

Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia Discusses Leadership and Global Security Challenges in NPS Lecture

Ambassador John J. Sullivan spoke about risks facing the world in a guest lecture at the Naval Postgraduate School emphasizing unity and U.S. leadership.

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EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Naval Postgraduate School](#) (NPS) welcomed former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, John J. Sullivan, who shared candid insights on leadership lessons and the world's most pressing security challenges during the most recent Fireside Chat format [Secretary of the Navy Guest Lecture](#) (SGL), November 12.



Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, John J. Sullivan spoke to more than 1,200 students and faculty at the Naval Postgraduate School on risks facing U.S. and global security.

During a 90-minute discussion followed by a Q&A with more than 1,200 students and faculty in attendance, Sullivan drew from his extensive diplomatic experience to outline the risks facing U.S. and global security, emphasizing unity, the growing threats from authoritarian regimes, and the critical need for strong U.S. leadership.

To open, Sullivan was asked by the Fireside Chat moderator, retired U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Eric Wendt, about the most important lesson he had learned about leadership.

“My biggest lesson on leadership sounds simple but it is not always easy: believe in what you are doing,” Sullivan stated, with conviction. “Leaders must be credible, and that comes from pursuing what you are passionate about and believe in. You will accrue knowledge and expertise because of your pursuits, but you must be authentic as a leader.”

Wendt, a retired Special Forces Green Beret, NPS distinguished alumnus, and current NPS professor of practice in the [Defense Analysis department](#), asked a question which quickly shifted

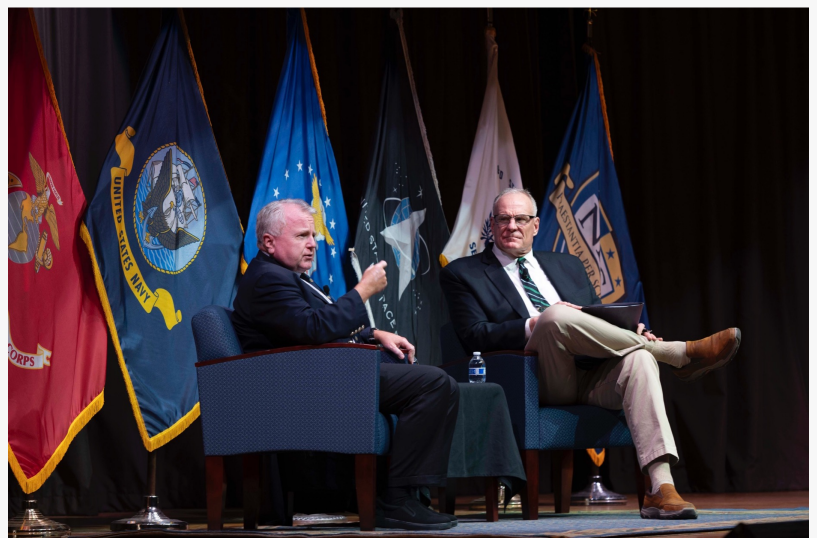
the conversation to the security landscape of today, where Sullivan outlined what he described as the “top three threats” facing the United States and global stability.

“The greatest security threat to the United States is the United States itself,” Sullivan began. “To prevail in any strategic competition or conflict, we must first be united. Our adversaries do all they can to prevent this domestically and with our allies. The health, vigor, and unity of this country are prerequisites for the U.S. to remain atop as the world’s leader. We must be true to our values and find common ground.”

His words resonated with the room, especially as he reflected on the growing challenges within American society, warning that America cannot afford to be divided. He continued by noting that we must also recognize how division weakens us and strengthens America’s adversaries who are determined to undermine our standing in the world.

Next, Sullivan turned his attention to the global stage and the increasing alignment between authoritarian regimes, particularly the China-led axis that includes Russia, Iran, and North Korea.

“These authoritarian nations find refuge in each other and work to actively undermine the international rules-based order to advance their illegitimate power and claims,” he said. “The threats to global security today are some of the worst I’ve seen in my lifetime. We’ve seen these powers challenge democratic institutions, and they are emboldened as we struggle to maintain unity at home.”



Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, John J. Sullivan with retired U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Eric Wendt at the Naval Postgraduate School discuss risks facing the U.S. and global security.



Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, John J. Sullivan receives a standing ovation at the Naval Postgraduate School after his guest lecture on national security.

Sullivan pointed to the critical role of the U.S. and NATO in standing against this growing alliance. He noted how the U.S. historically stood with its allies during the Cold War and how the U.S. currently faces a similar challenge with new adversaries working together to “destabilize the global international order.”

The conversation then shifted to his third concern, the Russia-Ukraine war, and specifically about Russian President Vladimir Putin.

“In short, Putin is pursuing his vision for the reestablishment of the Russian empire,” he said. “His justification for invading Ukraine was based on false pretenses. Despite the people of Ukraine, choosing the West and a democratic future, as did many other millions in former Soviet Bloc countries, Putin will not stop.”

Sullivan characterized Putin’s invasion of Ukraine as a profound miscalculation with Ukraine being far more willing to fight than Putin anticipated.

“With U.S. and European support, Ukraine has held its ground against a far superior military force,” he stated. “U.S. and NATO must remain steadfast in their resolve.”

The Ambassador underscored the strategic significance of a firm alliance in Europe also “deterring similar aggression elsewhere in the world.” In his closing remarks, Sullivan turned to the role of leaders in voicing these concerns to advance meaningful conversation with the American public about global security threats and why it matters.

“There is not enough public discourse on the magnitude of the risks and potential insecurity in the world, but I am encouraged by what I see happening here at NPS,” he stated. “The potential for a much greater conflict is real and we must help our neighbors understand, or we may lack the will to coalesce as a nation if that time comes. Seeing the bright, patriotic leaders here at NPS gives me confidence that the future of our military and our nation lies in capable hands. You are the leaders we need, right now.”

For students at NPS, Sullivan’s lecture offered a rare and valuable perspective on the complex challenges facing the U.S. and the world from someone with recent, relevant experience. And while conflict is not inevitable, Sullivan emphasized that understanding historical lessons is crucial to maintaining peace.

NPS Defense Management student U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Brittany Saulsberry was grateful for the Ambassador’s insights.

“Understanding our adversaries from someone who’s been at the table with them allows us to mitigate risks and recognize the obvious threats before they become more significant,” said Saulsberry. “The key takeaway for me was how important it is to truly know your adversary. Deterrence is our priority, and the more we understand adversary motivations and strategies, the better positioned we’ll be to achieve that, protect our national interests, and uphold our

principles."

For more information on the Secretary of the Navy Guest Lecture program at NPS, and to watch past lectures, visit <https://nps.edu/spls>

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