

**Remarks by ROBERT BELL,
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TIME TO REVITALIZE NATO

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Robert Bell fourth from left. (Photo credit: New Direction Foundation)

MR. BELL: Thank you very much, Jeffrey.

I was actually planning to start with Rahm Emanuel as well who I used to work with in the Clinton administration, but put just a slightly different perspective on his famous quote because I agree fundamentally with Jamie's major theme in his remarks that the issues and challenges that Europe if not the world face in this crisis are really more profound than sort of a very narrow and simplistic and cynical question about whether Mr. Putin has or has not given NATO a *raison d'être* or given substance to a summit that might otherwise not have had a lot of substance.

I really think there are three dimensions to this crisis and they extend well beyond whether it helps marginally with NATO's well-being.

First, I'll accept everything and agree with everything that Jamie said about the fact that we had a pretty good plan for NATO before this crisis, but I wouldn't want anyone to think that NATO is looking for a crisis to try to find a rationale. We have plenty to do without the people of Ukraine being subjected and baited.

It seems to me the three dimensions of this crisis start first and fundamentally with the really powerful message that President Obama made in this city not too far from here just a few days ago. Because in an extremely poignant way, he sort of asked this question rhetorically. Should we care? Why does it matter? Forget NATO, why does Ukraine matter to Europe? The President said that it was a moment of testing for Europe and the United States and for the international order that we have worked for generations to build.

I don't know how many of you heard the speech or have had a chance to review it on YouTube or read it, but I really do recommend it. I think it will go down as one of the two or three landmark speeches of his presidency.

To me the key line was when he said what's at stake in Ukraine today is that Russia's leadership is challenging truths that only a few weeks ago seemed self-evident, that in the 21st Century the borders of Europe cannot be redrawn with force; that international law matters; that people and nations can make their own decisions about their future. And if indeed those are the stakes, and I believe they are, then this far transcends sort of the narrow question about whether this marginally gives more *raison d'être* to NATO or not. But turning just to the NATO dimension, it seems to me that the second reason this matters is that Ukraine was a key partner to NATO. It wasn't a country protected under an Article 5 collective defense commitment, it was an operational partner who over many years since its independence has been working hand in glove with NATO to contribute to global

security. Not to protect Belgium from invasion, but to help NATO project security in different parts of the world. From Afghanistan to counter-piracy to Kosovo. Ukraine has been a contributor to peace and stability using the instrumentality of NATO as the vehicle in which to plug in and play, if you will, its military capabilities. And we all in Europe, indeed all in the world, have a stake in that as well.

Then last and not least, I think, is the fact that the actions that Russia is embarked on here, and let's be clear, this is not a steady state crisis. It still has serious potential for escalation, it's fluid, dynamic. The Russian demands to turn Ukraine into some hybrid of the Finland that we knew in the Cold War and the Switzerland that's governed by a federated cantonment structure with each region of the country having a veto power, that's an unacceptable red line for the West, for the EU, for the UN, for the United States, and it's going to be a challenging negotiation.

So for NATO, the central significance of the crisis beyond the fact that we have a key operational partner under severe duress and the fact that the international order that we thought we had spent the last 70 years building in Europe is being challenged, is that there is the potential that the crisis could continue down a path that becomes a direct security threat to a NATO member state. That is why Poland invoked Article 4 of the NATO Treaty and asked NATO collectively to help reinforce its sense of security and reassure the countries to the east that NATO stands behind them.

That will be the immediate business of the Foreign Ministerial meeting that will begin tomorrow here in Brussels. It's a challenge that the United States has already responded to unilaterally in terms of a number of reassurance measures with fighter aircraft and ships and more that have been generated in the last days and weeks. There is a very encouraging

trend of European allies now stepping forward, offering their own reassurance contributions to the defense of NATO collectively including British offers, French offers, Danish offers, Dutch offers, Turkish offers, a very encouraging trend I think building. And this challenge to put together a complete package of reassurance within the alliance, within the context of Article 5, will be the business of NATO tomorrow.

Now longer term, of course, NATO's going to have to do a fundamental review about what this all means. What it means for the NATO strategic concept. What it means for its defense guidance, for its prioritization in terms of capability types. What it means for its level of ambition in terms of being able to generate forces for specific missions. And what it means in terms of the basic presumptions that have governed NATO's relationship with Russia going back to the Founding Act in 1997.

I won't presume to predict the outcome of that debate because NATO works by consensus, and these are very challenging questions. Much, I assume, will depend on which course Russia takes. Do they take the off-ramp that Secretary Kerry again last night in Paris elaborated for Minister Lavrov? Or does this crisis escalate even further? Let's hope that it's the former and that the sort of strategic lessons learned out of this can be put into some sort of past tense, accepting that we are not going to recognize the illegitimate annexation of course of Crimea. And not a strategic review that's occasioned by a direct invasion of Ukraine proper beyond Crimea.

With that, I'll stop.

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