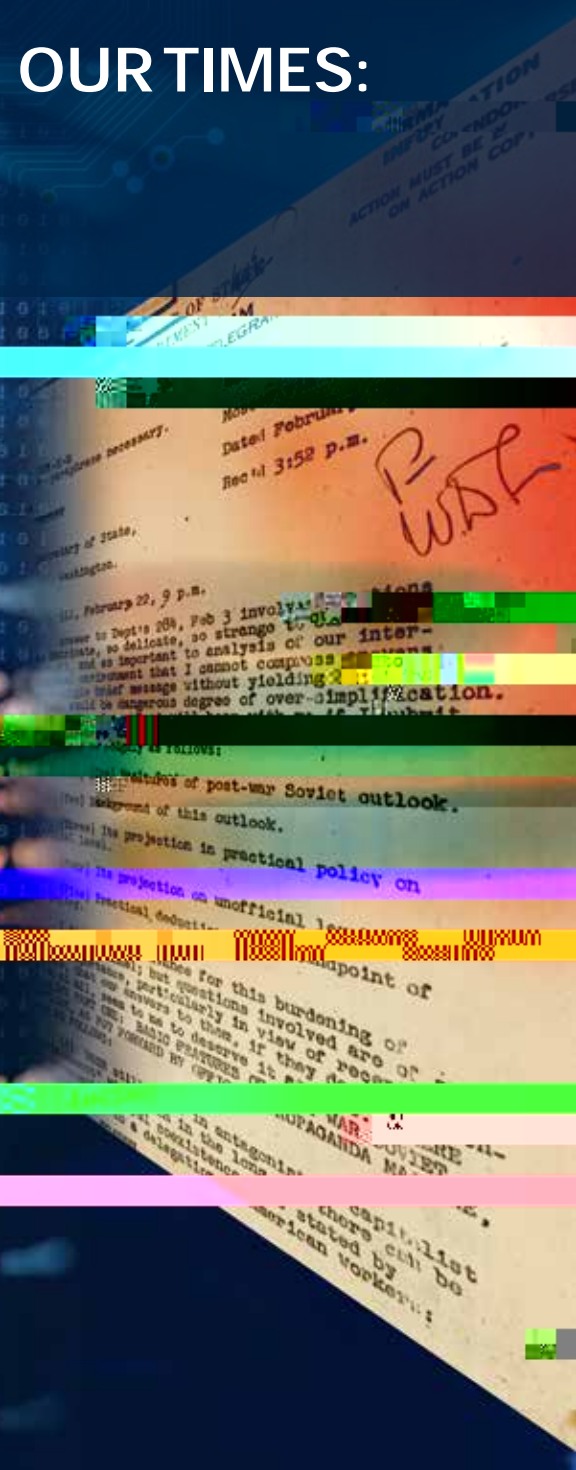


A KENNAN FOR OUR TIMES:

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Editors: We wanted to start with some questions about your time as Policy Planning director. Perhaps we could begin with the agenda that you brought to the job.

Jake Sullivan: I was the director of Policy Planning from February

when power is increasingly measured and exercised in economic terms and many of our main adversaries are much further along in integrating the economic dimensions into their grand strategy. That was one.

The second was how to give content to and more granular conceptual shape to the Asia-Pacific “pivot” or “rebalance.” So I worked closely with members of my team and Kurt Campbell, who was the assistant secretary for East Asia, on a seminal article Secretary Clinton wrote in 2011 called “America’s Pacific Century.” And then that led to a number of more tailored initiatives, including the work that Policy Planning did to support the opening to Burma/Myanmar and related projects.

The third was more of an inbox issue. It was how to think about the potential risks and opportunities of the Arab revolutions, which were unfolding right at the moment that I took the job on. And what was interesting about the time horizon on that particular set of activities was the U.S. government was operating day-to-day, hour-to-hour. And so for policy planning, mid-range to long range-planning became a week out, a month out, a year out rather than 5–10–25 years, as we were just trying to stay one step ahead and think through, you know, what all this meant, where it was all headed, and how the United States should respond.

Those were some of the main areas where I tried to bring a new thrust or perspective to the overall agenda of the policy planning staff.

E: If you were to step back and think about what that office had been, what it was meant to be, what it could be, how did you feel the mission fit the substance of what you set out to do? What is your sense of the ways in which Kennan shaped the office and its mission?

JS: Well, the threshold question for any Policy Planning director is

how do you implement the very simple directive that Secretary Marshall gave to George Kennan, which was to avoid trivia.

headquartered at the National Security Council.

The State Department itself was just one of more than a dozen cabinet agencies that saw itself as deeply involved in the advancement of America's foreign affairs mission. The Agriculture Department, the Department of Homeland Security, the Justice Department, the Energy Department, and on down the line, the Treasury Department, all had substantial elements of their bureaucracy devoted to foreign affairs and foreign policy.

Policy Planning at State suggested a division in responsibility and authority

ends. This story ends with the contradictions of the Soviet Union becoming increasingly exposed to its own people, and eventually those contradictions are going to doom the Soviet system.

And so that is the foundation for containment, his saying, “that’s where this is all headed—now we need a strategy that gets us from here to there.” That protects America’s interests and pushes back against Soviet expansionism but in a sense helps create the conditions for that result to unfold. He couldn’t say the timing or anything else, but he could say, “here’s where we’re going to end up and therefore here’s the prescription for how to get us from here to there.”

When it came to the Middle East, we couldn’t say, “okay here’s where it’s going to end up. So now let’s talk about getting from here to there.” There was immense dispute and debate about where it was going to end up.

That’s just one of many examples—to answer your question about the end of the Cold War—of how a conceptually simpler (still incredibly difficult but conceptually simpler) landscape for foreign policy and grand strategic decision-making lent itself to cleaner, sharper, more sustainable and durable strategies like containment. They were cleaner, sharper, and more sustainable compared to the messy, contingent, uncertain, and also incredibly varied landscape of the post-Cold War era, where not only did you have the continuation of geopolitical competition, but you had the rising strategic threat of terrorism and you had a series of transnational issues that required overcoming complex collective action problems and the mix of competition and cooperation and your adversary sometimes also being your partner.

This was the landscape we were dealing with in the post-Cold War era. I know that every Policy Planning director likes to say that his or her period was the most difficult, the most challenging, the most vexing period that there ever was. But in the case of the recent Poli-

cy Planning directors, I'm going to say, I'm going to go out on a limb
and say it was actually true.. go out sor0 f jok a labTJ0. E:.

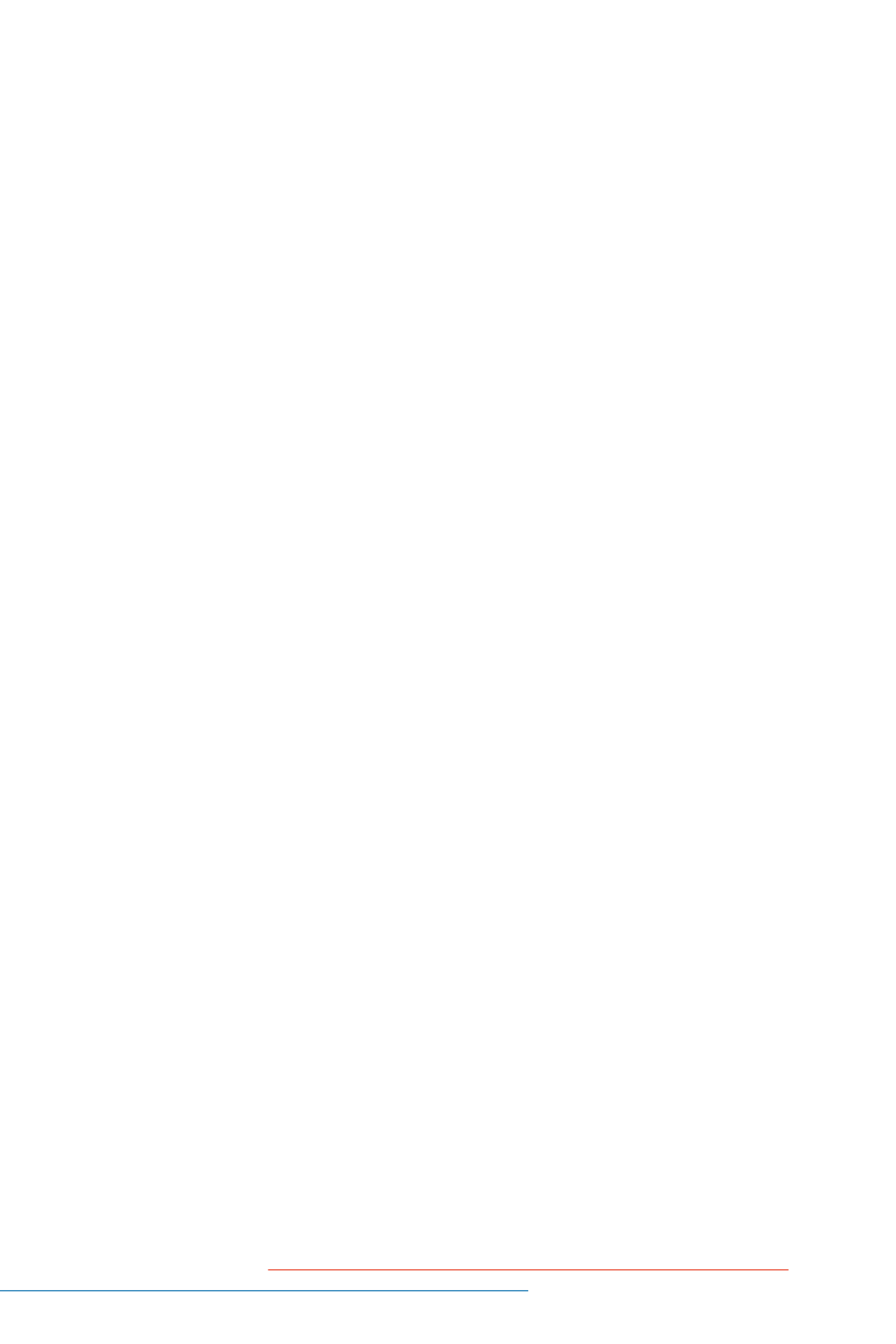
even get to the “how.” If you’re not wrestling with that question in a systematic way, then you’re ultimately letting down the secretary and the president because you will get carried along by events.

And I can’t give myself an A grade on being able to do that as Policy Planning director. I don’t know any Policy Planning director in recent memory who would because it’s so hard. We are all struggling with long-term thinking. But we need to get better at it. We really do.

E: We’re also consuming a lot more news and information from more sources than we would have been 50 to 60 years ago.

JS: The advent of email has been disruptive to sound, sober, durable, strategic decision-making because it creates a rhythm and a tempo and a mode, an operating style, that is much more tactical and reactive and doesn’t leave time for people to step back and ask big, hard, conceptual questions that allow one to hang a frame around America’s foreign policy choices.

E: There may be other significant powers in the world which nonetheless have a narrower aperture for foreign policy planning....Sinking.EMC -3he 8



We are now entering a much more competitive phase where to maintain a competitive edge strategy is going to matter a whole lot more to the United States. I think we're going to have to get better at it as a strategic community. That's the second thing. And that says Russia relies more on strategy to get what it needs because of its relatively weaker position. The United States has not had to rely on it as much.

Even so, I view Russia in particular as having more of a tactical opportunistic approach to its strategy than some kind of coherent, comprehensive game plan that it is going out and executing on a daily basis. I think Putin gets more credit for being a strategic genius than he deserves. I think he has nerve and gumption and is willing to move fast and seize opportunities when they present themselves, but I think there's a lot more improvisation in what the Russians are up to than the conventional wisdom would suggest.

E: You've already recited from "The Long Telegram." Kennan's approach was to ask questions about, as he put it, "the sources of Soviet conduct" or the nature of the regime. These were questions that he answered through political analysis but also through reflections on history and literature. Was that approach was still active in your time as Policy Planning director? Or was it better to take another approach? This is a Russia question, but there might be other countries that come into play in this regard.

JS: There were two big priority areas for my time as director: where the Middle East was headed and this whole issue of economic statecraft. Digging into the academic literature and the history and talking to a lot of people who have looked at these questions not as policymakers but as historians or as theoreticians or as anthropologists—that was an important part of what we did. And my staff really dug in methodologically to the social sciences, to the history, to the theory, and then tried to generate papers that would be informed by all of that but not weighed down by it to the point where they be-

Looking back at Kennan's thought process reveals a huge challenge: how to stay true to what it was that made him so good while at the

ing-grade answer but probably not something that's going to get honors. That's spoken as someone who's in the middle of grading final exams right now.

So number one, I think going back to what I was saying before about how Kennan got to his assessment of where the Soviet Union was

figure out a more effective and sustainable way to raise the cost to him for his continued disruption of democratic systems and efforts to weaken and divide the West.

But (c) that we offer him a path to some form of uneasy coexistence. There's never going to be the friendship one might have hoped for in the 1990s and 2000s but the relationship can be more durable, sustainable, and certainly de-escalated from where it is right now.

We should try to do this through an integrated, strategic conversation at the highest level. I think it's very hard with Donald Trump, who just doesn't think in these terms. But if you had a different president, who sat with his senior security team and Vladimir Putin with his, I do think that you could work out a modus vivendi between the United States, our European partners, and Russia that would be more durable, and would involve, to a certain extent, making it clear to Putin that while we will never back off of our values and we will always stand up and speak out on human rights, we're not in the business of trying to bring him down. Because I think that is one of the aspects of this that has become so destabilizing.

That's a 30,000-foot way of thinking about this, but fundamentally I think we have to say to Putin: we're not going to accept a notion of just a flat-out sphere of influence, but we're also going to try to understand your defensive interests in your own near abroad. That we say to him: we are not going to stand silent in the face of abuses of human rights, but we're also not in the regime-change business in Russia. That's for you and the people of Russia to work through.

And to say: here's what's going to happen to you if you continue down the path that you're on. These are the kinds of steps that we are going to be prepared to take in a predictable and consistent way that are going to impose very real costs on Putin and Russia if they keep going in this direction.

That would be how I would think about managing that relationship.

And you know, I'll just finish with an anecdote. Bill Burns and I were meeting with Sergei Ryabkov, the deputy foreign minister, in the context of the Iran negotiation, and we had to convince him that Russia should join us in the approach to the Iranians on a particular issue related to inspections and verification. And we convinced him, you know, we got him on board.

And then as we were leaving the room, we also had to say, by the way, today we just imposed sanctions on Ukraine. Thank you very much for your help on Iran.

And that anecdote goes to show you that there are issues on which we are going to have to continue to work with the Russians, including not just bilateral issues in our relationship like strategic stability but external issues like Iran and its nuclear program, even as we engage in this more competitive and adversarial dynamic that I've just described.

We have to be mature and sober about how we effectively manage the elements of cooperation and the elements of competition and pushback and not at any point turn our backs on the kind of core proposition of who we are, what values we stand for, who our friends are, and how we're going to stand up for them.