

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:00 Today's episode of Hidden Forces is made possible by listeners like you. For more information about this week's episode, or for easy access to related programming, visit our website at [hiddenforces.io](http://hiddenforces.io) and subscribe to our free email list. If you listen to the show on your Apple podcast app, remember, you can give us a review. Each review helps more people find the show and join our amazing community and with that, please enjoy this week's episode.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:48 What's up everybody? My guest today is Dr. Steven Cohen. Dr. Cohen is professor emeritus of politics at Princeton university and of Russian studies in history at NYU. He's received several scholarly honors over his lengthy career, including two Guggenheim Fellowships and a national book award nomination and was, for many years, a consultant and on-air commentator on Russian affairs for CBS news. Dan Rather, who anchored the CBS evening news desk from 1981 to 2005, as recently as this year, referred to Professor Cohen as " One of, if not the, premier expert on the old Soviet Union, Russia, and Russian history in all of what we call Western civilization."

Demetri Kofinas: 00:01:43 We live in dangerous times, not only in international relations, but also in domestic affairs. Right here at home in our news rooms, lecture halls and university campuses. There have always been political litmus tests in America. During my time as a college student, unabashed support for the military and categorical denunciations of anti-Americanism were prerequisites for any political discussion.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:02:15 Today, a hefty dose of Russian fear-mongering and gratuitous insults leveled at Russian President Vladimir Putin, serve similar functions. Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, a presidential candidate on the Democratic side, was recently accused by former Secretary of State and two-time presidential candidate Hillary Clinton of being a "Russian asset." And Donald Trump is consistently chided for what his critics assert is the conspicuous absence of any criticism of Vladimir Putin.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:02:52 In the years since Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea, Dr. Cohen has become in the words of one writer, the most controversial Russia expert in America. He's been openly critical of NATO expansion for as long as I can remember, and though this criticism puts him in good company, his views on Ukraine and what he sees as America's role in inciting Russian aggression have left him marginalized and oftentimes disparaged, as a "Russian apologist."

Demetri Kofinas: 00:03:27 I can't say I agree with Dr. Cohen on everything, but I heed his counsel and take his warnings very seriously. We are in his view, dangerously close to war with Russia. The title that he has chosen for his most recent book, which consists of a series of commentaries on Russian affairs, originally published at The Nation magazine. He used American foreign policy towards Russia as not only needlessly antagonistic but recklessly endangering of American national security, putting us at the greatest risk of nuclear war since the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:04:11 Regular listeners to this program know that I normally record the second half of my conversations as over time segments, but in this case it didn't feel right to break it up. Dr. Cohen provides long, unhurried answers and this conversation is interspersed with personal stories and anecdotes from his time growing up in the Jim Crow South, his employment as a CBS commentator, as well as his experiences living in the Soviet Union during the Brezhnev and Gorbachev eras.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:04:46 In place of the overtime, I've made available my recently recorded episode with physicist Sean Carroll on quantum mechanics that I won't be releasing for a few more weeks, but the transcript and rundown to this week's episode has been made available as usual to our Patreon, autodidact, and super nerd subscribers. Again, to quote Dan Rather, "Whenever I'm around Professor Cohen, I learn a lot," and I think you will too. And with that, please enjoy my conversation with Professor Stephen Cohen.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:05:29 Dr. Steven Cohen. Professor Steven Cohen! How are you? Welcome to Hidden Forces.

Stephen Cohen: 00:05:36 I don't do doctors because I don't make house calls. Professor's better.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:05:39 But you are a doctor of sorts.

Stephen Cohen: 00:05:41 It's a formality.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:05:43 Of sorts.

Stephen Cohen: 00:05:43 Kissinger likes to be called Dr. Kissinger, but that's because he was never a professor.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:05:47 Is that right? How well do you know Henry Kissinger?

Stephen Cohen: 00:05:49 Not well, but a little.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:05:50 You know him that's still something.

Stephen Cohen: 00:05:52 I know him through family. It's always interesting to talk to him.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:05:55 He must be quite a character. I told you, you were here and we've got some tea and I didn't want to spill the beans before we started-

Stephen Cohen: 00:06:02 And promised me vodka and I ended up with a glass of kind of bland tea.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:06:05 Well we can pour some vodka in there if you want [laughter].

Stephen Cohen: 00:06:08 That was just a reflex, it's okay.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:06:10 So you were my professor freshman year in college.

Stephen Cohen: 00:06:15 I can't change the grade now. It's too late.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:06:17 You actually gave me a really undeservingly good grade.

Stephen Cohen: 00:06:20 Well then you're a preceptor though.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:06:24 I'm ashamed to say that I cut your class often and I should not have, but I did only because I was a freshman and because I was so enthused with the liberation that comes with living in a dormitory as an 18 and 19 year old kid, and I was enjoying NYU a lot. But your class was one of my favorite classes ever that I've ever taken and certainly in college and your lectures were...captivating isn't strong enough of a word and I feel like mesmerizing is too much. Somewhere in between captivating and mesmerizing. You're an incredible storyteller. I remember one particular story and I'll share it later from the lecture, but it was a wonderful time. The lecture hall was enormous and this was part of the core curriculum.

Stephen Cohen: 00:07:09 They called it MAP or something like that, right?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:07:10 Yeah, something like that. I wouldn't have taken it otherwise. It was just wonderful and it's a great honor to have you in studio.

Stephen Cohen: 00:07:17 Well, to gift credit, I taught at Princeton for 30 years. And my own mentor, Robert C. Tucker, whom I regard as maybe the greatest American Russian expert of all times, in terms of the intellectual issues he studied. He didn't live to complete what was projected to be a three-volume biography of Stalin, but the two volumes on Stalin are just extraordinary. There's nothing

better. He also has a book of essays called the Soviet Political Mind, which I think I used in the past.

- Demetri Kofinas: 00:07:49 Yes, I read chapters from that book.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:07:51 What made Tucker interesting as a professor of Russian Studies, is he always left you with a really strong question to think about. Most people who talk about Russia write, about Russia, whether they're academics or journalists or politicians, are full of answers. When you run across somebody who's got a good question about Russia that you haven't thought about it, you don't know the answer to, that's where the intellectual fun really begins. Somebody said to me, he was Russian, actually a famous Russian historian. He said, because don't forget, they had lived under censorship for decades until Gorbachev came. So, this was the glossiness Gorbachev period. He said, "Steve, a good question is always better than any answer." And I think in some ways intellectually that's right.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:08:37 That's interesting. I also remember a scene in the lecture hall where you recounted, you often did this, I mean your love of the Russian people was palpable. It was clear that you had a lot of deep friendships. In fact, I think you also mentioned that Russians, when they don't know you, they can be very cold, but when they know you, they're very warm. I think that might've been something that you mentioned.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:09:03 But I also remember you saying how you would go over to Russia and that your Russian friends would appear to be so much more informed than you were.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:09:10 You mean they were more informed about America than then I was informed of Russia.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:09:14 Perhaps, I remember that they were, but I specifically remember you reenacting your friends and saying "You Americans, you don't know how to read the newspaper. You've got to turn it upside down and look at the corners." Is that something that you've done often?
- Stephen Cohen: 00:09:27 Well, you bring back a lot of memories because it wasn't my first trip to Russia, but beginning in 1976, this is a long time ago, right? This is long before Gorbachev, this was when there was a lot of censorship. I went to live in Russia for extended periods, two, three, four months at a time from 1976-
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:09:47 Brezhnev's period.

Stephen Cohen: 00:09:48 That's right, until 1982 when they took away my visa, they wouldn't allow me in the country. So, from 1982 until Gorbachev came to power in '85, they'd had enough on me. And I just couldn't get in the country, but I have to say that the years I lived there from 1976 to 1972 I wouldn't say it completely transform my thinking about the contemporary Soviet Union completely. But it changed it so fundamentally, and then this is sort of when you run into me, and I began to rewrite all my lectures, I mean no professor, say you give 24, 28 lectures a year, wants to write 24 new, 28 lectures a year.

Stephen Cohen: 00:10:29 That's like 24- 28 articles. Nobody's got that in him. So, what you hope is you've got a core lectures that you can just keep giving or update them and then some new ones. But living in Russia, even though I had studied it for some time already, at least a decade during those years, '76 to '82 before they wouldn't let me come back, everything changed in the way I thought in this sense. That everything, this is the metaphor, I borrow it from somebody, I don't remember. Everything that had seemed great to me now became multicolored, and I start using this word and it was, everything was more complex, but the reality of how people lived.

Stephen Cohen: 00:11:08 You may remember I used to give a lecture that was a favorite. People liked it. It was called "naleva." So naleva in Russian is not easy to translate, but it means sort of like under the table, doing things not by the rules-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:11:20 I do remember this.

Stephen Cohen: 00:11:21 ... and involves things like black market.

Stephen Cohen: 00:11:24 So what I discovered living in Russia were things that obviously couldn't know from afar. For example, how a person got a quality abortion. You remember I told this story. And the way people got, because there was a deficit of quality goods except for the elite, right? And quality goods and services would be everything from apparel, to a safe abortion. Abortion being the ultimate and regular form of birth control and Russia, because the other forms were not readily available.

Stephen Cohen: 00:11:53 So I got to know people who had been through all this process. And what I discovered is that Marx and Engels had said communism would be a moneyless society. Well, the Soviet Union of that period wasn't moneyless, but the money had no value. It was bartering, that somebody had a service or a good, that was scarce and somebody else needed it and they would have to come up with an equally needed scarce good.

Stephen Cohen: 00:12:21 And that's why I began to build this lecture around naleva society, or the real Russian society, where people would do things like literally, I told this in the course, exchanging tickets to an Elton John concert. It's a myth that the Beatles were the most popular at that time. It was Yelton, as they called him, Yelton, Yelton. He gave a big concert, I think it was in Leningrad now, St. Petersburg. And it was like the hottest thing. And I actually knew of a case, that through intermediaries of bartering on the black, gray, multicolored market, actually abortion was obtained for two Elton John tickets.

Stephen Cohen: 00:12:58 But how that happened, it wasn't all, that's sort of funny or sick or depressing in itself. But it was the process of the way the real society worked, which had very little to do with official Soviet society. And of course, what happens is Gorbachev comes forward, declares his policy of Glasnost. In other words, censorship ended, let's talk about how we really live and then all of this became known.

Stephen Cohen: 00:13:21 But when I was living there, it was underground and that's what you heard in those lectures that I contrived to try to capture what Soviet society looked like to me. After all, I had grown up in Kentucky and Indiana and then ended up in New York or Princeton. So, a lot of this took some figuring out on my part.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:13:40 Speaks to the power of the market. And it's interesting in my amateurish studying of Russian history, the post-Soviet period also saw something similar in terms of the flourishing of the black market, right? But you mentioned Kentucky. So, from what I understand, you grew up in Kentucky, this was the Jim Crow South.

Stephen Cohen: 00:13:59 Yes.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:14:00 I'm curious to know what that was like because you were growing up in the 1940's and '50's. First, what was that experience like in and of itself and how did that experience inform what you ended up doing later in your life?

Stephen Cohen: 00:14:14 So the most important thing to keep in mind about my generation who grew up in the segregated South is that when we were young, it seemed perfectly normal, didn't seem wrong, didn't seem-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:14:29 The segregation, the racism, everything.

Stephen Cohen: 00:14:31 I mean the segregation was absolutely complete. I mean, I suppose you know this from reading things. There was a movie recently that showed some of it, but I didn't think it captured all of that. The one about the pianist who-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:14:42 The Green Book.

Stephen Cohen: 00:14:42 Green book, Yeah. I didn't feel that really captured the totality. I mean it was apartheid, it really was. It was an American form of apartheid. Everywhere you went, there was bathroom for the colored, as was written bathroom for the white. Everything was divided, color, white. Where you sat, where you went to school.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:14:58 Fascinating.

Stephen Cohen: 00:14:59 Now there were violations. I mean I was a basketball junkie and basketball was in the black neighborhoods, so I did some mingling.

Stephen Cohen: 00:15:07 But there certainly was, you were in great peril if, there was dating between the races, this was dangerous. Klan wasn't very strong in this part of Kentucky, but it was around, and after all-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:15:20 And you could feel that, you could feel that.

Stephen Cohen: 00:15:21 Well, I went to school with the kids of the Klan, remember. I mean, but they were just funny guys who on holidays rode around in pickups and white sheets.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:15:30 Wow.

Stephen Cohen: 00:15:31 I mean it wasn't, I think the last lynching where I grew up was 1937, before I was born. But the possibility of violence hung over the society. So, I found that interesting when I began to study Soviet society before Gorbachev, when so much was repressed. And I began to ask myself with the help of my own professor, Robert C. Tucker, because I mentioned this to him and this brought me to the major theme of my academic career.

Stephen Cohen: 00:16:01 How repressive societies change, I don't mean to draw a direct parallel between the end of segregation and Kentucky or in the Jim Crow South and the end of repression in the Soviet Union. But the way, it did influence how I began to think about change.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:16:21 Or maybe even the end of the Civil War, compare that to the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Stephen Cohen: 00:16:26 I have to think about that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:16:27 I mean, there was no invasion obviously. But accounts that I've read, Soviet accounts of what it was like after the breakup, that period in the 90s, it was traumatic for a lot of people. Some of the accounts that I read from Andrew Solomon who had spent time in Moscow, particularly his accounts of the artists in Soviet Russia, it seems like it was a radical change of life.

Stephen Cohen: 00:16:54 Well, it was a tragedy. I mean Putin once said, and this was held against him, but it was mistranslated. Putin once said that the end of the Soviet Union, I think he used the word "raspat" (распад), which means something like disintegration, but the end of the Soviet Union, he was reported to have said was the greatest catastrophe of the 20th century and people got all over him.

Stephen Cohen: 00:17:21 They said, "Well, what about the Holocaust? What about World War II?" But actually, if you go back and look at the Russian, what he said, he said, it's very clear there, one of the greatest catastrophes in the 20th century.

Stephen Cohen: 00:17:33 And for the Russian people, to come to your point, that was true because with the end of the Soviet Union, the dislocation was so great. The economic depression by most indicators or criteria exceeded the decline of production services of great American Depression.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:17:53 Depression.

Stephen Cohen: 00:17:53 It was their economic depression was greater than our Great depression, just to put this in perspective. But that had real life consequences. For a period in the 1990's, men were dying on average at 57 years.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:18:08 In the post-Soviet era.

Stephen Cohen: 00:18:10 And in Russia-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:18:10 In Russia.

Stephen Cohen: 00:18:11 ... because the other components had gone their own way. Longevity for women didn't fall as much, and men still die much earlier than men in the United States do but the gap is not so great. But what happened in the 1990's as Putin said, it was a catastrophe for many Russians, they died. I mean, that's a catastrophe. So, when people mock Putin for that, nobody

bothered to go back to the Russian where he said one of the greatest catastrophes. But even today, in order to understand Putin or Putin-ism, if there's such a thing, you have to begin the story in the 1990's and the catastrophe.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:18:46 So I have a lot of questions about your youth and how you first became interested in Russia and your first trip to Russia, which I think was in the late fifties?

Stephen Cohen: 00:18:54 1959.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:18:55 And if we have time we'll get into those. But since we're already here, I want to begin our discussion talking about Russia and maybe how we got to where we are today. But right before we do that, I do want my listeners to really have a sense of your stature, your experience, what it really means to hear from you. You mentioned in terms of life, you've grown up in the 1940's and 50's in Jim Crow South. Dan Rather, to quote Dan Rather, he's called you "One of, if not the, premier experts on the old Soviet Union, Russia and Russian history in all of what we call Western civilization." There's actually a great 92nd Street Y conversation with Dan and your wife Katrina from The Nation. You consulted for, and we're on-air commentator for CBS during which period?

Stephen Cohen: 00:19:43 Oh-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:19:43 Certainly. It was when CBS was CBS. I mean, Dan Rather was the anchor.

Stephen Cohen: 00:19:48 Dan Rather was the anchor.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:19:48 I don't know if you'd ever did Walter Cronkite-

Stephen Cohen: 00:19:50 No.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:19:50 ... before Cronkite left.

Stephen Cohen: 00:19:51 No, no. I met him a few times before he died. But he was emeritus then and would come around. No, I was with CBS, I think it was from, I think briefly what happened was, is that I was given a contract to be on the Today Morning Show of NBC.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:20:05 They didn't have a monkey back then, did they?

Stephen Cohen: 00:20:07 No. They were more serious then, but the idea was they wanted to build in, because the Soviet Union was so important, a

regular dialogue between a so-called whatever they call it, hawks and doves. And so, I was supposed to be the dove and they produced somebody who was a hawk and they liked that and I needed to pay the bills, which you can't do-

- Demetri Kofinas: 00:20:26 Must've been a pretty good salary from CBS.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:20:28 looking back, it wasn't that great.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:20:29 Really?
- Stephen Cohen: 00:20:29 But it helped with the kids. And then that was NBC and then CBS saw me and said, "Why are you just doing morning show? Why don't you come to us for a full network contract?" Which meant that I couldn't go on any other commercial networks, but they paid me a lot of money, far more than I was worth. But that's how Dan Rather and I began to travel to Russia --
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:20:48 Must have been also cool to be on TV back then because now everyone's got a camera. It doesn't mean anything to be on camera.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:20:54 It was pre-cable or-
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:20:56 Yeah, pre-cable with broadcast.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:20:58 I get this right, cable was emerging in various places.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:21:01 Yeah, early 80's was when Ted Turner, CNN, but CNN didn't really take off until the Gulf War, I think.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:21:07 That's right. No, it was the case when I was with CBS that there were three evening news networks that anybody who wanted to follow news would watch. ABC, NBC, CBS, and the anchors were really, really famous. And it was one half hour, by the way.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:21:20 It was Roger Mudd, Dan Rather.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:21:22 Well it changed over the years. I mean, there was Tom Brokaw, but what was interesting was if you take the commercial time out, I think they had something like 24 minutes.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:21:30 Incredible.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:21:32 And some enormous proportion of Americans watched this before or after dinner. It was an American ritual.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:21:39 I was struck by, again that 92nd street Y conversation, listening to Dan Rather unhurried, and this is a big, I think a really a big part, I don't think it can be overstated how detrimental the need to get it out, get it out, be the first to say something before you even have any clear idea of what you're saying, is really hurting our conversation today. So, we're going to get into all of these different-

Stephen Cohen: 00:22:06 Well hold that thought for one second. What's interesting you see, in part and depressing, is with the advent of so-called Russia-gate, the allegations for which I can find zero evidence that Trump is incriminated or complicit-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:22:21 Well hasn't he now been effectively, not technically absolved, but effectively, he certainly wasn't found guilty of collusion.

Stephen Cohen: 00:22:29 The charges against him come so fast and I've lost track of what they're-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:22:32 And you were write, you were writing critically of the investigation before the Mueller Report came out.

Stephen Cohen: 00:22:35 But here's what the point is that I want to make is that until this happened, you had to have certain credentials to be regarded by the media as "a Russia expert." Now everybody's Russia expert.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:22:47 Right. That's got to annoy you.

Stephen Cohen: 00:22:49 It doesn't annoy me, it bemuses me because last night for a few minutes, I was watching one of the, probably on CNN or maybe MSNBC, and I mean some woman was going on about Putin and Russia. She obviously knew nothing, but it's in the culture now what you're supposed to think, and I don't know if it's depressing or amusing, but it's certainly not good for national security.

Stephen Cohen: 00:23:11 There was a time, I don't want to dramatize it, but I was there. I was at one of the three major networks for a very long time. I knew the people at the other networks because we would all go to Russia together to cover big events. These were very serious people. And one of the things that the bosses, that would be the president of the news divisions and the executive producers didn't want was BS coming out of the mouths of people that they were putting on the air. So, if somebody put a blowhard on who clearly was office perch, right? I mean, or didn't know what

they're talking about. Whoever put that person on was going to get some grief.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:23:49

That's all you got.

Stephen Cohen: 00:23:50

Now it's completely different.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:23:51

Right, right. What matters now is that the person gets attention and he can get eyeballs.

Stephen Cohen: 00:23:54

And the fact is, that I know maybe three, when I would call really informed, fully presentable, lucid people who were really among the leading American experts on Russia who haven't been on any of these TV broadcasts in years because they don't fit what's needed now.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:24:19

Well there is a litmus test today when it comes to Russia. So, it's interesting, there are lots of threads here. First of all, I think it's my view that certainly in all of American history that I've lived through, America has always needed a boogeyman or two or three. During the Bush administration, it was Islamic terrorism, it was Saddam. Also, the one of the litmus tests was saying that you support the troops. You could show that without having to say it, by getting a lapel pin. There's always a litmus test and we have recently gone through a period of hysteria with Russia. And it's really sad and frustrating is that whenever we go through these periods of hysteria, once it's over, they just move on to the next thing. And what's left behind is sort of wreckage and there isn't a reflection on what has happened here.

Stephen Cohen: 00:25:13

There can even be a lost generation. When I came from Kentucky and Indiana, I went to Indiana University. And I grew up, as I said in Kentucky, which was about 130 miles away across the Ohio River. So, I had really grown up in what Russians would call the American provinces. I mean, it's not meant to be derogatory, it just means it's not a capital city, in the provinces. So, I came in the 60s to Columbia University to do my Ph.D. And the first thing, I don't want to say it shocked me because I knew the history, but the first thing that impressed me was, is that two of my professors had been personally called in name by McCarthy as Soviet agents. It was completely untrue, ludicrous. But they had been left as one used to say to me, "Stevie, I still have a jumpy stomach, be careful." That they had been left with a caution, which they passed on to some of their students.

Stephen Cohen: 00:26:15

And the point was that if you want to make a career studying Russia, then communist Russia, Russia in general, be careful,

just be careful. Don't get out on a limb. Don't make yourself a target for people like McCarthy and his descendants. So that was meant to be kind, but in fact it was dysfunctional because what you want or I want is my best students to think way outside the box, not simply to find the cautious turf and stand there. Why do I mention this? Because it's back. It's back. Not the way as bad as it was during the McCarthy years, but I know of cases of young scholars who have chosen, say their dissertation topics, which you have to write to get a Ph.D., right, if you want to go on and be a professor, who've chosen not the topic that really interested in them most but a safer topic.

- Stephen Cohen: 00:27:10 And if people begin to speak and write with any kind of self-censor operating in their head, that's just not good. And so, we're at risk if this continues and it's begun again, was before Trump, it began before Trump, but it's been-
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:27:28 Yeah, we've covered it on this program.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:27:30 ... intensified with Trump, we're going to lose a whole generation of young scholars to caution.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:27:34 No, it is very concerning. And this is also, this brings up though again something else that's really underappreciated and it's hard to appreciate it unless you already have it to begin with, which is a familiarity with history. At least have studied enough history to appreciate just how little all of us know and all of us understand. I want to also emphasize that I do remember in your lectures, you making that point that this is your view. This is your experience of history, but that we need to engage with this material on our own and come to our own understanding.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:04 So I want to ask you again, I bring it back to that question. You know when I was in your class, spring semester 2000, this was before the 9/11 attacks, all right? This is about six months before September 11th, when really the world changed politically and after the 9/11 attacks, of course, Vladimir Putin and Russia were presented, at least in the media, and he presented himself also, as our allies, allies in the war against terror, allies in any adventure we would have in Afghanistan.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:37 But even then before that, in the 2000s and the 90s, everything in the popular culture, whether it was images of Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin laughing and being chummy on the White House lawn. If it was movies like Independence Day that featured Americans and Russians working together to defeat an international race of aliens, the sense was that the Cold War

was over. We were now buddies and we were going to build this new future together.

- Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:05 And this was of course a time where the new conservative movement began its swell. Neo-conservatism goes back to at least Irving Kristol, but it was gathering force, right? Pervading the foreign policy establishment. So how did we go from this world where that I was in studying Russian history with you. There was no controversy around Russia, you were not controversial. To now where we are today, where Russia is seen as a mortal enemy and you are seen as a controversial person with a controversial opinion.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:29:38 Of course we could digress, I won't, and ask what controversial means. There was a feature article about me in the Journal of Higher Education, which is kind of the Bible of professional educators, which referred to me as the most, I think I have this right, I put it on the cover of my new book "War with Russia?," the most controversial Russia expert in America.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:02 Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Stephen Cohen: 00:30:04 And I liked that, I didn't mind that at all. But the question, is what is controversial mean? And what they were referring to, because the guy who came to write the article about me, I remember the context of the question, was in 2014 when the Ukrainian crisis began and I presented an alternative view of its origins and its dangers and how to resolve it. That was my new, I had been controversial before, but now it's starting all over and that's where I got this tag, " Oh, he's a Russian apologist or a Putin apologist." Because I thought we were complicit in the crisis that unfolded in Ukraine.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:30:38 But, it comes, I guess with the baggage that we've already looked at the past, it comes with studying Russia. You either take it seriously, well, I take it seriously, it upsets my wife. You let it affect what you do and think and say and right or you don't. That's the crucial thing. And I come back to my point, if young people who see what happened to me after 2014 and after all I was, established figure pretty well known. If they could do that to me, how could they be safe? They had no careers, no reputation, but they had to make career and reputation for the sake of their family.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:31:15 I got a lot, I mean I got quite a few emails or personal contacts of young people saying, "Well I think as you do, but dare I say so publicly." And I told them, no, wait until you got your-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:31 Absolutely.

Stephen Cohen: 00:31:32 ... get your position and then once you got your position secured-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:36 Even then we live in a different time and I can tell you in my position, fielding incoming on social media, it can be scary. And what you say can be taken out of context and it can destroy you. It is a dangerous time in many different ways. I want to pose a question because I remember two particular things from your lectures that I think, and they basically are ways of asking a larger question, which is, what don't we Americans-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:32:03 ... the larger question, which is what don't we Americans get about Russia? And the two things that I remember most that stuck with me, and I realized it only when I began to prepare for this interview, I realized I've been channeling Dr. Cohen at least one of these questions because I've been saying for years or contextualized in conversations about Russia in terms of NATO expansion eastward. I got that from you. I'm pretty sure I got that from your lecture. Certainly, you've been saying it for years. The other thing that I remember from your lecture had to do with the grievance of the 1990s. The extent to which the experience of the liquidation of Soviet public assets and the privatization of the Soviet empire or Soviet Russia in the hands of the oligarchs, the extent to which that resentment drives modern Russian politics. What don't Americans understand that you think they need to understand that would change their overall understanding of our relationship with Russia?

Stephen Cohen: 00:33:01 That its history has been so different from our own, or at least so different from the history of the majority of white Americans, and it's important to make that distinction. Think a minute about Russia's modern history in the 20th century. Don't even go back to serfdom and the rest, but start occupation in World War I, the Russian Revolution, three years of a brutal civil war, in some ways more brutal than our own Civil War. In the early '20s, famine. Imposed collectivization of 125 million peasants in the late 1920s by Stalin, followed by another famine. World War II, about 27 million Soviet citizens died in World War II. I mean, we can't imagine-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:33:55 More Russians died than any other nationality, right? During World War II.

Stephen Cohen: 00:33:59 Not sure about that. Probably more than Germans would be the question. Probably more Russians. Yeah. I think 670,000 American died just for proportion. But to me this was... And this

was also occupation. I mean, the Nazis occupied a large part. It was a crucible experience for Russians. After that comes the collapse of the Stalin cult, which two generations had been raised on the belief. It was taught in the schools, in the popular culture, in the ideological centers that Stalin was the kindest and most genius person who had ever ruled any country, and that was torn down. Then come the changes under Khrushchev, then comes the end of the Soviet Union, followed by a horrible depression in the 1990s. So, you said, what's the difference between Russians and Americans? The easy, cliched and semi correct true thing to say is what people always say, "Oh, we're just like Russians. We love our kids. We all want to have a successful, satisfying career. We want the best for our children, et cetera, et cetera. We want good health. We're just people, why can't we get along?"

- Stephen Cohen: 00:35:13 This is only superficially true. The fact is this is history that I've just enumerated for you in a very sketchy way. Means that Russians have been through a crucible quite different from most Americans and therefore they see life and its possibilities and its dangers, not all of them, but a great many of them, than do Americans. One Russian used to like to say to me, he was a television personality. This was during Soviet censor time. Everybody watched him because everybody knew he'd say something that was forbidden, but he would sneak it in. And then the next day, "Did you hear what Sasha Bolvan said last night? Oh my God, how'd they get that on the air?" But he was famous for sneaking something in.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:56 What period was this?
- Stephen Cohen: 00:35:57 This was the late '70s and early '80s. And I knew him pretty well, but my friends would watch him, and I would watch him when I was in Russia, watch him on TV. He's a great big guy. Weighed about 300 pounds. And he just had the look of a guy... Had a big walrus mustache and he looked like trouble. But they liked him and they kept him on the air. He had some trouble, but they kept him on the air. But he used to say, and it's important, that "People can't jump out of their history any more than you and I can jump out of our skin." This is fundamental. I mean, to ask a people simply to become something other than their history has been, whether you begin it with their grandparents who told all the kids and the stories that weren't permitted by the censored press, or their parents, you know what your parents went through.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:36:46 It was a very different experience than almost all Americans, certainly white Americans went through. So, we are different in

the way we perceive things. Now that began to change, I guess, with the end of the Soviet Union, but what you had mentioned, the disillusionment that kicks in again in particularly places like the New York Times. You can even track this in the columns of Nicholas Kristof, one of my favorite negative examples of how to write about Russia. When he literally wrote that Putin had let him, Kristof, down, because Putin had not turned out to be a sober Yeltsin.

- Stephen Cohen: 00:37:22 Well, what he meant by Yeltsin was Yeltsin, outwardly at least, went along with this charade that Bill Clinton enacted in the '90s of this great Russian-American post-Soviet friendship. It wasn't true. It was for public consumption. And Kristof wanted Putin to be like Yeltsin in that regard. That is to be completely deferential to American interest or what Kristof thought were American interest. And when Putin turned out to be different from Yeltsin, Kristof felt personally betrayed. So, there is an example of what we're expecting Russian leaders to be, and yet they're coming out of a completely different history.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:38:01 Yeah, I do want to talk about that. I want to bring us back to this point about NATO. You recognize this man as George Kennan-
- Stephen Cohen: 00:38:07 Oh, that's Kennan.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:38:08 Yes. George Kennan.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:38:09 Hold on a second.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:38:10 Yes.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:38:11 So I lived and taught in Princeton when George lived in Princeton and I knew him very well, but I've never seen this photograph. And the reason is of course George was much older when I knew him. He's quite a young man there. He looks like he might be in his 40s.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:38:24 That might've been when he was stationed in Moscow.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:38:25 It might've been. Yeah. But I knew him when he was already this kind of wizened, gray elder statesman who had this up and down career with Washington.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:38:35 I've mentioned his long telegram often. Of course, it's one of the sort of foundational pieces of American foreign policy that anyone reads who's interested in international relations. He

gave an interview in 1998, I don't know if you remember this, to Thomas Friedman. And it was in-

Stephen Cohen: 00:38:54 I do remember.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:38:54 It was in the New York Times. It was titled Foreign Affairs; Now A Word From X. And of course, X was because it was-

Stephen Cohen: 00:39:01 George had signed the-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:02 Signed X when it was published in Foreign Affairs-

Stephen Cohen: 00:39:04 Anonymously.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:05 Anonymously. And I want to read some passages from this article because I find it to be incredibly prescient to the point that it's disturbingly prescient.

Stephen Cohen: 00:39:13 On Kennan's part, not on Friedman's.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:15 On Kennan's part. Yeah, no, not on Friedman's part. I'm going to just take pieces of it because they really make this point. He said, I think when referring to the expansion of NATO, he says-

Stephen Cohen: 00:39:25 This is George Kennan?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:26 This is George Kennan speaking.

Stephen Cohen: 00:39:28 He's speaking to Friedman.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:28 Yes. He said, "I think it is the beginning of a new Cold War. I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies. I think it is a tragic mistake. It shows so little understanding of Russian history and Soviet history. Of course, there's going to be a bad reaction from Russia and then the NATO expanders will say that we always told you it is how the Russians are, but this is just wrong." And he ended the conversation according to Friedman saying, "This has been my life, and it pains me to see it so screwed up in the end." Wow.

Stephen Cohen: 00:40:09 I remember it vividly, and I even remember George talking to some of us at Princeton about what he was going to say, and not only to Friedman, but when he went to Washington to testify because he was a sought after figure still. The takeaway for me is how prescient George Kennan was, how clear the cautionary warning he was giving about NATO expansion, and how little Friedman took away from it personally.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:40:38 Yes. Well, he's been a cheerleader of-

Stephen Cohen: 00:40:40 That's right. Because his columns have not been in the spirit of George Kennan.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:40:45 A lot of people got carried away. You know? I think that's also something that I think is easily forgotten from that period. People got swept up.

Stephen Cohen: 00:40:53 You're talking about NATO expansion?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:40:55 Not just NATO... Yes, in that period, but I mean also people got swept up in the post-Cold War world, this idea of American exceptionalism, moral superiority, that America was now basically... It was the full spectrum dominance idea that we were going to become the global hegemon, number one. We were going to set the international agenda, we were going to drive it forward and no one was going to get in our way. And in fact, I think a couple of years ago or a year ago maybe it was, or two years ago, I've got the information in my rundown for subscribers, these documents were made public because you'd been talking about this for years, that Gorbachev who you know very well, was given assurances by Jim Baker that NATO would not move an inch, not one inch to the East. And some of this information-

Stephen Cohen: 00:41:39 Right. Published-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:41:40 Yeah, so it's now-

Stephen Cohen: 00:41:41 The transcripts of the discussions were made-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:41:41 A historical fact. I want to read one more thing though from Kennan's interview. He said, "I was particularly bothered," because you mentioned that he testified before the Senate, and he referred to the Senate conversation as superficial and ill informed, the debate in the Senate. And he said, "I was particularly bothered by the references to Russia as a country dying to attack Western Europe. Don't people understand our differences in the Cold War were with the Soviet communist regime and now we are turning our backs on the very people who mounted the greatest bloodless revolution in history to remove that Soviet regime." That also really stuck out to me, because the Cold War lasted how long?

Stephen Cohen: 00:42:26 Well, the people [inaudible 00:42:28] that Cold War. We're in a new cold war-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:42:30 Yeah, sure. It lasted a very long time. The fact that it ended without a shot, it's one of those things where when you look back, I think for most of us, I don't think we really fully appreciate how lucky we are. And you've made this point time and again and I think it's so important. During the Cold War, and I want you to make it yourself, during the Cold War, Americans, we were all taught to be afraid of nuclear war. It was in the culture, especially in the early years. The Cuban Missile Crisis, there was real anxiety that we could see a nuclear apocalypse. We have in some ways, we don't have by number necessarily, but as you've made the point, we have I think, intermediate range nuclear missiles now that we didn't have that we got rid of in the '80s under Reagan and Gorbachev. In some ways, tensions are higher and we have less awareness of these weapons and the potential for this type of war.

Stephen Cohen: 00:43:24 Well, look at the so-called discussion or debate about Ukraine going on in Congress, driven by people who want to get Trump for some misdeed he did with Ukraine. And they're bringing forward all these career diplomats to testify who are so called Ukrainian experts, Americans, and who were stationed there. But if you read what they say, it's horrifying. For them, and they say this candidly, the war against Russian aggression has never ended. Ukraine is the front line. We have to stop Russia in Ukraine or it's going to be, I don't know where, San Francisco. I mean this is exactly what we were told and what Kennan was protesting whenever that was, 40 or 50 years ago. It's all back. It's preposterous, but it's also really, really dangerous. That's why in my book, "War with Russia?," I make the argument this really is a new Cold War and we need to think about it as such because there were lessons we learned that enabled us to survive the preceding Cold War that we have not learned yet, and things are really, really dangerous.

Stephen Cohen: 00:44:33 I mean, I make the argument in the book that this new Cold War, this has been my main theme for the last few years, this new Cold War, which your generation gets from my generation. Whereas my generation got the last one from our predecessors, you get this one from us. This is more dangerous. It's interesting how this war it went and the limits to what you can... I mean, I've been excluded from mainstream media now for several years, but nonetheless, I have an audience, so I'm always curious to the extent to which I persuaded people of what I think may need to be persuaded about. People gradually, there was a lot of pushback on this when I began this, at least in 2014 if not before, arguing we were now in a new Cold War with Russia. People said, "No, no, that's not possible. I remember Condi Rice said Cohen's got it all wrong." And gave the reasons.

Stephen Cohen: 00:45:23 I don't think anybody today reasonable would deny we're in a new Cold War with Russia, but I go on to make a secondary point that's more important to me. This one's more dangerous. We can't say, "Okay, it's a new Cold War. We survived the preceding." So, the question becomes, asked to me, "Why is it more? In what way?" Now in my book "War with Russia?," I have a chapter which gives 10 reasons, but that's too many. I never should've given that many. You should get down... Something for all writers to learn. B, you're not going to get people 10 reasons and persuade them. Give them three or four and you got a good chance of winning them over, but stop and think. Unlike the preceding Cold War, this new Cold War is on Russia's borders, the epicenter, the political epicenter, Ukraine and the Baltics. The preceding Cold War was in faraway Berlin.

Stephen Cohen: 00:46:11 Think of the possibilities of mishap and some of them have already been reported. Some of them haven't been reported. Look at these buildups. I mean massive American NATO buildups on Russia's borders. There was nothing like that during the preceding Cold War. To the extent that we had combat with the Soviet Union, the preceding, throughout the Cold War, it was through proxies in what we used to call the third world. Ethiopia. I mean if something went wrong in Ethiopia, it wasn't existential. If something goes wrong in Ukraine or in the Baltic area, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, where NATO is building up, if something goes wrong militarily, you're talking about war with Russia. We're told in a hush way because they don't want to announce it officially, they have something called deconfliction is going on. Have you heard about this?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:47:05 No.

Stephen Cohen: 00:47:06 This means that the Russian generals and the American generals have a private secret correspondence where when there's a possibility of military conflict, they're in touch to be sure there is none. So, this tells us two things really important. That the military people themselves see the risk of military conflict. American, Russian. The New York Times may not see it, but the big military-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:47:31 Who's reporting this? Where are you hearing it?

Stephen Cohen: 00:47:32 You can read it anywhere. Google deconfliction talks. That there is a process, I assume it's... I don't know if it's on email or in closed telephone, what the communication is, but you can even read about in the paper occasionally. But deconfliction. Deconfliction. It was in Syria. It's in Ukraine. It's wherever, too many places, that American and Soviet military power are

eyeball to eyeball. That the generals on both sides have kind of a constant process. They alert each other to maneuvers. If something goes out of whack, they immediately say, "Please don't attack us. That was a mistake. We're sorry, we'll make remedies." But this tells you that the people who know, know there's actually a risk unlike that existed during the preceding Cold War.

- Stephen Cohen: 00:48:18 So what are we discussing in Washington instead? This is what Senate hearings should be about. You mentioned new weapons. So, the Russians have developed something called hypersonic weapons, missiles. You heard about them?
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:48:32 Sure.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:48:32 The history of this is very important for Americans to recognize. Once upon a time, there was a wonderful treaty called the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the ABM treaty. It prohibited the United States and the Soviet Union, we were the only... Well, there may have been other signatories, but we had the weapons, from deploying an anti-ballistic missile. And it was one of the wisest treaties ever, right? Because it meant that if planners in Moscow or in Washington knew that they attack the other, they were going to get obliterated too. It was called mutually assured destruction, and that protected us for decades. But now suddenly the United States says it has a weapon, an anti-ballistic missile, that can stop anybody from striking the United States, that makes the Russians think, maybe we'll do a first strike. And that's something you never want anybody to think.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:24 But no one really believes that missile defense systems actually are credible. Right? Certainly not for the type of force that the Russians can deploy.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:49:31 Now you get into Dr. Strangelove reasoning. I assume your listeners are aware of Dr. Strangelove movie where he said-
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:38 It's the Stanley Kubrick-
- Stephen Cohen: 00:49:40 Yeah, we won't lose more than 40 million and they'll be replaced by all the women and men in-
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:45 That was Kissinger. Kissinger, I think had written his PhD on limited nuclear war. Did he not?
- Stephen Cohen: 00:49:51 But before we leave this stop and think what this discussion is about.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:53 Sure.

Stephen Cohen: 00:49:54 I mean stop and think about it. And one reason we should stop and think about it is that almost none of our political candidates who want to be President of the United States are talking about it. I mean this is what they should be talking about. One of the things. And the reason they don't talk about it, it's not well reported. There is no awareness of it. So, the fact that we've come to a point where military strategists on each side are contemplating how they could get away with a first strike and without retaliation, that we're back to that again, come back. Something that we thought was behind us. And it's not being discussed in the political discourse in a presidential year by the Washington Post or the New York Times or such newspapers. That is why, one reason why, I say the new Cold War is more dangerous because the dangers of the old Cold War were discussed all the time and those of the new Cold War are scarcely recognized.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:50:54 I have a lot of thoughts about what you've said. First of all, you gave 10 reasons, you could have given 100 reasons. I mean, you can't possibly get nuanced enough on this type of a conversation. I don't know how good a job I will do representing the opposition or people that would disagree with you. So, one thing I would recommend is for folks to check out a Munk Debate that you were part of with Vladimir Posner on one side, and on the other side was Gary Kasparov and Anne Applebaum. To get that perspective-

Stephen Cohen: 00:51:26 That was in Toronto.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:51:26 That was in 2015.

Stephen Cohen: 00:51:28 The famous Canadian format, the Munk Debate.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:51:31 Yes, it was good. And I think they made their own set of valid points. But the reason that also came up in my mind now as we're talking is, I was reminded of, and I understand why, because I think Anne grew up in Poland, right? And of course, Gary grew up in the Soviet Union. You know the level of emotion on their end, and I do understand it, I'm not trying to suggest that I can't sympathize with it, but there doesn't seem to be an adequate amount of reflection. You know how they say cooler heads... Let's hope cooler heads prevail? It doesn't seem like we have a lot of cool heads. It seems like we have a lot of hotheads and people seem unfairly comfortable with the current state of affairs and don't seem to appreciate the dangers.

Stephen Cohen: 00:52:14 Well that was a point I was trying to make. We can make it in a bumper sticker, if we're talking about American-Russian relations, that the dangers far exceed any awareness of them. I mean, this book that I published, "War with Russia?," I never thought I'd ever put a title like that on a book, "War with Russia?" Partly because I never thought until recent years that war with Russia was possible, conceivable. And then working on this book, I began to think it was. And since the book is for general readers, not for my fellow scholars, I wanted to put a title on the book that got people's attention. "War with Russia?," and it covers the period since 2013 when I think that danger has developed and it continued to grow and people know about Trump and all that stuff, but it began before Trump, and if Trump goes away tomorrow it's still going to be there. And yet again, there's no media awareness or focus on it.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:53:16 So, okay. Another thing that you've said is that, "In America we've demonized Putin and we've Putinized Russia." What is the reason? Again, this sort of brings back to a question that I asked a couple of times, which is how did we get here? How did we get to this place where Russia is the enemy without taking away the fact that I do think you would acknowledge that Putin is an authoritarian leader and that Russia, you would know better how you would describe their government, but it isn't a system that I would want to live under. Acknowledging that, how did we get to this point today where we are moving apart as opposed to coming together?

Stephen Cohen: 00:53:59 By the way, I'm not so sure. I mean obviously you would not care to live in Russia instead of here in the United States, but you might find that if you were transported there in your current guise that things wouldn't be so different. You could have this radio show there.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:54:14 But could I speak out against the government the way I can speak out against the government here?

Stephen Cohen: 00:54:18 [crosstalk 00:54:18] every day. I mean more hateful things are said about Putin probably, maybe not qualitatively, but quantitatively, in the Russian media.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:54:25 I suppose there are things that you can and can't say.

Stephen Cohen: 00:54:28 Well that he's betrayed the country. He's betrayed Ukraine. He's capitulated to the Americans. He's a weak leader. He sold his soul. Will that do?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:54:36 So what will get you in trouble in Russia? What kind of comments will get you killed? I mean there've been journalists that have been killed.

Stephen Cohen: 00:54:42 Not by the Kremlin. This is a bogus lie.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:54:45 You made the point that they've actually been by the oligarchs, but you know-

Stephen Cohen: 00:54:48 I mean, I don't know who killed all these people, but there's no logic to the argument. This whole business about the Skripals and Litvinenko in London and Nemtsov in the sight of the Kremlin. Whoever killed these people, Putin had no motive. Why would he? I mean, it's done nothing but tarnish his own reputation.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:06 Is he trying to kill Bill Browder?

Stephen Cohen: 00:55:08 I don't want to say anything about Bill Browder because I have a grievance with Bill Browder too.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:13 I know that he's not a popular guy. And I mentioned to you that he's been on the show and I understand why he's not popular. Because he was-

Stephen Cohen: 00:55:19 I don't know why you say he's not popular. He's got access to every mass media in the United States.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:23 Oh no, he's popular in the US, he's popular in the Western world.

Stephen Cohen: 00:55:26 At CNN they can't get enough of him.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:28 No question about it. No question about it.

Stephen Cohen: 00:55:29 He just doesn't tell the truth systematically, shall we say.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:31 Well, I think that I understand why Russian people have an issue with Bill Browder. I think it has to do with the fact that he was a foreign investor taking advantage of-

Stephen Cohen: 00:55:40 I'm not sure the ordinary Russian has ever heard the name, but the Russian political elite.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:44 I got a lot flak from Russian listeners or Russian people on social media by having him on. And I also experienced a surge of pro-US Browder bots. What were effectively bots on social media

supporting the episode. Actually, it's an interesting thing. When I put that episode out, they got a huge social media surge, but it didn't reflect in the listenership, which I thought was very interesting. And that suggests to me that it had a lot of bot support. We do live in a crazy world with intelligence services and everything, but what you're saying now-

- Stephen Cohen: 00:56:16 I know there's a documentary film about Browder made by a Russian, very well thought of Russian filmmaker, who's anti-Putin, by the way, just to mix things up. I think his name is Andre Nemtsov. You can Google it. Nemtsov. I think that's his name. Went to a lot of trouble to get an either... I don't know if he's got an English voiceovers or subtitles, but to make it accessible. And Browder spent a fortune trying to keep that film from being shown. So that tells you all you need to know about Bill Browder. He spends a lot of time with lawyers threatening to sue people if they publish or show anything that's critical of this myth he's created.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:56:51 He did make a lot of money in Russia, but his lawyer also was murdered by one of the oligarchs or some network of private interests.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:57:03 I don't want to go into this with you, but that's not what happened.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:03 All right.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:57:03 Even Browder doesn't [inaudible 00:57:05]. He said he was murdered by the Russian authorities and President-
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:07 Right, which were working... Yeah. Okay. Yeah, correct.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:57:11 He died badly. Unnecessarily. He died unjustly. But Browder's version of what happened in that prison seems not to be true. And let me remind you that people die in American prisons all the time from abuse.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:28 Well, we had someone recently that died-
- Stephen Cohen: 00:57:30 I didn't want to make the connection.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:32 In solitary confinement.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:57:32 But we have a long history of people dying of penal abuse in prison. This is a separate story that Browder spun to evade

charges that he massively stole money and failed to pay his taxes in Russia. That's what this is-

- Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:49 He had a convincing story. Anyway, I only know his side of the story and-
- Stephen Cohen: 00:57:54 You're not going to get his positive word out of me.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:56 Okay.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:57:56 Except one positive word. Many years ago, when I was teaching in Princeton and living there several days of the week, Browder's father, as you may know, was Earl Browder, who was the head of the American Communist Party.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:58:08 Yes I do. I do remember that.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:58:10 Earl had retired to Princeton. He was now an old man and I thought it'd be cool to go and meet Earl Browder, this famous former leader of the American Communist Party in the 1940s. So, I rang up and he said, "Come over." And I sat around and had an inane chat with him for about an hour or so. And I remember a little kid running around the room. It could have been his grandkid, it could have been Bill Browder.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:58:36 Well that's an interesting story.
- Stephen Cohen: 00:58:38 And I was on TV with Browder a couple times before things between us got tense, and I always meant to ask him if it was possible and that was him, but it didn't happen. But I don't think Browder is a healthy factor.
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:58:50 So I want to comment on something here, which is, this is sort of a meta-observation. I think, again, it's sort of a comment on what's wrong with our marketplace of ideas, how we have conversations. It's not a problem for me what you just said here about Browder or journalists. First of all, I don't have a clear opinion, but I'm also, there's nuance in your words and I think that today saying what you just said, if you said that on mainstream media, I think it would be an awkward moment for people because-
- Stephen Cohen: 00:59:26 About Browder?
- Demetri Kofinas: 00:59:27 No. Oh, about Browder. Also, about your view about Putin not having been behind the murder of that individual. What's his name again? The poisoning of the person in London.

Stephen Cohen: 00:59:38 There's the Skripal's, there's Litvinenko, there's [crosstalk 00:27:39].

Demetri Kofinas: 00:59:39 Yeah, your words, it's again, it's the point about the litmus test. Your words are put through a funnel and when it comes to Russia in America today, you've got to have a very clear opinion. You know? And that's true for a lot of different things. You have to have a very clear view and if you waiver from that a little bit, people don't know what to do with you. And you've been called a Putin apologist. I think actually your point that you made earlier that in fact you're, or maybe you made it in a different interview, that you're actually an American apologist.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:00:06 And I think conversations in America proceed from a place of moral assertiveness. And I think this comes through in spades on the other side when you listen to Russians, the frustrations that Russians have. And it's not just Russians, the Iranians have this also. I watched an Intelligence Squared debate where... I think you were on this. That's right. You were on this panel, and the final debate question was about Iran and the way it was framed was so ridiculous. And yeah, I'm going off on a tangent.

Stephen Cohen: 01:00:40 Tangents are good. Sometimes we say what we really want to say. Self-censorship is bad. And let me just put a footnote to what you said. I've said it before and it goes to why shows like yours are important. And the point of it is, is that the discourse in America about Russia and not only about Russia, and I mean the discourse coming out of Washington and our major newspapers and networks, is so primitive and so uninformed and so politicized that having alternative media... I guess that's what it's called, right?

Stephen Cohen: 01:01:14 I mean, my wife is the editor in chief and publisher of The Nation magazine and has been for a quarter of a century, Katrina vanden Heuvel. And it's considered an alternative medium, even though it's read in the mainstream, but the views that it presents and the writers it uses are not mainstream writers for the most part. But to applaud ourselves, and look how democratic we are, you have your show, there's The Nation magazine, but the fact is what's the impact on Washington where policy is made?

Stephen Cohen: 01:01:47 These people do very selective reading and listening. I know a number of aides to very influential Senators and members of the House, and the aides are really the ones who decide what these people are going to read. They make sure they have it in their packets. Sometimes it's a subscription, sometimes it's a clip from the article. And you know, the aides tend to be

Washington-centric, comes down to these handful of sources. So, I keep coming back that the dangers are far greater than the discourse we're having about them. That to me is why the new Cold War is more dangerous than the preceding Cold War. Ask me what to do about it. I am not sure. But clearly in normal democratic circumstances, a presidential candidate would take up this cause and it would be covered by the media.

- Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:39 So that's a good way to pivot.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:02:41 Because we're in a presidential season. I mean, we don't get it.
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:44 It's a good way to pivot to Tulsi Gabbard, who is one of the Democratic candidates who has not gotten perhaps the amount of mainstream coverage that is warranted, at least for her pacifist views. How well do you know Tulsi?
- Stephen Cohen: 01:03:01 Well, I know her and I know her well enough to say that it's not correct to say she has pacifist views. I mean she served in the military. I don't know how many people she killed, if anybody, but she's still I think a Colonel in the Reserve, she goes off and [inaudible 00:31:17]. She's not a pacifist. What she is, is an anti-interventionist, by which she means that we have been involved for a long time in a succession of reckless, unnecessary wars abroad that have done everybody more harm than good.
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:03:35 Hillary Clinton said that she's a Russian asset.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:03:38 Well, it doesn't speak well for Hillary Clinton, does it?
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:03:41 Why do you think that she said that?
- Stephen Cohen: 01:03:43 Hillary?
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:03:44 Yeah, and not just Hillary, but she's not the first person. This has been a thing with Tulsi. They've accused her of being-
- Stephen Cohen: 01:03:51 I don't know. The first article, big article, that I saw slurring Tulsi began with me. It said, "The well-known Putin apologist, professor Stephen...
- Stephen Cohen: 01:04:03 ... it said, the well-known Putin apologist Professor Stephen Cohen, made a financial donation to Tulsi Gabbard's presidential campaign. Well, the second half is true. I did send, I don't know, some bucks to her to keep her voice in the race, but the business of being a Putin apologist is something that, this

was nbc.com. They're particularly anti-Tulsi and they had been banging away at her. It's disgraceful.

- Stephen Cohen: 01:04:26 Why do they do it? Are they such believers in this war for American foreign policy that we pursued for decades that they can't stand the dissent alternative view she represents? If that's the case, this is maybe the most powerful network in America. Why would a network have such an ideology? Where's this coming from?
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:04:52 What a question.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:04:52 I mean, why would a network, as a corporate entity, aren't they busy over there with sex scandals? You'd think they'd have something else to worry about, but it's unusual, I think, for a network to go after a presidential candidate the way NBC has gone after her.
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:05:05 Why? Why do you think?
- Stephen Cohen: 01:05:07 I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:05:07 It's interesting.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:05:09 But, the point of it is, for me, is that the issue of, I mean put this historical and use the language of my generation, detente with Russia, or Cold War. Detente meaning more cooperation, less conflict. That was a term. Had been a factor in many presidential campaigns before. Right? Eisenhower ran, in fact, saying that he would do something to ratchet down and you saw what happened. The shoot down of the U2.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:05:41 There are powerful forces both in Moscow and in Washington who are perfectly happy with this new Cold War and will sabotage it. There were episodes under Obama where somebody in the Department of Defense ran a sabotage campaign against a peace overture by Obama. You can see what they're doing to Trump, no matter what you think about Trump, the moment, and I remember this vividly, during his presidential campaign, he said, "I think it would be a good idea to cooperate with Russia."
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:06:10 Yeah.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:06:11 I remember this vividly, and I remember going on Larry King, who I guess Larry still has a show, but he had a show, went on and I said, "Larry, Trump just put a target on his back the

moment he said he thought it was a good idea to cooperate with Russia." And, he's never gotten that off his back.

- Stephen Cohen: 01:06:25 So, the enemies are strong and it doesn't surprise me they're coming after Tulsi Gabbard.
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:06:29 It's wild. You know, Stephen Colbert, for example, I've heard him multiple times on his show, which I don't really watch because I don't find it funny, but I catch clips on it on YouTube, and on multiple occasions I've heard him complain to his guests. He doesn't say, "Why doesn't it say a single bad thing about Putin?"
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:06:47 Again, it brings us back to this thing about litmus test. Also, to your point about Putinizing Russia, or demonizing Putin and Putinizing Russia.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:06:55 Can I stop you there?
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:06:57 Yeah.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:06:58 It would take as many of your hours of your show to work through this notion that it's the job of the American president to say bad things about the president of Russia, or the leader of the Kremlin. That's not what the American president is supposed to do. And, I don't know how many cases you'd find, if we started in modern times. Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and on, that American presidents spoke ill, in a personal way, about Kremlin leaders.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:07:32 Now, stop and think why this is for one minute. Always hanging over our heads is the possibility of a new Cuban Missile Crisis, not in Cuba. So, you may have young listeners, let me remind them that in 1962 we came close to war with Russia when Russia installed nuclear installations in Cuba, and there was a confrontation and Kennedy, the American president, Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, negotiated. The Russians backed down, the Soviet's backed down. They withdrew it. But, what people don't know, and maybe even to this day, don't know, is that secretly, we had missiles in Turkey
- Stephen Cohen: 01:08:10 Just as close to the Soviet Union as Cuba was to Miami Beach.
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:08:14 Bobby Kennedy negotiated those away.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:08:16 It was part of the deal. It was never made known until later because Kennedy was afraid that he would be seen to have

made such a concession to Khrushchev to remove the American missiles, he'd have political problems. All right.

- Stephen Cohen: 01:08:27 So, I ask this question. We have a Cuban Missile Crisis, not in Cuba. Syria, wherever. Is Trump free to do that? To negotiate away from war? That's it. I keep coming back to that. Right? Because you don't negotiate away from war by blaming the other side solely. Each side accepts some responsibility for the warfare situation you're in, and each side makes a concession.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:08:51 But Trump, having been labeled as puppet of the Kremlin, is he in any position to make any concession? So, what's the alternative? It's war. War between nuclear powers, which seems to be lost.
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:09:03 Also, if people just stopped to think about it, because I'm so acutely aware of the fact that there will be people that will listen to this and they will be shifting and saying, "Why are they making excuses for Putin?" And, I keep thinking to myself, "If you stop to think about it, America has, in its recent history, supported some of the worst people on the planet." There is no way that the issues that we have with Russia are because Vladimir Putin is authoritarian and because he is a bad actor. It's got to be something else. So, what is the reason? Why? Why has this man been someone that we have been unwilling to work with? Did he get in the way of the process in the 1990s under Yeltsin?
- Stephen Cohen: 01:09:54 When I gave my, at least partial explanation, in our discussion before, and again, it runs as a theme through my book, *War With Russia*. When Yeltsin was leader of post-Soviet Russia, he and Clinton enacted, for almost a decade, a charade of partnership and friendship. Behind the scenes, we were treating Yeltsin very badly. In fact, if you read Strobe Talbott, he was Clinton's primary advisor on Russia, there's a passage in his memoirs where Clinton literally says, and I trust we can say this on your broadcast, "Well, I guess we'll have to shovel some more shit in old Boris's face."
- Stephen Cohen: 01:10:39 They knew exactly what they were doing to Yeltsin. And yet, the myth went forward that that's... Not the myth, but the axiom, I should say, the belief went forward, that that was a good Russian leader. Yeltsin. The one who gave us what we wanted without representing these specific Russian interests. I mean, Russia is a big country, the biggest territorial country in the world.

Stephen Cohen: 01:11:00 It's got national interest, legitimate national interest, especially along its borders. So, we can't expect Russia simply to defer to the United States on every major international policy. Right? So, along comes Putin, and that's basically what he says.

Stephen Cohen: 01:11:15 There's a famous moment where he gives a speech. What year was it? I've forgotten. But, McCain, they're all in Munich, McCain's sitting on the front row and Putin drills his eyes right on McCain, who's sitting there with all these Cold War American senators and said, "Gentlemen, you have to understand. Our relationship with you cannot be what you want. It cannot be a one-way street."

Demetri Kofinas: 01:11:36 Was this before McCain called him a thug, or after?

Stephen Cohen: 01:11:39 Not sure, but McCain was loose with his language. I mean, McCain was not, shall we say, much of a foreign policy thinker.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:11:47 Well, he said, "Let's bomb, bomb, bomb Iran.", in 2008.

Stephen Cohen: 01:11:48 Well, he liked it. He never saw a war that he wasn't prepared to embrace, even though he was-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:11:52 It's interesting because he became, and again, there is nuance everywhere and I don't wish to speak ill of a man who has passed, who is not here to defend himself, but he became-

Stephen Cohen: 01:12:03 That axiom would prevent us from writing history.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:12:06 And maybe, perhaps, you as a historian can do that. But, he's a perfect example of someone that, when it was convenient for the narrative of the time, he came back into vogue, he was not popular for a period of time.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:12:18 Actually, he especially wasn't popular during the K Street scandals in the 1980s and '90s, right? But, he's a good example of that. And Hillary Clinton said that Putin doesn't have a soul. And, that's something that, I think, again, to this point about-

Stephen Cohen: 01:12:32 By the way, do you know what Putin said in return? She did say that. And, that disqualified her as a presidential candidate in my mind immediately because one of the existential, almost constitutional, obligations of an American president is to negotiate with the Kremlin leader to keep us out of war with Russia.

Stephen Cohen: 01:12:49 So, if she begins by saying Putin has no soul, says it publicly, exactly where is her credibility to negotiate with him? To which he replied when he was told, she had said he, Putin, had no soul. "Well, at least I have a brain." She didn't have a brain when she said that-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:13:07 Well, in fairness.

Stephen Cohen: 01:13:10 And, she, then wanting to be president.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:13:11 In fairness, Trump's negotiating style is to completely defame the other person, and then, begin the negotiation process.

Stephen Cohen: 01:13:20 I can't be drawn into a situation where I have to judge other historical figures through the prism of Trump. I mean, we'd all be doomed. Trump is Trump, though I remain, to this day, the supporter of one Trump policy. That is, his idea that we need to cooperate with Russia-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:13:37 And his policies have not been-

Stephen Cohen: 01:13:40 But, we don't know, if he was left alone, what he would do. You're absolutely right. He's taken certain "hard-line" steps against Russia. I guess it's to get these Russian allegations off his back. I suppose when he decided to give Ukraine the military assistance that Obama wouldn't give Ukraine, he thought that would keep people from calling him pro-Russian, or something.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:14:03 Again, I bring it back to this question. I keep harping on it. Why? Why? Why the fixation with Putin? Why the fixation with Russia? The first time that it came even into my head that we had an issue with Russia was during the 2012 campaign. I learned about it from Mitt Romney on the debate stage. Russia is our greatest geo-political adversary. He said it then and there. 2012 was the first time I ever heard it, and I thought to myself, "Where the hell did this come from? I thought we were friends."

Stephen Cohen: 01:14:33 That's when Obama said to Romney, they were debating, weren't they?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:14:36 Yeah, they were debating.

Stephen Cohen: 01:14:38 He said, "Governor Romney, the 1970s are calling. They want their foreign policy back." Do you remember that?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:14:46 Yeah, no, I do remember that. That's so funny. He was good. Obama was good.

Stephen Cohen: 01:14:50 But now, Romney takes credit, because he says, "See, I was right." That's what Romney is running around saying now because he's offering himself, of course, to the Republican party, if they decide overthrow Trump. He's running around saying, "I was right back then."

Demetri Kofinas: 01:15:02 Well, to echo the words of George Kennan that the NATO expanders would be running around saying how bad the Russians were and that they told this, but they're wrong. I mean, that's the thing. We're all being told now that Russia is bad. See? We told you. But, how much of that is our policies? But again, I bring it back to the question, Dr. Cohen. Why? Why? What is the reason?

Stephen Cohen: 01:15:22 Why, why what?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:15:23 Why the fixation with Russia? There's got to be a reason. I'm not saying it's a good reason.

Stephen Cohen: 01:15:27 The American fixation.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:15:28 Well, the consensus. Why?

Stephen Cohen: 01:15:30 You mean the fixation on Russia as an enemy?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:15:33 As an enemy. Why?

Stephen Cohen: 01:15:35 So, there was a big Soviet Russian, whose name was Georgy Arbatov, now deceased, but he was a foreign policy thinker and advisor to the Kremlin. And, he said, even when things were going pretty well between Moscow and Washington, that the Cold War will come back and we will be the villains again, we Russians because, he said, and he paused, "You Americans can't live without an enemy." He was generalizing about us. I think he meant our political class. Maybe we need to look into that. Go back and see. Has there ever been a time when we haven't had an enemy.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:16:13 I agree with that also, but why Russia? Why Russia? Why not China? Why not some other country? Why Russia? What does Russia have that makes it a country that deserves, or has attracted, the ire of the foreign policy establishment?

Stephen Cohen: 01:16:30 Again, not to be self-referential, but a major theme of my little book is, why are we again in a Cold War with Russia? It tries to answer your question, and I give various explanations, and treat

various factors, and look at historical episodes there in a way we can't do right here.

- Stephen Cohen: 01:16:52 But, it's very interesting to ask rhetorically. Did the preceding Cold War ever really end? Everybody says the cold war ended. There's some dispute about when historians should date it. 1989, 1990, or with the end of the Soviet Union in 1991.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:17:12 So, the people who played a diplomatic role like Jack Matlock, who was the American ambassador to the Soviet Union, argues that the Cold War ended through negotiations, peacefully, with no winners and no losers, or rather, as Jack would say, both sides were winners in ending the Cold War.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:17:34 Now, there's been a revisionist interpretation of how all that ended because after the Soviet Union, if you would ask, probably, a high school student who'd been reading some history, or a college student, they would say the Cold War ended in 1991 when the Soviet Union ended. You understand the difference? In other words, we won it.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:17:55 But, if you take a different view that we didn't win it, but it was negotiated. Both sides negotiated an end. But, what happened was, after the end of the Soviet Union, and this began with George Bush, the first George Bush, and it bitterly upset Gorbachev who'd been a party to the negotiations that ended the Cold War.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:18:12 George Bush began to run against Clinton on the grounds that he had won the Cold War, as a campaign slogan. He knew it not to be true, but for political-
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:18:21 Sure.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:18:22 But, it entered the bloodstream. And then, you come into this, what I call triumphalism, American triumphalism. What could make you feel better to say that there had been a 40-year shadowy Cold War with the Soviet Union and we won it.
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:18:38 It's understandable.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:18:39 So then, you mentioned earlier however, that this triumphalism then leads to a certain kind of foreign policy thinking in Washington that leads to certain foreign policy. There's a direct line, surely, between the view that we won the Cold War and our decision to attack Iraq. Would you agree there's a connection there?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:18:58 Between the end of the Cold War and the second Persian Gulf war, or the first one?

Stephen Cohen: 01:19:03 If we can knock off the Soviet Union, who can't we knock off? And, where does our mandate stop? Nowhere. We are now the sole surviving super-power.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:19:13 I think it took some time for that to bake in.

Stephen Cohen: 01:19:15 You may be too young to remember, but in the '90s, people were running around in Washington saying, "We're the only super-power now."

Demetri Kofinas: 01:19:21 Sure. No, no, I mean-

Stephen Cohen: 01:19:22 But, what licensed does that give you if you think like that?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:19:25 Well, to be frank, personally, I remember it because I wasn't politically conscious, but in my foreign policy classes, required reading was from that era to help me understand the foundations of the new conservative movement, the resurgence of new conservatism, and the Wolfowitz's, and the Richard Pearl's, and Douglas Feith's.

Stephen Cohen: 01:19:45 I don't think it's fair to conservatives to name those guys as representatives of conservatives.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:19:52 Sure They were actually, well, they were Fox kids.

Stephen Cohen: 01:19:53 Well, whatever they were, but there are a lot of conservatives today who would agree with what I'm saying about American foreign policy since the end of the Soviet Union, and some of the people that you've interviewed, I think, in their own way are conservatives.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:20:07 So, I will not pose that question again.

Stephen Cohen: 01:20:11 Which one?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:20:11 The question of why? Why, why, why? Why Russia? Why the enemy? Why the demonization? I will instead put forward a hypothesis that I wouldn't feel comfortable putting forward otherwise because it is conjecturally-based and not based on much fact, but some sort of connection of ideas, which is, I wonder to what extent Putin got in the way of US businesses that were having their way with the privatization of Russia.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:20:40 Did he get in the middle of it? Did things get screwed up after 1998 after the collapse of the Russian economy? I mean, I still don't really understand it because I think, in my view, we know from the history of us foreign policy, if an authoritarian dictator, or whoever it is, is the worst person in the world, that is almost never important.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:21:03 What really matters is, do they do Washington's bidding? So, clearly he, in some way or other, didn't do Washington's bidding. And, again, I'm bringing something back to my point, when and why did this relationship go south?

Stephen Cohen: 01:21:19 Well, it wasn't due to the American corporate business community. They were as eager as ever for the Russian market, which is a vast market. And, I may have the number wrong, but about 160 significant American corporations doing business, and profitable business, in post-Soviet Russia, and that's part of their balance sheet and they don't want to lose it.

Stephen Cohen: 01:21:40 So, when Putin comes to power, he had to look pretty good to them. He was sober as Kristoff pointed out.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:21:46 Sober Yeltsin.

Stephen Cohen: 01:21:47 Sober Yeltsin. He professed to be a capitalist. He professed to want business relations. And, in fact, if you look at his... Putin is a fluent German speaker. He was stationed in Germany during his years in the KGB, and he has a special affinity for Germany. And, I think, I may have the number wrong, but something like 9,000 significant-sized German businesses do business in Russia. Stop and think about that.

Stephen Cohen: 01:22:15 So, here we ought to introduce something that is hard for us because we're provincial people. You and I, I mean, America is a provincial country. Putin thinks of himself as a European man, and he thinks of Russia-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:22:29 That's interesting.

Stephen Cohen: 01:22:29 Yeah, it's important too. He thinks of himself as a European man. He lived in Europe. He speaks fluent German. It's unusual for a Russian political leader. The old Bolsheviks spoke foreign languages. But, since then, it's been unusual for a Kremlin leader to speak a foreign language.

Stephen Cohen: 01:22:48 And by the way, his English seems to be pretty good. He's been studying English.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:22:51 He stops the translator whenever he feels like it.

Stephen Cohen: 01:22:54 That's right. He knows enough-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:22:55 You can tell that he knows what's going on.

Stephen Cohen: 01:22:56 And, listen to him do his rendition of Fats Domino. He plays the piano and sings. In English, his rendition of Fats Domino's on Blueberry Hill is a lark, but Putin thinks of himself as a European man.

Stephen Cohen: 01:23:12 The interesting question I ask myself is, does he think of Russia as a European country? Because, historically, we all know that Russia has straddled Europe and non-Europe to the East. Russia has been of Asia and been of Europe, both geographically and politically, intellectually, culturally, spiritually.

Stephen Cohen: 01:23:35 And so, Putin comes to power after an episode of, please let us in the West, the Western, the Yeltsin thing with Clinton, and all of that. But, during which Russia collapsed, and men died at 57. We've talked about this.

Stephen Cohen: 01:23:51 So, here comes Putin, a European man. And, to go back to something that you mentioned, immediately after 9-11 Putin was the first person to call president George Bush, right? This is the second George Bush, and say, whatever we can do to help.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:24:07 Oh, I remember that,

Stephen Cohen: 01:24:07 And now, that was not empty. They had something we didn't. Well, first of all, he said, "you can have all of the flyover Russia you want to get to Afghanistan." But, they had a fighting force. Soviets had built a fighting force, which still calls up and it was called the Northern Alliance that was in Afghanistan, a good fighting force made up of Afghan fighters, but with Russian commanders. And, he said, "It's yours." So, how many lives, American lives, did Putin save by the assistance he and Russian... And, he gave us Russian intelligence, which was far better than our own in Afghanistan, for obvious reasons. And yet, despite that act of generosity, and he was opposed, by the way, it's a matter of record that his own generals, a lot of his own intelligence people said, "You can't give the Americans this information. You can't do this." He went ahead, and yet he's ended up to be one of these great villains.

Stephen Cohen: 01:25:02 So, the question you ask, why this? Let me put it to you, a rhetorical question.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:25:08 Oh, come on.

Stephen Cohen: 01:25:08 Well, we're having-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:25:10 I hope it's rhetorical.

Stephen Cohen: 01:25:11 So, let me make it rhetorical. Why was it okay, and even more than okay, they were applauded and elected, for previous American presidents to negotiate extensively on the most sensitive strategic issues with Kremlin leaders who were declared communists, correct? Soviet communists, and not with Putin, who's an anti-communist and who States his anti-communism all the time?

Demetri Kofinas: 01:25:40 I don't know. That's why I'm asking you. I'm genuinely perplexed.

Stephen Cohen: 01:25:42 Well, the answer, then, has more to do with us than with Russia.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:25:45 And what is that answer?

Stephen Cohen: 01:25:48 I'm supposed to be an expert on Russia, not America. Well, people have said we need an enemy, and it's handy. I think it goes back to what I've talked about. There was this assumption that when the Cold War ended, we won it. That was a mistake. It was negotiated. But, it's believed that we won it, and therefore, like defeated adversaries, say Japan and Germany after World War II, Russia should have done what we told it to do and accommodated us. And, when it didn't-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:26:18 I see.

Stephen Cohen: 01:26:19 ... we felt something between grave disappointment and betrayal.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:26:23 A sort of cascading...

Stephen Cohen: 01:26:25 Well, people thought, because you could hear this and it was written, that the end of the Cold War was analogous to the end of the World War II. We had won.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:26:33 Yeah.

Stephen Cohen: 01:26:34 But, if that was true, stop and think about this now for a minute, and we occupied Japan and Germany, right? And, they did what we told them, at least for a few decades, then Russia

should have been in the same subservient position, and yet it wasn't.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:26:49 And, we also put together the Marshall Plan after Europe. We treated the defeated Nazi-

Stephen Cohen: 01:26:55 That became another. I agree.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:26:56 Nazi Germany, in a very different way than we did the Soviet Union.

Stephen Cohen: 01:26:59 There people who think, like Jeffrey Sachs, whom you probably know, had we given Russia a gigantic Marshall Plan package after the end of the-

Demetri Kofinas: 01:27:08 Well, I don't know if could have afforded to do that, but-

Stephen Cohen: 01:27:11 Well, if we had given them really substantial, instead of loans that they had to repay, that the political relationship would have turned out differently. I don't believe it for a minute, but it's an argument at least.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:27:22 So, you mentioned this. I think that was your first lecture in the class. It was, or at least mentioning it to us about, is Russia an Eastern country or is it a Western country? Is it a part of Europe, or is it part of the East? And, I think your argument was, "Well, it's really neither."

Stephen Cohen: 01:27:41 I think what I did and I always had trouble finding a reading to give, but I think toward the end I found a short reading, is the point of it is, it's not for us to answer the question. I wanted to say it's a question that Russians have grappled with for centuries, right? And, it remains important, and now, becomes geopolitically important to put the knot on this unraveling conversation we're having. That seems to be going here and yon.

Stephen Cohen: 01:28:03 We haven't really talked about relations between China and Russia today. The single most important bipartisan relationship that's emerging in the world today is between Moscow and Beijing. There's no question about it. These humongous countries, rich in population, resources, and space have gone from a hostile relationship to a wary kind of liberate relationship, to a crazy partnership, to what looks to be merging now as an all-out alliance.

Stephen Cohen: 01:28:40 This is a transformation in geopolitics, and it's all because of the United States and the policies that we pursued. It doesn't mean they're going to be hostile to the United States, but think of the sway, economic if only, with the whole belt road and Chinese projects that are Moscow, Beijing, and I mean partnership and friendship. There's conflicts, to be sure, but if that becomes a reality of modern geopolitics, it's a major change. And, Europe becomes, shall we say, considerably less significant.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:29:14 In the conversations I've had on this program, foreign policy-related, I've come away with the view that the United States, to the extent that we have a geopolitical rival, it seems to me to be China, and China, I think, shares much less in common with America than Russia.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:29:35 And, it seems to me, again, that in this world, in this complicated world we live in, we have to make compromises, and I don't see how it's in our interest not to find a way to work with Russia, to work with the Russian government, to work with Putin.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:29:53 And, I'm not putting any details there, but it seems to me that, just given the complexity of the world, we cannot pick fights with everyone and fight every battle everywhere. And, there are things, specifically, about the Chinese communist party that I find...

Demetri Kofinas: 01:30:07 I don't know how we can work together with that government. I just don't. And, it seems to me that we need to work on our alliances, and try to work with countries where we can.

Stephen Cohen: 01:30:18 Certainly, I don't know enough about China to have deep-felt views, but I certainly endorse what you said about Russia. There is no reason, other than things we've imagined, and conflicts we've dreamt up, why the relationship between the United States and Russia should not only be good, but a kind of international security relationship.

Stephen Cohen: 01:30:43 That should have happened in Syria. It should have happened in Syria. But, there are other places where it's necessary. I think that one of the issues that ought to be debated among the democratic would-be nominees is whether they would pursue a rivalry or a partnership with Russia in international affairs.

Stephen Cohen: 01:31:02 So, far as I know, only Tulsi Gabbard, on her own, has said this. I was horrified when our own mayor, during his brief appearance

in a debate, when asked what was the gravest international threat to the United States, de Blasio, said Russia.

- Demetri Kofinas: 01:31:19 Yeah, he's ridiculous.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:31:19 Where that was coming from-
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:31:21 Who know. I don't even know if he knows. I don't know. Let's not even talk about that-
- Stephen Cohen: 01:31:27 But, it's out there.
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:31:28 Yeah.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:31:28 That idea. And, I agree with you that it's not only a fraudulent idea, it's not in our national security interest, and it would be very easy, and the last word. None of us were supposed to say anything kind about Trump, but I can't be quite so categorical.
- Stephen Cohen: 01:31:46 From the beginning, and continued, this instinct Trump has to cooperate in a detente way with Russia is in our national interest. Would that he be free to do it. Now, he may screw it up. He may not know how to do it, and the people around him are nothing to write home about, but nonetheless the instinct is right.
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:32:05 So, for listeners, normally we do overtimes. I have made a decision in the middle of this conversation not to do one because I felt like we didn't get to all the things I wanted to in the full episode. However, there is, as always, a rundown. Not only is there a rundown, but, in fact, there is a very beautiful picture of a beautiful young lady in Moscow in this rundown.
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:32:26 And, I also shared some parts of my syllabus from my class with Dr. Cohen, titled Russian History Since 1917. I think that's-
- Stephen Cohen: 01:32:37 Russia Since 1917.
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:32:39 Russia Since 1917 was the name of the class, and there will, of course, also be a transcript. Those are available at [patrion.com/hidden-forces](http://patrion.com/hidden-forces). As always, you can find a link to that in the description to this week's episode.
- Demetri Kofinas: 01:32:54 Dr. Cohen. It was wonderful having you here. I appreciate you giving me a good grade despite the fact that I missed some of your classes, but your lessons have remained with me. Thank you.

Stephen Cohen: 01:33:05 Thanks for having me on.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:33:08 Today's episode of Hidden Forces was recorded at Creative Media Design Studio in New York City. For more information about this week's episode, or if you want easy access to related programming, visit our website at [hiddenforces.io](http://hiddenforces.io) and subscribe to our free email list.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:33:26 If you want access to overtime segments, episode transcripts, and show rundowns full of links and detailed information related to each and every episode, check out our premium subscription available through the Hidden Forces website, or through our Patreon Page at [patreon.com/hiddenforces](http://patreon.com/hiddenforces).

Demetri Kofinas: 01:33:47 Today's episode was produced by me and edited by Stylianos Nicolaou. For more episodes, you can check out our website at [hiddenforces.io](http://hiddenforces.io). Join the conversation at Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @HiddenForcesPod, or send me an email. As always, thanks for listening. We'll see you next week.