foreign policy issues.

So it's pragmatic. It's instrumental. But we now see military cooperation for the first time. You had Chinese troops participating in Russian military exercises last fall in the Eastern part of Russia. We now see there's going to be more sort of training and cooperation with the Air Force. So slowly, the military aspect of this I think is getting closer.
MICHAEL MORELL:
So Angela, I want to ask about the dichotomy. You raised this earlier, but I want to come back at it directly. The dichotomy between Russia's role in the world and the size and health of its economy. Right? How is that possible?
ANGELA STENT:
So throughout the centuries, when Russia first became a grew power in the 19th century, it's always only been able to act as a great power by virtue of its military presence or ability to project military power, rather than economically. Because it's always been economically behind Europe, behind the more developed countries.

And Russia is able to do this. And I think part of this is in the post-Soviet realm, Russia is by far the strongest military power. So that's easy. It's, you know, easy for them to do whatever they've done in Ukraine, to send soldiers there. I mean, the Ukrainian Army isn't a match for them. Or in other parts of the, you know, in the frozen conflicts of the post-Soviet space. That's easy. In Syria, you know, what they've done in Syria they've done with fairly limited resources.

They haven't, not that many soldiers and airmen have gone there. The casualties haven't been that big. So they managed to do that on a fairly tight budget if you like. And even what we see now in Venezuela will be interesting to see what happens there. But so far, you know, it hasn't cost them so much. So they're able to project military power on the cheap, fairly successfully, particularly in areas where they're surprising the West or where the West doesn't want to respond.

I mean, obviously, the U.S. and N.A.T.O. is not going to go directly against the Russians and Ukraine, even though N.A.T.O.'s beefed up its troop presence in that area. And I think that is how they are able to do it. None of these are massive military interventions.
MICHAEL MORELL:
And the other tool they use, right, is very capable intelligence services. And at the end of the day, intelligence is not that expensive.
ANGELA STENT:
No, exactly. It's the intelligence services, and they, as we know, they are very good. And as we know in our own case, they've been able to exploit obviously the weaknesses, both in social media and in the cyberspace to their own advantage.
MICHAEL MORELL:
So Angela, at the end of the day, here's one of the things I struggle with. At the end of the day, when I look at Putin and Russian foreign policy, I wonder whether it serves the long-term interests of the country or not. Or is it actually doing a disservice to the long-term future of Russia? How do you think about that question?
ANGELA STENT:
So the, I think you'd have to think about it, that in the long run, what the Russian leadership should do is reform the economy in such a way that Russia will become a fully modern country. It's not a modern country. It doesn't have modern institutions of governance. It's largely a raw materials exporting state. And if you compare it to its neighbors, China, but even not China, smaller countries in Asia, they're going to go ahead, and Russia is going to remain at the, you know, much lower level economically, without a modern economy.

But I always caution this. When I worked at the National Intelligence Council and other places where people sit down and do scenarios, you try and think what the future is. And you always look at the fundamentals, and you say, the Russians can't go on like this. Their population's declining, you know, they're not modernizing the economy. And at some point, things can collapse.

But we do know from history that the Russians managed to carry on and muddle along. You know, they surprise us when they do that, more than we think they will. So I do think that in the long run, I don't see that Russia is really served by a foreign policy that antagonizes the West that much. It would be better from the Russian point of view and economically for them too if they, if we had better relations, because they've got much more, you know, Western investment and things like that.

So and we know that there's, you know, as long as Russia continues the way it is, there's a significant brain drain of their most talented people, who are not staying in Russia. That they're emigrating to Europe or the United States or Australia. So in the long run, this doesn't serve their interests that well.
MICHAEL MORELL:
But cutting through the nationalism, right, to get to what you're talking about would be extremely difficult--
ANGELA STENT:
Right. That would be difficult, and the long run, you know, is some way away. And it's certainly beyond the tenure of Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin.
MICHAEL MORELL:
So Angela, let's finish up with a couple questions on U.S. policies. You write in the book that, "The West has had flawed assumptions about Russia." What are those flaws?
ANGELA STENT:
Well, I think we were probably overly optimistic, although understandably overly optimistic in the 1990s when the Soviet Union collapsed. And I think particularly in the Clinton Administration, believing that Russia did want to move towards the West, and if only we gave them the wherewithal and worked with them to do that, that would be their choice.

And I think again, if you go back to history, and you look at the long-term factors I think for many Russians, you know, developing more like the West or being integrated more with the West would have to them been seen as something where they had very little agency, and they were junior partners.

And I think we underestimated the degree to which the loss of great power status or however it was presented to the population really had a very profound impact on people. And so I think those were flawed assumptions. That doesn't mean that we can't work with Russia, or we couldn't were circumstances better. But I think the future, the U.S. has to be more realistic about what Russia is and how it's likely to develop.
MICHAEL MORELL:
Were those flawed assumptions shared broadly by Russia experts? Or you're really talking about the people making policy?
ANGELA STENT:
Well, it was people making policy, but interestingly enough, some of the most tough anti-Soviet thing, you know, experts, academics, think-tankers, they were very enthusiastic. Because I think a lot of people maybe focused too much on the fact that the reason the Soviet Union had acted the way it has, it was because it was at least nominally a Marxist, Leninist, Communist country, even though it probably didn't believe that.

And not realizing enough that a lot of what informs the way that Russia acts is Russianness and is going back, you know, into Russian history. And that the ideology that you saw in the Soviet period was kind of superimposed on historical traditions that have reasserted themselves.
MICHAEL MORELL:
Did the I.C. share in this mistake about the assumptions, or was the I.C. more sober and more realistic?
ANGELA STENT:
I think they were probably more sober and realistic, which of course, led to all the debates, you know, that we know about now about whether, you know, Gorbachev and people like him were just sort of a passing phenomenon.
MICHAEL MORELL:
And if we applied the more accurate assumptions, right, about where this policy is coming from, and how enduring it is, what should be our policy?
ANGELA STENT:
Well, I think we do, you know, we have to work with Russia on some issues. We should have very realistic expectations, but there are issues. For instance, arms control, I mean, we have a major treaty that's going to expire, the new S.T.A.R.T. Treaty in 2021.

These are areas where, as the world's two nuclear superpowers with what, 93% of the weapons, we do need to work with the Russians. And there are other areas where we could work with the Russians. We have worked with them, not always successfully on counter-terrorism, but sometimes it's worked.

So we have to define narrowly where we need to work with them, and but not have any illusions about the fact that they're going to move any closer to our view of the world than we have at the present. And then, and there are other issues. You compartmentalize the relationship. The Arctic, this is an area where we're both working together with them.

And as we now read, there's also a military buildup, and we can become competitors there. So probably we're now in a stage where we are again global competitors in a way that we weren't before, even though, again, the U.S. is much stronger than Russia still. And identify those narrow areas where we can work together.
MICHAEL MORELL:
And where they're creating that turbulence in the world, what do we do?
ANGELA STENT:
So there we have to really devise better ways of deterring them. You know, and of countering them. Clearly, first of all, issues like cyber, election interference, which continues to today, we have to build up our defenses and where appropriate, respond to them.

But so far, we haven't done very well in deterring Russia. And I think we're often surprised by what they do. And so I think we have to be somewhat better at, you know, thinking about where they might go next, of being forward-looking and thinking about that, although that's difficult.