

Transcript for Episode 4, “How to Enlarge NATO”

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[Note: This is a rough transcript of the audio recording, based on digital transcription and human review.]

Morgan Kaplan: [00:00:18] Hello, and welcome to IS: Off the Page. I'm your host, Morgan Kaplan, and I'm the Executive Editor of *International Security*, a quarterly journal edited and sponsored by the Belfer Center at Harvard Kennedy School and published by The MIT Press. In today's episode of Off the Page, we'll be talking about the past, present, and future of NATO expansion.

[00:00:36] We begin our conversation by talking about Mary Sarotte's summer 2019 *International Security* article, how to enlarge NATO. The debate inside the Clinton administration, 1993 to 1995. To help us with this discussion. We have the author, Dr. Mary Sarotte with us, as well as guest Ambassador Douglas Lute, who was the United States Permanent Representative to NATO from 2013 to [00:01:00] 2017

[00:01:05] Mary Sarotte is the Marie-Josée and Henry R. Kravis Distinguished Professor of Historical Studies at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. Thank you so much to Professor Sarotte for joining our show today.

Mary Sarotte: [00:01:18] Great to be here.

Morgan: [00:01:18] So tell us a little bit about this moment in history, [00:01:21] where does this discussion of NATO expansion begin and how do we reach this critical point, which is the focus of your article, 1993 to 1995?

Mary: [00:01:29] As I looked over the history, I saw three key episodes in the history of NATO expansion. So there's these three moments of decisionmaking that drive the process forward in a specific direction and not any other direction.

[00:01:43] I refer to them as ratchets because when you ratchet something, it means you've, you've gone in one direction permanently, you can't go back. So first are these the three ratchets and the first ratchet happens under George H.W. Bush. The Bush administration [00:02:00] might in theory have stepped back in 1990 and said [00:02:03] NATO just accomplished its mission. NATO is designed to defend Western Europe from land attack by the Soviet Union, more or less. Also air attack and nuclear attack, but defend Western Europe from attack by the Soviet Union. And. We've just accomplished that goal. The Soviet Union is collapsing.

[00:02:22] Perhaps it's time to say “mission accomplished” and go home. I say that could've happened in theory because that discussion, as far as I can tell, never actually took place. Instead, the Bush administration felt very strongly that NATO had just helped to win the cold war, and if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

[00:02:39] So why on earth should we abandon this hugely successful institution, the most successful military Alliance in history? We need to preserve and perpetuate that not least because the United States is predominant within it. If NATO ceases to exist or becomes weakened, alternative security arrangements might arise that don't have the United States at the center.

So [00:03:00] even though there are a number of actors at the time saying, let's disband all military blocks, let's demilitarize central Eastern Europe. Or let's create a pan European security organization, even though there are other actors saying that at the time, the Bush administration acts swiftly and assuredly to protect NATO's future, thus ensuring that NATO and not any other institution will be the dominant security institution of European security.

[00:03:25] So that is the first ratchet, and that's already done in 1990. So before the time period of my article, Bush has already foreclosed other options. Right? He is unable how, however, to win reelection.

Morgan: [00:03:38] So just to clarify, Mary, so you're saying that by 1990 the decision's already been made to expand NATO? The question now is how, and then under what process?

Mary: [00:03:50] Yes, although I would put that in a slightly more nuanced format. The initial expansion of NATO is from Western Germany to Eastern Germany. So yes, [00:04:00] there as part of German unification. There is a decision to expand NATO, in other words, to expand it to the other half of Germany.

[00:04:07] And so the first post-Cold War NATO expansion takes place on October 3rd, 1990 when Germany unifies, and the key action there is NATO moves beyond the 1989 line. It moves beyond the Cold War line because that was a real sore point with the Soviet Union, which of course, later, uh, says that it had a promise that would not happen.

[00:04:28] Right. And the United States. While it did discuss that hypothetically in conversation, never put anything in writing. Of course, this is now something about which policymakers in Moscow still gnash their teeth. I quote in the article, the former Russian foreign minister Primakov saying, unfortunately, all of these things we heard in conversation were not put into writing.

[00:04:50] So the first post-Cold War NATO expansion, as I said, is October 3rd, 1990. The question after that then is, are you going to keep moving [00:05:00] eastward? In other words, are you going to keep moving into central Eastern Europe? And because Bush loses the election in November 1992 that decision falls to Clinton.

[00:05:08] And that's really the focus of my article is this decision making inside the Clinton administration. So Clinton, on the one hand, doesn't have a totally open field. Bush has already made this initial decision that NATO and any other security organization will dominate transatlantic security. So that decision is already taken, but [00:05:28] there's now an open question of whether when and how to expand NATO. And my article focuses on the debate inside the Clinton administration, which was a surprisingly contested debate, a surprisingly contentious debate between advocates of a slow conferral of limited

membership to a wide array of countries [00:05:49] versus people who wanted pretty much the opposite—a rapid conferral, a full membership to a narrow band of countries.

Morgan: [00:05:56] What does a slow, kind of steady conferral [00:06:00] look like, right? What does it mean to slowly give someone membership?

Mary: [00:06:02] Right, what that looks like is the Partnership for Peace. The Partnership for Peace is an organization developed by the Pentagon to bring countries along, slowly allow them to prove themselves as members in the partnership, promote them gradually through [00:06:17] phases to full membership. So first you can be an affiliate of the partnership for peace, and then you could move potentially to a kind of associate membership with NATO. And then over a long time period, if you've proven yourself worthy and you'd developed your infrastructure appropriately, then you could gradually become a full member.

Morgan: Like [00:06:35] getting tenure.

Mary: Like getting tenure. Exactly. And. At the time. This approach had a huge number of supporters, including Les Aspen, the first secretary of defense under Clinton, including Madeline Albright who said, “this is fantastic.” This squares a number of circles. It doesn't immediately create a new front line across post–Cold War Europe because instead of NATO expanding just geographically to the nearest countries, it's going to expand [00:07:00] to the most capable countries once they've proven themselves, but they could be anywhere. So it avoids a clear frontline. And it also puts full NATO expansion, full membership at the end, rather than at the beginning of this transformation process in which we are about to engage. And initially Clinton is persuaded by these arguments.

[00:07:18] So that's the second ratchet. The Partnership for Peace is launched. At the NATO summit in January, 1994 which Clinton attends on his first visit to Europe as president, and it seems that the decision has been made, but actually the opponents of this approach, people who want to give full membership as soon as feasibly possible to basically Poland, Czech Republic too, [00:07:40] but it's a lot about Poland. They are not satisfied with this decision and they are. Supported by people inside Warsaw, Budapest, Prague, who also aren't satisfied with this idea that they're going to have to linger in a gray-zone and their supporters of the swifter conferral a full membership to a narrow band of countries say, “You know, we can't just leave these [00:08:00] countries hanging out there.

[00:08:00] We can't, you know, they lost out at Yalta. We can't let them lose out again. We can't sacrifice them on the altar of post collapse Russian anxieties.” Right?

Morgan: [00:08:10] So tell us a little bit more about why these different sides are being taken. I mean, it sounds a little bit like what you're saying is those in favor of a slow conferral are making the argument along the lines of, “well, we're now in this [00:08:24] post–Cold War moment where we want the Russians to feel a little bit more secure than they may be feeling right now in by having the slow conferral process will ease a lot of tensions potentially bilaterally between the United States and Russia.” However, on the other hand, you have those in favor of fast, swift, full conferral who are saying, “well, actually, if you

think about those who actually are up for NATO expansion, we're putting them in a difficult place.”

Mary: Correct.

Morgan:

[00:08:52] “By not giving them full expansion. So while we may be appeasing the Russians, to a certain extent, it's at the expense [00:09:00] of those in the middle who may themselves create certain scenarios that are difficult for that Russian-U.S. bilateral relationship.”

Mary: [00:09:06] Right. Those are two components of the debate.

[00:09:10] Those in favor of the partnership for peace tended to emphasize the U S Russian relationship. For example, secretary of defense, Bill Perry, who followed Les Aspen. He felt very strongly that as the secretary of defense of the United States, his job was to ensure the security first and foremost of the United States.

[00:09:30] And decreasing the number of missiles aimed at the United States was a desirable goal, and he was succeeding in achieving that goal because of the very cooperative relationship between Washington and Moscow in the early post-Cold War period. And as, as he put it, roughly anything that moves the Russian hand [00:09:48] closer to the trigger again of nuclear weapons is to be avoided. Anything that makes the Russians, you know, that anxious should be avoided because we're achieving important strategic goals here. Right? And [00:10:00] as much as I admire and like the central and East Europeans—this is no comment about them—I represent the U.S. government, and it is in the strategic interest of the U S government to pursue arms control with Russia as far as it will go.

[00:10:12] And NATO expansion now is going to be deleterious to the success of arms control. And then on the other hand, you have supporters of the idea that Europe should be whole and free, that there is a moral obligation to extend a hand to the Central and Eastern Europeans, and that Washington should not make them wait around.

[00:10:30] While Russia sorts itself out, that they've already waited all the decades since the altar that is morally inadmissible to leave them hanging out there. And now that the U.S. and Russia had such a good relationship. Russia did not need to see NATO as a threatening organization. NATO could become more of a political organization.

[00:10:46] The U.S. would work very hard to create new forms of affiliation for Russia with the alliance, and it would be possible, therefore to expand NATO and address the 20 Eastern European concerns while maintaining good relations with Russia. And these, [00:11:00] these are two very strongly held views and these camps are fighting with each other inside the Clinton administration.

Morgan: [00:11:05] Well, so we know of course what happens, which is in the end, we do get swift conferral of a full membership to a certain number of states that point in time. But what's interesting about your article is getting at precisely why that happened, um, and how that happened. So could you tell us a little bit more about why [00:11:24] the swift conferral

for full membership won out over the alternative? And also out of curiosity, as someone digging through the archives, you know, what surprised you when looking at the answers here?

Mary: [00:11:35] I think first qualify, when we're talking about swift, we mean relatively swift. The offer goes out formally in 1997 and expansion happens in 1999.

[00:11:45] So we're talking about relatively swift conferral, but still, it's much quicker than the advocates of the partnership for peace wanted, right? The, uh, yeah. The process takes an important turn in December 1994. So 25 years ago in a [00:12:00] number of things come together in that month. First, you've just had in the midterm, congressional elections of 1994 and overwhelming Republican victory and the Republicans as part of their "Contract for America" and that election had strongly endorsed NATO expansion, and they had cleaned up at the polls.

[00:12:19] So President Clinton, who's obviously thinking ahead to his own reelection campaign in 1996 sees that this is an effective issue with voters. So you have the Republican midterm victory in November, 1994 you have also—and this answers your question on what surprised me—you have what seems to be a resolution of a Ukrainian problem.

[00:12:39] This issue really just blindsided me when I was working in the archives. Ukraine turns out to be hugely important to the NATO expansion story. I guess we're learning a lot. Nowadays in America about the importance of Ukraine international relations. This is, yes, we are, and this is yet another case where it was important.

[00:12:54] Ukraine, when the Soviet Union fell apart, was born nuclear. Ukraine instantly became the [00:13:00] third largest nuclear power in the world with an arsenal much larger than that of Britain, France, or China, and many of those missiles could destroy U.S. cities. So obviously that became a huge security concern, and that gave [00:13:13] credence to the statements by Secretary Perry saying, we need to prioritize this and, and we need to focus on that. Not on NATO expansion, but in December 1994, so 25 years ago, this December, the United States together with the British and the Russians convinced Ukraine to sign the so-called Budapest Memorandum.

[00:13:33] According to the terms of this memorandum, Ukraine agreed to complete the process of denuclearization. There had been some efforts already, but did agreed to complete the process of denuclearization in exchange for assurances, not guarantees, but assurances of its territorial integrity.

Morgan: [00:13:48] They must be kicking themselves now.

Mary: [00:13:50] Yes. So Ukraine comes off the agenda once it's signed the Budapest Memorandum. The Republicans have won a midterm election victory. Meanwhile, Russia has done a number of [00:14:00] self-defeating things, most notably invading Chechnya, and that causes shivers to go down the spines of various Central and Eastern European countries because they're now worried about renewed Russian aggression.

[00:14:12] That also lends credence to their calls to be let into NATO. And so all of this comes together, and by the end of 1994 Clinton. Has decided to switch to, but I call the full guarantee expansion track.

Morgan: [00:14:24] And just to be clear, who's getting the full guaranteed expansion?

Mary: [00:14:28] In the first instance, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, they receive invitations to join NATO in 1997 and they joined in 1999.

Morgan: [00:14:36] What are the critical moments in which these decisions are made? Like what are the actual inflection points where the policy of swift NATO conferral to a limited number of actors actually becomes policy and takes place?

Mary: [00:14:49] There's actually two critical moments in December 1994 so 25 years ago, and one of them we know a lot about, and one of them we know very little about.

[00:14:57] That was another one of the surprises in my research. The one we [00:15:00] know a lot about because it happened in public, was the December 5th, 1994, OSCE summit where Clinton had to basically endure a tongue lashing from Yeltsin who accused him of dragging the world from a cold war to a cold peace because of Clinton's increasing willingness to expand NATO rapidly to a small number of countries.

[00:15:22] That is a dramatic moment. Clinton choose out his foreign policy team on the plane on the way back for dragging him across the ocean to serve as a punching bag for Yeltsin. But it's a sign that the honeymoon between Moscow and Washington are over, and then it leads to the second event, which was a surprise to me, which is driven by Secretary of Defense [00:15:42] Perry. Secretary Perry demands an audience with Clinton in effect. To say, "Are we really expanding NATO? Is that policy? I want to hear it from the President of the United States. I know there's a lot of people saying it's policy. A lot of people saying it should be policy. There's a lot of discussion of it going on.

[00:15:58] There's even discussion, some discussion [00:16:00] going on with the Russians, but is it really policy? I want the President to tell me that." He gets an audience with the president in the president's private study. The Secretary of State is there, Vice President Gore comes, a few other people come, but not many. And that meeting at which Nick Burns takes handwritten notes [00:16:15] seems to me to be crucial. That's the meeting where Clinton looks at a Secretary of Defense and makes it clear that, yes, NATO is going to expand and Bill Perry nearly resigned afterwards as a result, he was so convinced that this would be a tragedy for U.S.-Russian relations, that he almost thought he couldn't go forward with it, but instead he decided to go back to his staff and say, "It's going to be an uphill climb, but we're going to [00:16:36] try to keep the U.S.-Russian relationship on track as we make this terrible mistake."

Morgan: [00:16:40] Tell us a little bit about this process by which you've uncovered all these documents. I mean, my understanding is that a lot of this required Freedom of Information Act. It required basically years of effort in order to unpack some of this history. [00:16:56] So can you, can you tell us a little bit about, you know, what's like the behind the [00:17:00] music of, of this article.

Mary: [00:17:03] Yes. This article is unusual because as a historian, usually I go to an archive or use an online archive. For this article, I had to construct my own archive before I could actually write it. I filed years of Freedom of Information Act and mandatory review requests with various entities.

[00:17:22] The state department, the defense department, the Clinton presidential library, the Bush presidential library, and. When most of those were denied on the first round, I then had to go through a series of painstaking appeals to get these documents released. So it, it took a lot of work, but, but I'm glad it worked out in the end.

Morgan: [00:17:40] Well, so this has been terrific, Mary, and I think this creates a perfect, uh, jumping off point for talking about contemporary policy discussions on the question of NATO expansion and also geopolitics in Europe today. But I only have one more question for you, Mary. In that is, are you ready?

Mary: [00:17:56] Ready for what?

Morgan: [00:17:58] To go Off the Page.

Mary: [00:18:16] Alright!

Morgan: [00:18:16] Now joining our conversation is Douglas Lute, who is a Non-Resident Senior Fellow in the Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center. Ambassador Lute was previously the U.S. permanent representative to NATO from 2013 to 2017. All right, well, welcome to the show, Ambassador Lute.

Douglas Lute: [00:18:33] Well, thanks very much. Good to be with you.

Morgan: [00:18:36] What are your impressions of Mary's article in terms of its characterization of events, but also how it helps us think about contemporary NATO policy today?

Doug: [00:18:45] Well, I think I have two initial impressions. One is I was really impressed with Mary's research. Going back to key source documents, uh, firsthand, uh, accounts of what took place.

[00:18:56] Uh, especially in the early 1990s, uh, when we [00:19:00] had, uh, NATO begin its enlargement from sort of the cold war set of 16 allies to what today has become 29 allies. And actually ally number 30, Northern Macedonia is in the queue and in the sessions process now. So NATO has close to doubled in size in the period that begins with Mary's article and research.

[00:19:21] So I thought it was very well researched and I learned a lot. And then second by way of just being a recent practitioner of sort of NATO politics is the U S ambassador there. Uh, it was fascinating to learn about the origins, the political origins of the post, cold war enlargement, and in particular the politics.

[00:19:40] And I think Mary does a very good job of laying out the politics on the personal level. There were some key personalities involved on the domestic political scene. There were domestic politics here in the States, but also, uh, among European allies. And then the international dimension largely having to do with the relationship with Russia. [00:19:59] So I [00:20:00] thought it was a, a first-rate piece of scholarship.

Morgan: [00:20:02] And so thinking more in terms of Professor Sarotte's argument in terms of the debate between a Swift conferral to a smaller number of countries versus a slower unfurl process to more countries, the swiftness won out. "Swiftness"—I don't know if that's a word, but I'm using it.

Doug: [00:20:20] It is now.

Morgan: [00:20:22] The swiftness won out. How do you think the success of those in favor of Swift and full conferral of NATO membership has affected contemporary NATO politics?

Doug: [00:20:30] today? You know, it was a pretty aggressive enlargement program, which began with the original three. So from 16 at the time of the end of the cold war to 19 with the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland joining in 1999 but then the pace picked up even [00:20:49] more considerably. So the next round was seven followed by two and then on my watch during the last half of the Obama administration, we added Montenegro [00:21:00] and now Northern Macedonia is in the queue, which takes us to 30, so I think that this original policy decision to go with a rather aggressive policy option that Mary lays out.

[00:21:10] Actually promoted an expectation that the door to NATO membership was open and that NATO was willing to take a rather proactive, aggressive, assertive role in adding new members. And, and I think that's it. It's a two-sided coin on the side of the Central and Eastern European countries. That sought membership or are seeking membership.

[00:21:32] That was, I think, a significant incentive to get their house in order to establish and try, try to clean up their democratic institutions, but also on the military front to move towards the ability to contribute to collective security of the alliance as whole. And of course, these are two of the criteria laid out in the treaty itself as to what membership means.

[00:21:53] On the other hand, I think that undeniably the rather aggressive enlargement of NATO [00:22:00] has been a contributing factor to the tension between East and West. So between NATO and the U.S. and Russia. And here I think it's important to remember that geography still counts. And while NATO has enlarged largely [00:22:14] to the East. NATO's largest, most militarily capable neighbor, or Russia, is still there. And while NATO appreciated in the 90s that Russia was struggling with internal challenges and it was largely self-consumed with its internal challenges, both on the economic front and on the political front, the fact is that [00:22:33] the geography still counts and NATO's relationship with Russia still is fundamentally perhaps the key strategic factor for the Alliance. So you have both good news and bad news here.

Mary: [00:22:45] Great. Doug, thank you so much for your kind words about my research. I just wanted to follow up on an insightful comment that you just made. [00:22:52] You talked

about how the history I described in my article “promoted an expectation,” and I think that's an important phrase [00:23:00] because it became apparent to me and my research on the early nineties—93, 94—that even at that time, key policy makers were thinking about a future beyond just Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

[00:23:13] In other words, they were aware of the expectations of places like the Baltics and part of the attraction of conferring full Article Five guarantee to a small number of countries. Was that it made clear that there would be future rounds if you had a first round where you let in say five or seven in the first round, it would be an open question as to whether there was any work left to do, but it was also clear that Baltics were not going to get in in the first round.

[00:23:41] So, I realized in the course of my research that it was actually an important tactical maneuver to expand NATO to a small number of countries because that made it clear that there would be subsequent rounds and that kept the expectations alive in the Baltics.

Doug: [00:23:53] You know, Mary, that's really interesting and I think, you know, here we are approaching what, 30 years later, [00:24:00] and there still is that expectation.

[00:24:02] And so NATO today has. Three countries who aspire to membership. So Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine, and these three aspirants as NATO refers to them, still remind NATO, uh, all the time. I mean, quarterly, that, that there's an expectation that the doors remains open and that they still aspire to membership and that they're still trying to meet the [00:24:29] entry requirements. [00:24:31] So it's this notion of expectations still in place.

Mary: [00:24:34] Yeah, absolutely.

Doug: [00:24:36] But you know, I was intrigued by your research about the close connection in the early nineties between the role of NATO and the denuclearization, if you will, of Ukraine. And how, you know, a huge policy success during that period was removing [00:24:54] literally thousands of nuclear warheads and delivery systems from the territory [00:25:00] of Ukraine, and, and if you will, repatriating them to Russia and then denuclearizing some of the warheads and so forth, and how that was for I think the first half of the nineties even the overriding consideration that we didn't want a nuclear weapons to be out of control and lost in this political scramble, which was the breakup of the Soviet Union and that sort of [00:25:26] nuclear role and how it interfaced in intersected with enlargement. I found really interesting in your work.

Mary: [00:25:34] Yeah, thanks for emphasizing that. That was a surprise to me as well. And that issue originated actually in the George H.W. Bush era. As soon as the Soviet union fell apart, Secretary of State James Baker went to President Bush [00:25:49] because of this issue of the sudden nuclear proliferation that resulted because of course Ukraine was born nuclear as was Belarus and Kazakhstan and Secretary Baker went to [00:26:00] president Bush and said, “President Bush, there is no other issue, more deserving of your time and attention than this one.” And Secretary Baker felt very strongly [00:26:09] that only one

nuclear power should emerge from the breakup of the Soviet Union. Other members of the George H.W. Bush administration had slightly different views, such as Brent Scowcroft, who initially thought, “you know, we've, we've dealt with multiple countries having nuclear weapons before we can keep dealing with that.”

[00:26:23] But Baker felt strongly that “No, Russia needs to be the only nuclear power.” In part because Washington had a track record of dealing with Moscow and arms control issues, and Baker felt it was better to stick with the devils he knew in Moscow. And the devils. He didn't in Kiev and a host of other capitals, and now when the Clinton team came in, they continue to make denuclearization a priority with the connection then to the NATO expansion story that I described in my article that was one of the initial sources of success of the Partnership for Peace, because the Partnership for Peace [00:26:53] offered a security birth of sorts to Ukraine and help to induce Ukraine to denuclearize.

Morgan: [00:27:00] So one question I have, and you know, this may be something worth explaining to our listeners, is the, what is the strategic value of partnership for peace for NATO, but also how has the process of swift conferral of NATO membership as described in Professor Sarotte's piece, how has that affected what the Partnership for Peace was supposed to be?

Doug: [00:27:20] NATO expansion has, in a way, overtaken the original purpose of PFP— Partnership for Peace. And that's because as Mary's article describes, Partnership for Peace was designed as sort of a safe place and an area where an activity which could accommodate the Central and Eastern European States, uh, without prejudging a NATO enlargement.

[00:27:47] So it was a place where they could gather, they could begin to affiliate with NATO, but we didn't have to decide in any urgent way who would join when that was sort of the origins of [00:28:00] Partnership for Peace. And so I think, I thought it was a brilliant approach to sort of be inclusive, but not be deciding in terms of a NATO enlargement. You know, Partnership for Peace exists [00:28:13] to this day, it's still a place.

There are 21 member states, to include Russia, by the way, is still a member of PFP and this partnership arrangement gives those 21 European States access to the NATO school system, access to NATO exercises. In fact, a whole range of NATO activities with no promise of [00:28:36] becoming member States. So it still serves its original purpose, but because, as Mary's article lays out, because we took this rather aggressive approach with regard to enlargement, we have 12 original PFP members who are now seated at the table with the North Atlantic Council as allies. So in a way, enlargement has sort of overtaken PFP.

Mary: [00:29:00] Yes. When I did my research, one of the people who was generous enough to give me time for an interview was secretary of defense Ash Carter, who is of course here now as the director of the Belfer Center. And Ash, when I spoke to him, said, I'm paraphrasing here, “Partnership for Peace was such a great idea. [00:29:18] I could never really understand why people were in such a hurry to get past it to full expansion.” And when he said that to me, that that resonated with me and with what I was seeing in the

sources. Because it did seem to me like an answer to a number of questions. It seemed like a squared, a number of circles.

[00:29:35] It provided a security birth. I'll be at, not with article five guarantees, but a security birth. To a number of post-Soviet States, including Russia, if it wanted one, which it did eventually, it didn't immediately draw a new frontline through Europe. It didn't immediately create an expectation that there would be full guarantee expansion.

[00:29:54] So countries would in some ways demonstrate their fitness through their [00:30:00] Partnership activities before becoming NATO members. It just seemed to make to make sense to me. Now I can understand if you play devil's advocate, the leaders of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, if they were here, they'd be wagging their fingers at me and say, "We waited decades behind the iron curtain during the Cold War.

[00:30:16] Why should we have waited anymore?" And I understand that that is fully justified feeling. When I would raise this question with former Clinton advisers, they would say, "You try saying no to Lech Wałęsa," or "You try standing up to Vaclav Havel" and I understand that. But the pushback would come from people like Secretary of Defense Bill Perry, who would say, you know, I understand what the Central and Eastern Europeans want, but my job is to reduce the number of missiles aimed at the United States [00:30:43] and strategic arms control is going great right now with Russia. And anything that irritates the Russians and moves their hand closer to the trigger finger, again, is not in the interest of the U.S. government. So my interest is in strategic arms control with Russia and then at a later date, expanding NATO [00:31:00] to Central and Eastern European countries is as deserving as they are.

[00:31:03] So that was another insightful moment when I talked to Secretary Perry as well.

Doug: [00:31:08] You know, PFP has, has performed another important role for the Alliance. So outside of the European space, PFP has served as a model for regional partnerships for NATO in the middle East and, uh, and across North Africa. So it has, NATO has two other sets of sort of regional partnership arrangements.

[00:31:26] One's called the Mediterranean Dialogue, and this encompasses most of the States of North Africa and around the Levant. So the Mediterranean Dialogue is somewhat pattern on PFP, and then it has another such regional arrangement in the Persian Gulf where we're a number of States are in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, the ICI, if you will.

[00:31:49] So really PFP was the first of these three sort of regional partnerships. And today, based on the original idea of PFP. You have the 29 [00:32:00] members of NATO and as soon to be 30 but you have some 40 other countries around the world ranging from Mauritania to Japan, geographically, which are affiliated with NATO by way of a PFP-like partnership.

[00:32:16] So NATO has sort of extended its reach globally. In a very helpful way, and I think a very healthy way by way of partnerships. And that all started with PFP.

Mary: [00:32:28] Interesting. It also had the advantage that the Russians initially liked it. Boris Yeltsin, famously, when he heard about it from secretary of state, Warren Christopher said, this is a brilliant idea.

Morgan: [00:32:38] So is Ukraine the linchpin of the future of NATO? I mean, because it seems like it was the linchpin back in the mid-1990s but is it still the linchpin today when we're thinking about a potential NATO expansion or even its survival as you know, as it was originally intended?

Doug: [00:32:54] So I don't think Ukraine is the linchpin for NATO.

[00:32:58] Although NATO, [00:33:00] there's an important NATO Ukraine relationship. Which will have to be dealt with over time. But I do think Ukraine is the linchpin in another way, and that is, it's the linchpin between east-west relations and by, by this, I think Putin has made this clear that he sees Russia's relationship with Ukraine as one that will never permit a NATO membership.

[00:33:24] And yet NATO, on the other hand, has been the 2008 Bucharest Summit told itself. And told the world that one day Ukraine will be a member. We're living in this, this dilemma or this tension between what NATO has declared and what Putin has declared. So Ukraine in that way, will continue to be a sore spot or a linchpin in NATO [00:33:47] Russian relations.

Mary: [00:33:49] Yes. Ukraine has been the Shoals upon which various attempts at order construction have broken. Ever since the Soviet Union collapsed. There's, there's been at least four times when this [00:34:00] has happened. The first time was when the Soviet union was collapsing, both Mikhail Gorbachev, the last Soviet leader and Boris Yeltsin there, the Russian president both initially wanted some form of a reformed Soviet union one that hopefully [00:34:15] be better able to meet the challenges of the 21st century. But Ukrainians may clear they had no interest in that. They wanted full independence. And once that was clear, then neither Gorbachev nor Yeltsin could see any way forward for union. They didn't want to be in a rump union, uh, that was missing the second largest Slavic Republic.

[00:34:32] And so Ukraine's desire for independence really drove the collapse of the Soviet Union. And then the second time when Ukraine is critical is what we were just describing when the United States and Russia are working together to denuclearize it. That is initially a success, but the longer term problem is that the way that Washington and Moscow convince Ukraine to denuclearize is via the Budapest memorandum, which guarantees the territorial integrity [00:34:57] I apologize, which assures the [00:35:00] territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Doug: That verb is very important.

Mary: That verb is important, yes, and that turns out to be problematic in 2014 when Russia violates a Ukrainian territorial integrity. And then the third time is then when Putin is president, you have start to have the Orange Revolution, the color revolutions.

[00:35:18] Putin never really recognize Ukraine as a fully separate country. He saw those protests as direct threats to his regime and to himself personally. And he also saw him as being instigated by the West rather than recognizing the domestic origins of this discontent. And so that really derailed, uh, Russia- American relations in the George W. [00:35:37] Bush era. And now the fourth and final time when Ukraine is breaking a political order is right now. Because of president Donald Trump's decision first to hire Paul Manafort as his campaign manager, thus connecting Ukrainian and American politics directly since Manafort, worked for years in Ukrainian politics.

[00:35:54] And secondly, now this attempt to establish a counter narrative to the Muller report [00:36:00] by saying it was Ukraine, not Russia, that hacked on behalf of Clinton, not Trump.

Morgan: [00:36:04] So Ambassador Lute, you served as the U.S. Permanent representative to NATO from 2013 to 2017 during those years, you know, what were the biggest issues you faced in that post and how were they resolved? Were they resolved? I'm curious to hear about your perspective actually serving as the U.S. representative to this Alliance.

Doug: [00:36:24] So I went to NATO after six years in the Bush and Obama White Houses, and I went to NATO and. Um, early fall of 2013 wondering what I would do with the rest of my life, actually, hoping that I could simply get out of that 18 acre compound, uh, on the White House.

[00:36:44] And so I was glad to go to NATO, as, you know, as a career army officer. I'd be good on my career. As a NATO officer in a way, uh, serving along, uh, the iron curtain in the U.S. army unit there in Germany. And I thought, well, you know, perfect way to sort of complete my lifecycle, you [00:37:00] know, so back my professional life cycle, go back and serve again at NATO, at the end of my career.

[00:37:06] And that all went very well. So from sort of September 2013 when I arrived through the new year 2014 things seem to be going fine. And then this rather good idea turned into a huge policy challenge. And that was, uh, you know, at the last day of February 2014 into March 2014, Putin seizes and illegally annexes Crimea.

[00:37:33] A few months later in the spring of 2014, he forces his way into the Donbass to sort of South Eastern provinces of Ukraine proper and destabilizes those two provinces. And then in June of 2014, a guy by the name of Al Baghdadi, who has been recently, again in the news, goes to the mosque in Northern Iraq in Mosul and declares the physical caliphate of the Islamic State.

So these [00:38:00] things all happen. One, two, three, one, the first sort of six months of 2014 and changed the rest of my time at NATO. So the next three plus years at NATO, and I would say that NATO still contending with the aftermath of those who sort of seminal events in early 2014 in particular and having to do with our conversation today, those events have dramatically changed the character and tone of NATO-Russian relations, and that story is still playing out.

Mary: [00:38:30] I would add to that. I believe those events marked the end of the post–Cold War era. So for me as a historian, it's useful when an era ends because you can view it in its totality, but I believe that is quite sad for global politics and indeed does not bode well for peace in Europe. I think the fact that Putin decided to change borders in Europe by force, once again [00:38:54] Basically tore up the new, the post–Cold War norm, that that wasn't going to happen and signified a [00:39:00] break. So I think the post–Cold War era was an era of optimism that started in 1989 and unfortunately ended in 2014 and we're still learning about the contours of the time that we're in now.

Doug: [00:39:10] I'd have to agree with that. [00:39:11] You know it during the period of your research, Mary, this very catchy phrase, which turns out to be in a national objective of a Europe: “whole, free and at peace” became sort of the bumper sticker, the banner of what we are trying to accomplish in Europe. And, and here we are, you know, approaching 30 years later and we can ask how are we doing in a Europe whole free and at peace?

[00:39:38] And I think certainly 2014 set us back a good way is we just think about those, that three-part phrase, right, “whole, free and at peace” and consider the role of NATO enlargement. You can I think argue that enlargement meant a lot for a Europe whole and a Europe free, right? Because it was a very, it was a [00:40:00] function of integrating central Eastern European States, mostly first into NATO and then many, and for many, subsequently into the European union.

[00:40:09] So “whole and free” makes sense. But I think you have to argue that enlargement at least contributed somewhat to our inability to hit the third criteria, which is “at peace”. And Mary's article lays out, I think very clearly, and this is an important distinction, very clearly, that the roots of the tension with Russia have mostly to do with Russia and Russian factors, domestic factors, sense of insecurity, vulnerability, the Russian economy, perhaps the humiliation of the breakup of the Soviet Union and all of that. [00:40:46] So these are very Russian internal factors,

Doug: [00:40:50] But at least a contributing factor worth considering is the degree to which Russia did not feel part of. Then integrated Europe. So we still have this [00:41:00] division between Russia now and the rest of Europe and, and perhaps Russia, the States in between and the rest of Europe. [00:41:07] So that's the 30 year Mark. We're not yet whole, free, and at peace.

Mary: [00:41:10] Thank you, Doug for emphasizing that theme. Another theme that I wanted to emphasize is this question of how to expand NATO. For a long time it seemed that the debate about NATO expansion was binary. It was good, or it was bad. And I was trying in the article to move beyond that and talk about different ways of expanding NATO, which might have led to a different result.

[00:41:34] I think it's important. I would like to say I'm not in this article trying to argue against NATO expansion per se. What I am trying to suggest is that there were alternative modes of expansion, which might not have exacerbated those internal Russian domestic problems in the way that expansion actually did.

[00:41:49] So thank you for emphasizing that point.

Doug: [00:41:51] I think your article rightly makes that point. Without arguing that enlargement is good or bad, that it's a binary choice. You know, [00:42:00] as a military guy by trade, I'm attracted to the notion of strategy being the alignment of ends, ways, and means, right? So what you're trying to accomplish, a Europe, whole free and at peace, the ways, how you're going to accomplish that, [00:42:15] and then eventually the resources and your article, I think is very effective in laying out that there really were some fundamental alternative ways. You could enlarge fast, or you could use PFP as a bit of a holding pattern and, and take a more deliberate approach. And I think it's very important to look back and without denying the right [00:42:37] of the 100 million central and Eastern Europeans who are now NATO citizens by the way of enlargement, right? Nobody can deny that. This is an unassailable right, that they have a right to choose their own path and that they're better off as NATO citizens than being outside NATO.

Mary: Sure.

Doug: But without marching up that Hill, you can also go back and see that there really were some pretty [00:43:00] deliberate alternatives here between how to enlarge. [00:43:03] And so I was drawn back to this sort of the fundamental definition of strategy, which puts a big emphasis on ways.

Mary: [00:43:11] Right, right. And these alternatives were known at the time, which is important. Yeah. No, I don't want the article to be read as an article opposed to NATO expansion, but rather as an explanation of a counterfactual, ways that it could have proceeded without exacerbating Russian internal tensions in the way that expansion did.

Morgan: [00:43:26] So thinking about this going forward though, what is the future of the NATO alliance and also potential expansion, right? On the one hand, Ambassador Lute, you've, you've mentioned a couple of times we have North Macedonia, which is well on its way to joining the Alliance, but then there's also a sense of maybe with the current conflict [00:43:46] in Ukraine. Maybe it's hitting its limits, but then you also have Turkey, and its recent incursion into Syria also testing the idea that existing NATO members are pushing back on this idea of the [00:44:00] alliance itself. Maybe not pushing back on the idea of the alliance, but are complicating even relations between existing members.

[00:44:06] So what does the future potentially look like? What are the options available? Where do we see kind of the future of NATO going?

Doug: [00:44:13] Well, a very key source document here is the key to your question. And that's the Washington treaty itself. So NATO enlargement will always be an option because it's in article 10 of the Washington treaty, which created NATO in 1949 so Article 10 essentially says that, aside from the original 12 any other European state in a position to do two things.

[00:44:38] Further the principles of the treaty and contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area, may accede to this treaty The third and final criteria for enlargement is a new

member, an aspiring member, must be agreed on a unanimous basis by current members. So because that's in the treaty itself, it remains, it remains an option and remains open.

[00:45:00] [00:45:00] Now it's not just a political policy decision, it's actually a matter of, you know, international law by way of this treaty. The second part of your question though is also interesting because unlike the European Union treaty, which under article 27 can sanction sort of misbehaving member States, there is no such provision in the Washington treaty, in the NATO treaty.

[00:45:22] Article 13 says that if a member state wishes to depart the treaty, uh, you have only to give one year's notice. So it's almost like a lease agreement on your apartment, right?

[00:45:34] But there's no provision for the Alliance to sanction a misbehaving ally. So today, in the case of Turkey, for example, were, arguably, the Alliance has a number of challenges with our Turkish allies, and there's largely only political [00:45:50] options available, uh, in terms of trying to bring pressure to bear and trying to get Turkey to abide by the principles of the Alliance.

Mary: [00:46:00] Looking at this issue as a historian, there are many aspects of the Trump presidency that are, shall we say, surprising, but one of the ones that leaps out to me as a historian is the way that he is reopening [00:46:12] What I thought as a historian was a settled debate. Back at the beginning of the 20th century, there was a debate between isolationists and people who wanted to be engaged abroad. Over whether it was best to start the defense of the United States on the near side or on the far side of the oceans that surround us.

[00:46:29] And of course, in the interwar period, the isolation is famously won that debate. But then we had World War II and we as a nation decided that that was clearly not the right approach, and we made a long term commitment to NATO to start the defense of the United States in cooperation with our allies on the far side of our oceans.

[00:46:46] And that debate, I thought was settled. And President Trump has now recently been talking about withdrawing from NATO, which I find deeply alarming.

Doug: [00:46:56] Well, you know Mary, well, occasionally you hear these sort of loose reports [00:47:00] coming out of the White House or, or so forth about the potential for moving further away from NATO.

[00:47:05] The political underpinnings of U.S. support for NATO remain very, very strong. I mean, there's the Chicago Council on Global Affairs polling that shows something like 75% of Americans believe in the value of NATO and would be willing to support it at current levels or greater levels. And then you have on the Hill sustained bipartisan support for the Alliance as well.

[00:47:29] So whatever comes out of the White House these days, I think we have good. Political foundations for continued success in the Alliance and continued us sort of central role in the Alliance.

Morgan: [00:47:41] This has been a terrific conversation, Ambassador Lute, we have a bit of a tradition here at the podcast, which is we like to conclude every episode by asking our guests from the policy community to [00:47:52] provide advice for either junior scholars or early career diplomats or service members. Given your expertise, what [00:48:00] is the kind of best advice you can offer people as they go forward in their careers in security studies or national security?

Doug: [00:48:06] Well, it's two part advice. For one is to master the substance, uh, in my 40 plus years in the international national international security arena, the first several decades being as a sort of up and coming army officer, but more recently as a senior officer in the white house and then subsequently has ambassador NATO.

[00:48:28] I learned that about 90% of the policy arguments are won on the basis of a well-reasoned mastery of the facts. So a facts-based, expertise-based argument mostly almost always wins the day. So mastering the substance is really important. But the second part of the advice is that we should couple expertise with humility.

[00:48:52] And by humility, I mean simply the sort of sixth sense that we will never really be complete masters. [00:49:00] That we will never completely be the experts. And so we ought to have a bit of humility about what we don't know and the sorts of things, the sorts of surprises that await us. So this pairing of mastery of the expertise and humility, I think is really important.

Morgan: [00:49:16] Terrific. Ambassador Lute, Professor Sarotte, thank you so much for joining us today.

Mary: Thank you.

Doug: [00:49:19] It's going to be with you.