

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Online Event

“One Year Later: Assessing Russia’s War In Ukraine”

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Featuring

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Seth G. Jones: Welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. We are talking today about the war in Ukraine. I am joined by three outstanding experts.

The first is Eliot Cohen. Eliot is the Arleigh Burke Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Robert E. Osgood Professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.

I also have in the room with me Emily Harding. Emily Harding is the deputy director of the International Security Program and a senior fellow. She's also formerly the deputy director at the Senate Select Committee for Intelligence, as well as an analyst at the Central – former analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency. Also served time at the White House on the National Security Council.

And finally, we have virtually Mike Vickers. Mike is the former undersecretary of defense for intelligence, as well as a former CIA case officer. Mike is also the author of the soon-to-be-released "By All Means Available." Strongly encourage everyone to purchase that. It will be a fantastic book.

So welcome to all of you. Thanks for joining us today.

Let me go to Eliot first. Eliot, we're roughly a year since the war began. What are the top three things in your view that the administration should be doing that it's not doing right now?

Eliot A. Cohen: So the first thing, I think, is really to arm Ukraine with everything that it needs to win this war. There's a long list, but the most important I would say would be systems like ATACMS, a long-range missile system, because with that the Ukrainians could really begin dismantling the Russian logistical infrastructure, which depends very heavily on rail lines. It would allow them to isolate Crimea from the mainland and really, I think, disable Russian forces in a big way. There are other things that they need, but I would say that one is probably at the top of the list.

Dr. Jones: Eliot, if I could just get you to push back a little bit on arguments. The ATACMS, for example, some have argued, A, that they may escalate the war; and, B, that the Ukrainians could use them to strike targets, for example, in Russia. So how do you respond to those concerns?

Dr. Cohen: Well, let me dismiss the second one first. You can cut a deal with the Ukrainians if you really don't want the Ukrainians to hit into Russia and you say: This is the deal; you get the ATACMS, but you can't use it to hit targets inside Russian territory. I'm entirely convinced that the Ukrainians would

comply with that. Although why exactly it is that the Russians get to attack Ukrainian apartment buildings and hospitals and all the rest, and their own military infrastructure in Russia is immune, I don't get.

And the escalatory argument is ridiculous because, I mean, what exactly are the Russians going to do that they haven't already done? They're going to be, what, attacking Ukrainian power plants? The only kind of escalation that would be meaningful would be to nuclear weapons. There's a whole bunch of very, very good reasons why the Russians would not do that. So this is just one of those cases where we've been deterring ourselves. And of course, the more we talk about it, the more the Russians play it back. You know, that's one thing that they're really good at.

So I guess I would say, you know, those long-range strike systems are critical. There are a lot of other systems that they need. There will be more controversial things like cluster munitions, which would be very, very helpful in the circumstance they're in now. But start with that.

Second thing, I think, is internally we need a real defense industrial mobilization. Yes, we are ramping up ammunition production. The assistant secretary of the Army, Doug Bush, announced we're going to, I think, sextuple it over a course of two years. But as you pointed out in that terrific report, "Empty Bins," we are just not mobilizing our defense industry, and there's a particular tool that is available to the government to use called the Defense Production Act, which has been on the books since 1950 and there were even versions of it before. And with it, you can make a whole lot of bureaucratic obstacles go away, and what you can also do, and what we should be doing, is figuring out ways to give industry multiyear contracts so that they will invest in the people and the infrastructure, and the people may be more important than the infrastructure, actually, to really ramp up production. So I'd say that's the second item.

The third item is a concerted effort to explain to the American people why this war is really central to our interests. You know, what is astonishing to me is not some softening of support for Ukraine among Republicans; what's astonishing to me is just how overwhelmingly bipartisan support for the war has been, and right now there's a congressional delegation, including 30 senators, at the Munich Security Conference, bipartisan. You have both Mitch McConnell as well as Chuck Schumer there expressing support, and that's in absence of the president, you know, giving a speech from the Oval –

Dr. Jones: And no Russians at the Munich Security Council.

Dr. Cohen: And no Russians, which is a great thing – but explaining why this is so important to us. And there's also, I think, a very important – as we explain why this is in our interests, we also need to remind people of the horrors the

Russians are inflicting. The latest one, just one that I would mention, is this big study out of Yale on what the Russians have been doing with Ukrainian children: putting them in concentration camps, setting them – pulling them apart from their parents, really –

Dr. Jones: These are in Russian-controlled territories of Ukraine.

Dr. Cohen: In the Russian-controlled territories of Ukraine, you know, indoctrinating them, attempting, really, to Russify them. And this is a crime under – a war crime under the Geneva Conventions. It's an act of monstrous cruelty. And it's just one more.

The American people, everybody really needs to be reminded that what we're seeing is not simply a war of aggression; it's a war which involves extraordinary crimes against humanity of a kind and on a scale that we really haven't seen since World War II.

Dr. Jones: Thanks, Eliot

Emily Harding: Can I jump in on that last piece too?

Dr. Jones: Yes, and then we're coming to you after that anyway, Emily.

Ms. Harding: Right. (Laughs.) Well, on the piece about the children, there was a report just recently that Putin himself had met with the Russian minister for children's affairs and had a very public interaction with her, supporting this program. I think that's important to remember. This is not something that people are doing sort of on their own inside Russian territory. This is sanctioned by the president.

Dr. Cohen: And if I can pile on that –

Ms. Harding: (Laughs.)

Dr. Cohen: I mean, you raise a really important point, Emily. The crimes that we are seeing, going beyond the fact of the invasion itself, are being really committed across the board. This is not the case of, you know, a bad guy at the top with a couple of bad actors below him. It's – unfortunately, it's systemic. And that goes down to units that go in and pillage and rape and murder civilians. This is very, very extensive. And we need to take into account what that means, not just for hopefully, eventually war crimes trials, but what kind of Russia we're going to be dealing with, you know, over the next few decades.

Dr. Jones: So, Emily, I want to come to you and then we'll go to Mike in a second. But, Emily, for you, what would happen if foreign aid, U.S. military assistance,

Western assistance, were to start to dry up or even to stop? How important is this for the Ukrainians? There have been, you know, the last week some media reports with unnamed administration officials commenting that the Ukrainians need to get this over with. But how important is Western aid to the Ukrainians right now?

Ms. Harding: It's critically important. I think it's an incontrovertible fact that as much as Ukraine is doing amazing things in this war, they cannot arm themselves for a long fight. It's just not physically possible, given what they're experiencing on the ground right now. And so outside assistance is going to be the critical factor to helping them sustain.

I thought it was really interesting that of Eliot's three things, the first two were weapons systems that the U.S. should be providing to the Ukrainians, and the third one was continuing bipartisan support and demonstrating that support. And that's because it's not only the hard power on the ground of the weapons systems, but it's also the signaling to Moscow that we are committed. They think that they can just wait us out. They think they can drive wedges into the West and that eventually we'll sort of lose patience with this kind of conflict and say, well, wouldn't it be better if we went to peace negotiations, and peace negotiations in his mind means that he gets to keep what he has now. So I think they, Russia, are in it for the long fight, and any signal that we send that we are not in it for the long fight, just lends credence to their hope that they can wait us out.

I think that it'll be really interesting to see what comes out of Munich and those discussions there, and that article in the Post where an administration official came forward and talked about how, you know, it would be really great if we could get to the negotiating table pretty early and that when Biden said in the State of the Union, we're with you as long as it takes – that only sort of means as long as it takes – I think that was disastrous.

I don't know what kind of strategy was behind that article. But the idea that we are signaling weakness at a time when we should be signaling strength and commitment it's just – it's a bad strategy.

Dr. Cohen: You know, I fired off a few volcanic tweets and the phrase that I'll stick with is strategic imbecility. (Laughter.)

Ms. Harding: You said it, not me.

Dr. Jones: All right.

I want to go to the Mike in a second. But if we can pull up the map right now of territorial control in Ukraine, what I want to do is show a little bit of where we're at right now.

So here's a current map of the war in Ukraine. The red areas are Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine. What's interesting in the blue is the sizable chunk of territory that the Ukrainians have been able to retake following Russian advances.

I mean, what's interesting and, I think, important to understand is when the war begins a year ago in February of 2022 Ukraine has a much smaller military, a much smaller and weaker industrial base, a much smaller economy, a much smaller population, a much smaller military including an army, yet, it is able, A, to stave off a Russian blitzkrieg operation to take Kyiv, and, second, it's able over the course of the summer and in the fall to conduct successful counter attacks to retake some of that territory.

If we start to look at where we're at right now, here's a(n) operational tactical level view of Russian and Ukrainian force disposition in the Bakhmut area of Ukraine. We see heavy fighting. We'll get into kind of what attrition warfare looks like here but heavy fighting with both Ukrainian and Russian forces digging trenches, significant artillery being exchanged on all sides.

If we look at pulling back for a moment, the broader force disposition, the vast majority of the fighting occurring now in areas of the east around areas like Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, there's still a potential for significant fighting down in the south in Kherson. But we expect to see an increase in activity over the course of later in February.

There have been a number of comments about possible offensives in March and we'll have to see, but this is the – roughly, the state of the war right now, the battlefield map.

I want to go to Mike now. Mike, you know, with this current force disposition right now and with the Russians losing, actually, pretty significant numbers, you know, we just – Mike, we just counted the number of Russian fatalities – combat fatalities. You were involved heavily in the war against the Russians, or the Soviets, in Afghanistan. The Russians so far have lost through fatalities more soldiers, both regular and irregular, in Ukraine in one year than they have lost in all wars since World War II.

So not including World War II but since World War II. That includes Chechnya. That includes Afghanistan. They had limited roles in Korea, Vietnam. They lost some during – in Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

But all of those wars combined. So since the end of World War II to today they have lost more soldiers in Ukraine than in all of those wars combined. They're quite extraordinary numbers and so the rates of casualties are also higher just because it's been pushed in such a short time frame. The war in

Afghanistan, as Mike knows better than anybody, was a 10-year increment. We're talking about one year here.

So, Mike, how do you see kind of the implications for Russia? What are its objectives? Can it be defeated and what does defeat even mean?

So over to you, Mike. Thanks.

Hon. Michael
Vickers:

Right. Thanks, Seth.

So, first, I'd like to just pile on a little bit to what Eliot and Emily said. Agree completely with their points. ATACMS, or army tactical missile system, is number one on my list, too. But we also ought to be giving them more of what they have if we're going to win this and that's HIMARS, the High-Mobility Artillery Rocket System. They have, like, 20 of them, I believe. I've been calling for quite a while they need and should have 60.

And then other things that are going to be very important that are a bit underreported for this potential spring offensive is mobility capabilities, particularly mine-clearing. You know, the Russians are doing what the Russians always do when they dig in. They create a series of belts and they put a lot of mines all over the place. And the mines aren't necessarily going to kill Ukrainians, but – large numbers – but they will slow them down and make them vulnerable then to artillery, which will – could kill a large number. And then, you know, helping with river crossing would be important too.

The mobilization is critical that, again, Eliot talked about.

And then I would say on the political front, you know, agree with everything Eliot said and Emily. We need to be in this to win it and really make it clear rather than, you know, we're with them as long as it takes but we hope they get this over with soon. If you want to get it over with soon – any time this year – you got to do the first one in particular and get a big, big start on the second one.

So let me now turn to the Russians. So you – very correctly, you talked about far more casualties here than all the previous wars since World War II, but capacity since World War II has really diminished too. You know, they have a much, much smaller army. Their ability to mobilize is much less, both for equipment but also for manpower. You see exodus of people trying to avoid the draft. Russia's in real trouble, other than the fact that it has had time to dig in and build these belts in kind of the winter lull. But the winter is also taking a toll on the Russian army. It's in worse shape, I think, than the Ukrainian army.

You look at recent battles. You know, people focus a lot on Bakhmut, which – you know, where the Wagner Group is, and it's with a lot of ex-convicts and mercenaries and stuff. It's taken casualties. But further north in Vuhledar, which in English means "coal gift," two naval infantry brigades – some of their most elite units – really got decimated. And so the Russians aren't showing much ability to really take ground. I think Eliot described them as a pre-1918 army, and I think that's in a way being charitable. They're well pre-1918, but that's certainly, certainly correct.

The one trouble here is that Putin's objectives haven't changed. You know, as unrealistic as they may be that he wants to take the whole country and he thinks he can outlast us and everything else, those are still his objectives. And so we need to show him that – if we're going to end this conflict, we need to show him that he not only can't achieve that but he's going to lose more.

I agree with Eliot that Crimea could be critical down the road or it'll be a big decision for the – for the White House, and things like ATACMS will really, really help in the early stages with that.

Yes, Russia can be defeated, but we have to do the things we've been talking about so far in the program. And defeating them is critical. I mean, it's – if Russia is perceived to have won here, even a limited war and hold onto the territory they have, it will be a loss for the West.

Dr. Jones: Mike, let me just ask you a follow-up question, which is: How do you respond to some who have pointed out that Putin so far – its economy, while it certainly has faced some punishment – and I want to get to sanctions a little bit later with Emily – but that the economy has survived thanks in part to its gas exports, that we haven't seen a ton of protests, and that Putin still retains relatively tight control of the security services? What is your sense about how much more he can take and the Russian political leadership can take losing these numbers of soldiers at this rate?

Dr. Vickers: Yeah. So that's key because, as you point out, you know, the sanctions have had effects but they – and Emily can talk to this in more detail – but they haven't had the effects that we had hoped, I believe. And you know, where you see some of the effects is in replacement parts for certain weapons. That's why these air barrages are more limited than they otherwise might be. It's not that Putin doesn't want to hit them with everything all the time; he just doesn't have enough of that to do it. And so they're cannibalizing parts from – even cheap chips from commercial appliances and things to try to stay in the game.

The Russian central bank, via currency controls and other things, have been able to make the effect of the sanctions less, as has, you know, this kind of

halfhearted energy policy and the limited scope of sanctions. You know, only 34 countries, I believe, around the world would have imposed any sanctions on – and they're not all-inclusive or all-binding, what we call secondary sanctions. So they haven't had the effects.

So the biggest effects will really be on the battlefield. The loss of not only these unprecedented casualties and equipment – you know, half their tanks – but also loss of – loss of territory, that's what will cause him to really lose face.

Dr. Jones: Thanks, Mike.

Let me shift gears a little bit. I want to turn to Eliot. There have been some analogies to World War I and World War II. But, Eliot, before you answer, if we can just pull up the satellite imagery we have just to show individuals a little bit of what the terrain looks like.

So here we've got artillery impact craters. These are in Pavlivka, Ukraine. You can see the damage to the ground from artillery that's landed.

As we move over, we can see armored vehicles deployed along the tree lines, so a lot of armor that has been important in this – in this war.

As we look over to additional tracks of armor, you know, we see the Russians using a lot of this. It reminds me of kind of some of the quintessential symbols with both artillery and armor of what attrition warfare looks like.

Also, as we go into the Bakhmut area, we can see the anti-tank ditches and the berms. You can see those impact craters throughout some of these fields, not being used right now to harvest any grain but really using to fight.

So this is also Bakhmut from earlier this month. These are defensive infantry trenches. You can – you can see those. And if we scan in, you can see those trench lines that have been dug – actually, they've been dug both by Ukrainian and Russian forces, on both sides of the contact line.

And then, finally here, a scaled-back picture where we see the impact craters, the anti-tank ditches, the berms, and then the complex trench system.

So, Eliot, people have referenced World War I and World War II in different contexts. So how do you read your military history here?

Dr. Cohen: So, I mean, as a military historian I'm intrinsically interested in this, but the – let's begin by noting the political significance of it. And the way people have invoked World War I and World War II is basically in a – kind of a pessimistic or even sort of a defeatist kind of way. Just go through that.

World War I, you see trenches. You know, you see mud and so on. People say: World War I, our mental image is a lot of movies because we don't have any World War I veterans around to tell you anything different, and images of infantry just going over the top and getting slaughtered. And that's true in part, but first, you know, trenches, those have been around ever since you had long-range rifles. So I can take you to a lot of late Civil War battlefields and I promise you you'll find lots and lots of trenches, and they've been around ever since.

I called the Russian army a pre-1918 army in an article I just wrote in The Atlantic because, by the end of 1918 – and this is less known – actually, both the Germans and the British in particular were actually very sophisticated in their tactics. They were dealing with these deep fortified zones, but they both found different ways of breaking through them. These were the kind of tactics that, say, Montgomery used at the Battle of El Alamein in 1942. What makes the Russian army today a pre-1918 army is in the early phases of World War I you basically had units that could not adjust fire and that didn't conduct reconnaissance before attacking, that couldn't maneuver on a large scale, that couldn't do the kind of coordination and synchronization we take for granted. And that's – that is a major weakness. It's why the Russians have resorted to what are essentially infantry assaults, which are extraordinarily costly. And it's why we also have not seen them be able to maneuver units at all.

The Ukrainians, I think, are in a different position. And I – we can talk later about what the future's going to be, but it's important to remember the Ukrainians are actually conducting kind of mobilization behind the lines and re-equipping of a substantial force, which I think they plan to use for their counteroffensive.

The World War II imagery is used in a different way. You know, people – the way people invoke World War II, it's: Oh my God, you know, yes, the Russians will take huge losses; yes, they will be inelegant; but just look at what they were able to do in east, they'll just steamroller Ukraine and there's not much you can do about it. Well, let's set aside the fact that a lot of those soldiers were actually Ukrainians in World War II. Let's set aside the fact the Russians could only do that with massive support from the West. We shipped about 400,000 jeeps and trucks to them, not to mention food and oil and all sorts of other things. The fact is, it's a very different military, and I think both you and Mike alluded to that.

When the Germans invaded Russia in June of 1941, in the western military districts alone in the Soviet Union there were 2.9 million soldiers in the Red Army, and another 2.3 million further east. The base – what was the base of the Russian army in 2022? Three hundred thousand troops plus maybe

another hundred thousand elite or special – it was 400,000 total, absolute maximum.

And you mentioned the level of casualties. We're talking about somewhere between – there are different estimates – 135,000, 200,000 if you count dead/wounded.

Dr. Jones: I think they're actually higher than that. Ours are up over – well over 200,000 casualties. That's total killed, wounded, and missing.

Dr. Cohen: You add all that up, it is virtually impossible to reconstruct an effective military when you've taken that level of losses, particularly as they did at the very beginning from their – from their very best forces.

The other thing is, if you look at Russian military performance in World War II – I mean, it is incredible in some ways – they were fighting a war for survival. They were fighting against an invader who really wanted to exterminate them or enslave the people who were left. Well, that's how the Ukrainians feel today. That's not how Russian soldiers sent to go fight Ukraine are feeling. They're fighting a war of conquest. And if there's one thing that we've learned – or re-learned, really – it's that, high technology or no high technology, the will to fight, determination, that counts for an enormous amount in warfare. And the balance there is entirely on the Ukrainian side.

Very last thing I'll just say on this, and it picks up on things that both Emily and Mike have said: That's why our display of will is so important. You know, Putin thinks that the last big imbalance that exists, as Emily was saying, is between his willpower and our willpower. At the point where they're convinced that it's not just between the Russian military and the Ukrainian military that there's that imbalance, but between him and us, that's the point at which I think Russia begins to crack.

Dr. Jones: So one of the things that's interesting along these lines is, with all the suffering that the Russians have conducted right now, there have been a number of questions on the Hill. We've seen it both from some Democrats as well as some Republicans. Emily, your last job was on the Senate Select Committee for Intelligence, so you've spent a fair amount of time on the Hill. What's your reading right now of where some of the key members are right now in supporting Ukraine, how long that – how long it might last? Because, I mean, at the end of the day, if we go back to Clausewitz, you know, the political dimensions of warfare are essential here. So how do you read the political climate in Washington for aid to Ukraine?

Ms. Harding: Right. The political climate in Washington is very noisy on a lot of different issues, and I think there is a general bipartisan consensus that supporting

Ukraine is a good thing and that we want the Ukrainians to win the war. After that, I think it gets a little bit more complicated, and you see different opinions on what that really means and what level of assistance the U.S. should be providing to ensure that outcome.

The Democrats, I think, on the Hill are mostly going to follow the lead of President Biden – which is why his statement in the State of the Union, I thought, was so powerful, that we’ll be with you on this as long as it takes, and why I think any kind of undercutting of that message later on is a real problem because Democrats on the Hill are going to sort of point to him and his leadership.

Republicans on the Hill, I think, are more complicated, a little bit split. There are quite a few people who truly do believe that this is not just a fight about Ukraine; that this is a fight against a dictator who is seeking to impose his will on another country, and that it’s a bigger global fight against fascism, against this idea that a tyrant could take over territory in Europe. On the flipside, though, I think there is some streak that is highly isolationist and thinks that the U.S. maybe shouldn’t be participating. Or, where are we going to put our main thrust of our aid – is it going to be focused on Europe or is it going to be focused on the Pacific?

I think that that is a worthy debate to be had – you know, what we should be preparing for, what the consequence is of empty bins. But if we don’t win this fight now, then the other fights become much harder down the road. So it shouldn’t be an “or” proposition. It should be an “and” proposition. And I do think that that minority on the Hill is still a pretty small minority that’s sort of questioning how far we go with our aid. The markups of the NDAA are coming up in the next few months.

Dr. Cohen: The National Defense Authorization Act.

Ms. Harding: Thank you. Yes, I forget. Sometimes I just speak Congress.

And then what the president continues to push for as far as aid packages in the next few months are going to be really interesting. The added dimension of the upcoming presidential election – we already have a few folks on the right who have declared and who have said things about supporting Ukraine.

So I think that’s going to contribute to a robust debate on just how pronounced our support for Ukraine should be.

Dr. Jones: Mike, if I could turn to you.

Emily mentioned the Pacific. How do you read the importance of Ukraine right now if the Russians were to make advances in Ukraine, if U.S. support

was to wane? It was not long ago in this current administration where the administration did make the decision to pull all of its forces out of Afghanistan and the government collapsed.

So how important do you see this? How important is this as the Chinese look at U.S. and Western political will? The Russians are an ally of the Chinese. So can you put this into a bigger, broader context?

Dr. Vickers:

Sure. So, you know, thankfully, life is often full of second chances and Ukraine is a big second chance after the pullout from Afghanistan for the administration and for the United States.

Were we to lose in Ukraine, even a limited war loss where Russia has gained territory and basically outlasted us and we give up – as I said, the only way Ukraine can really lose is if the West, led by the United States, gives up – then I think it would have far-reaching consequences. In Europe, Eastern Europe would become very nervous. You'd have a lot of debate in an alliance that is holding together reasonably well right now and it would make inroads, not only a return, perhaps, to forgive Russia for its sins and get back to business as usual in terms of energy, trade, and other things, even though I think, you know, Europe, rightly, is moving away from that right now and that's why I think the stakes are high. But also further inroads in terms of Chinese economic interests in Europe.

And then it would have similar cascading effects with our allies in Asia and then, you know, I think the Chinese would take different lessons from this how they look at Taiwan, given the challenges the Russians have had and the confidence in their generals. You know, it might be a mixed message but it would, certainly, be better for them if Russia won than if they were defeated, and correspondingly worse for the United States.

Dr. Cohen:

Could I just jump in on that? You know, in this war there's been a fair amount of what I think of as baloney realism, which is kind of fake hardheadedness which takes different forms. It usually ends – but always ends up in the same place, which is we ought to cut some sort of deal with the Russians and freeze the conflict where it is.

One part of that is the argument, well, we really need to pivot to Asia – this is a strategic distraction – and there are even some people in the government who I think believed this in the run-up to the invasion, and it's simply not true, I mean, in profound ways, and I think Mike has laid a lot of those out.

I had a conversation with a mutual friend of all of ours, who's a very, very senior Australian intelligence official, who said to me a year ago – he said, you know, this matters to Australia. And I said, you know, when people in Australia ask you why what do you say? He said, well – he said, our country

faced an existential crisis only once in its history, in 1942. And why did that happen? Because the Asian security order broke down. And why did the Asian security order break down? It's because the European security order broke down.

And I think that's why you see, particularly the Australians but there are others as well, get very engaged in this. There can be good things that result if we really make sure that the Ukrainians win and the Russians lose – good things in the Indo-Pacific. I think, among other things, the Chinese will see that the Western freedom-loving nations are a more formidable group than maybe they thought. But there can be very, very bad things if we get an outcome which some people will characterize as a compromise or as a stalemate but which is actually a defeat.

Dr. Jones:

So one thing that I think has to be pointed out when you look at the wars both in Ukraine right now and the tensions right now in the Taiwan Straits those are also very different wars and they require different types of weapon systems.

So if we look at the war in Ukraine, it is – at its core it's a land war right now, the importance as we saw in the satellite imagery of artillery, of long-range fires, of tanks.

A war in the Pacific – I mean, Taiwan is an island so a war in the Pacific we'd see a much more significant focus on maritime vessels, submarines, potentially, aircraft carriers, although they're vulnerable to Chinese strikes. Air forces – when it comes to Chinese power projection the U.S. is going to require a lot of long-range anti-ship missiles – LRASMs, JASSMs, extended-range JASSMs. So the types of weapon systems that one would need in Ukraine to aid the Ukrainians and in the Pacific to deter, or to fight if deterrence fails, the Chinese are very different.

So I think anybody who makes an argument that by providing assistance to Ukraine is taking away weapon systems that we should otherwise be providing either to Taiwan or to ourselves or other allies – Koreans, Australians, Japanese – in the Pacific does not understand the type of warfare that is involved in both of those theaters.

So that's – if I come back to Mike with one question – this was going to be a follow-up, Mike, to your comments, which is – and a lot hinges on this – is just, briefly, what is your sense about how willing Putin is to actually settle right now?

Because there are – we still hear a lot of hopes. We've heard comments coming out of some European leaders about the hope of a settlement. How

likely, just bluntly speaking, do you think Putin, based on what you've said earlier, is willing to settle in Ukraine?

Dr. Vickers: I don't think he's willing at all. I think he thinks he can still win. I mean, you know, any settlement starts with him holding on to what he has and, you know, that's sort of the floor. But he has ambitions still beyond that and he thinks he can get them. He thinks we're going to fold, at the end of the day.

And so I don't think it's realistic at all and I think Tony Blinken and some other senior officials have said they see no prospects, really, this year for a settlement. You know, these, you know, not for attribution leaks about we want this over with soon, I don't know who's making those but some of the official statements seem to really cast doubt on and I, certainly, think that's true of Putin. Putin is in no mind to settle right now.

Dr. Cohen: You know, I basically agree with that. I'd just qualify it in two small ways, maybe three.

One is Putin has been willing to accept tactical retreats. So the withdrawal of forces from Kyiv – from around Kyiv at the very beginning of the war, and the withdrawal from Kherson city, which was a much bigger deal because that was, you know, a regional capital. That was – this is an area that they had annexed.

Dr. Jones: And withdrawals around Kharkiv, too, oblast.

Dr. Cohen: Yeah. Well, partly that was compelled. I mean, they were getting just hammered – although there were other withdrawals, you're right, that were calculated. So he's – at kind of a tactical level he can accept that. I don't think strategically yet he can do that.

One other thing is I think, to some extent, Russian propaganda is kind of laying the predicate for why they can't win and that is, we're not really at war with Ukraine – we're at war with the West.

Now, they sometimes try to twist this in truly bizarre ways. One of them, which was almost amusing, was one of the vampires and ghouls that they have on Russian television saying, well, we have actually successfully demilitarized Ukraine. They're getting rid of all their Russian Soviet-era military equipment, so they have to resort to Western military equipment, so they've been demilitarized. He was actually saying this with a straight face. But I think, you know, that gives them a little bit of an opening.

The third way in which it may happen, of course, is Putin is not immortal. He looks like he's solidly in control now but, you know, we will find out that he's not solidly in control the moment he finds out that he's not solidly in control

and that can – you know, as Mike knows better than the rest of us, that can happen in all kinds of ways.

Dr. Jones: Yeah. So I want to come to Emily about Biden's trip to Poland in a second and significance and what he might say, but I wonder if we can go to that territorial control map of Ukraine right now. Just a reminder, to set this up: So President Biden is headed to Europe.

This is – again, this is a reminder of where the battlefield picture looks right now in red, or Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine. In blue are areas that were controlled at various points of the war by the Russians that the Ukrainians have retaken. And then as we look here at the force disposition, you know, a lot of active fighting, particularly right now in areas of the east, including in and around Bakhmut right here.

So for Emily, based on kind of where things are at right now, how important is the president's trip to Europe? Why Poland, as opposed to other places? What do you expect out of it?

Ms. Harding: Sure. I know Eliot has some thoughts on this too.

I think that a Biden trip to Poland is a really good idea. I think it shows some considerable support for the neighboring country to Ukraine that has borne a lot of the burden, not only in hosting Ukrainian refugees but also serving as a key logistics hub to pretty much every piece of weaponry going into Ukraine. We had the opportunity to interact with some of our Polish colleagues a couple weeks ago and they were firm in their desire to keep pushing back against Russian aggression, in large part because they know what happens if you don't. They have been on those front lines and they have no desire to be on those front lines again. So I think that a Biden trip to Poland is going to be extremely useful in helping to show U.S. support for the larger NATO alliance, to show U.S. support for a critical partner, and that hopefully to signal to the Ukrainians, too, that we are in this for the long haul.

Dr. Cohen: Yeah, and if I could just add to that: What's interesting is where he's not going as well. He's not going to Berlin. Usually a president –

Dr. Jones: He's not going to Paris.

Dr. Cohen: He's not going to Paris, not even going to London, which would be a better place. And I think what this signals is, in many ways, the kind of center of policy energy, now but also, I think, for the future of European security, is in the east. And it's being backed not just by words but by deeds. So, you know, the Poles, who have just been magnificent throughout all this, in every dimension you can imagine, they are doubling the size of their tank fleet. They've just signed a deal with the South Koreans I think to buy something

like 250 and set up a factory to manufacture another 750, and that's on top of the M1 Abrams that they're buying from us.

Dr. Jones: The Poles are co-producing HIMARS now, so they're –

Dr. Cohen: They're co-producing HIMARS. And it's not just Poland; it's all of these – particularly the former Soviet countries, so particularly, say, the Baltics, but a lot of the East Europeans, like the Czechs, and then people who are going to be members of NATO, like Finland, or Norway, which has a border with Russia, after all. Those are the people who are taking this really seriously and they're exercising leadership. And despite the size of the German economy and despite the aspirations of France, they're kind of being pulled along, and it's a really interesting development. So I think European security is going to have a very different feel to it in the months and years ahead.

Dr. Jones: : I think what's interesting is if you talk to senior government officials in the Baltic states – Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, any of those countries on the eastern front – what you realize is, first of all, how close the Russians came to actually taking Kiev, and second – so Hostomel, for example. Hostomel was minutes, probably less than an hour away from potentially being seized by the Russians –

Dr. Cohen: This is the airport near Kiev, which was their prime target.

Dr. Jones: And if they had been successful there, we might have seen a successful assault on Kiev. There were also other – I mean, it was not clear at that point how Zelensky would be as a leader; there had been invitations, including from the West, to pull him out of Ukraine. And if you – if we had seen the Russians successful, we would have potentially Russian tanks in Lviv along NATO's eastern front. It would have been a very different situation from the Russians suffering the way they have right now. So I think it's worth remembering how close we actually came to the Russians potentially taking Hostomel, possibly taking Kiev, and what that history would have been like.

Dr. Cohen: And I would add to that that the Baltic states and the East Europeans I think have had a much better understanding of what's in play here. You know, in the West, particularly in the United States and Germany, there's been all this – you know, we didn't treat the Russians nicely enough after they blew up the Soviet Union. We did not. They did. And the East Europeans, particularly the Balts but also the Poles, the Czechs, are saying, no, this is about the reestablishment of the Russian Empire in a somewhat new form. If you look at Putin's speeches, if you look at his writings, they are absolutely correct. And they see themselves as next. I mean, I've been having conversations, as you have, with some of the Baltic officials from the Baltic republics. They absolutely see their own countries' security at stake here. So it's not merely fellow feeling for Ukraine; it's a sense of real imminent

threat from a Russia that seems to want to go to a version of its imperial past.

Dr. Jones: We probably should add the Finns too –

Dr. Cohen: Finns absolutely.

Dr. Jones: – because they will likely be a new NATO member and also right on the Russian border.

Ms. Harding: I have to take the opportunity to brag on my and Mike's former intelligence colleagues when it comes to the airport operation. I think this is a great example of the power of intelligence collaboration, the power of indications and warning. I mean, the fact that we were able – "we" – they; I have to give credit to them – were able to say things like, we think this is the plan; be ready for the plan. That's what an intelligence success looks like.

Dr. Jones: Mike, do you want to come in on any of these issues, on the importance of Eastern Europe or the president's trip to Poland? Because after that, I want to ask you about how this all ends.

Dr. Vickers: You know, I agree with all of that, that the trip to Poland is a great idea and totally agree with what Eliot and Emily said, and also underscore what Emily just said about importance of intelligence, particularly in those early stages.

Dr. Jones: So, Mike, let me – as we start to wrap things up, let me start with you here. How do you see this evolving over the course of at least 2023? And how important, based on that, is it for the U.S. to take clear, substantive actions over the next several months?

Dr. Vickers: So it's critical. I mean, I think a lot will depend on Ukraine's success in taking more territory in the spring, summer, and early fall. You know, if they were to fail to do that, I think the political climate would potentially get tougher by the end of 2023. So I don't know that the war will be over necessarily. I think there's some possibility for that later in 2023, if the Ukrainians really have big successes and things bite more in Russia. But it is a very important year and it's one where the West really needs to be all in.

You know, one of the things I didn't mention earlier when we were talking about Eliot's three things is long-range – and Emily on intelligence. Long-range surveillance drones that also can do armed reconnaissance and shoot things would be very, very helpful. The administration has kind of been hesitant on that. You know, they can operate behind friendly lines and see many kilometers into – both electronically and with imagery – into Russian lines, and that would help a great deal as well. And underscore all the points about the linkages and the differences between Asia and Europe. You know,

our best near-term China strategy is to defeat the Russians. You know, there's a lot of things we need to do to get ready for China, but our best near-term strategy is to defeat the Russians in Ukraine.

Dr. Jones: Yeah, Mike, for example, there's been a lot of discussion about providing the Ukrainians the MQ-1Cs that the administration has so far not been willing to provide, so –

Dr. Vickers: That's right.

Dr. Jones: Same thing, frankly, on the fighter jets as well, which the Ukrainians have lost some, a number of them; they're hurting on spare parts.

But, Mike, one question for you – and the last question for you and then we'll end with Emily and then Eliot – is, you were heavily involved in the campaign to support the Mujahideen in Afghanistan against the Soviets that had invaded, and by the mid-1980s, at least under Gorbachev, the Soviets make a decision, both politically and militarily, that the costs and benefits are not worth – cost-benefit calculations are not worth the Soviets remaining. So they eventually pull out not because they lose necessarily on the battlefield, but just because the costs are so high and the benefits are so limited. To what degree do you think there is a possibility at some point of the Russians making a similar calculation in Ukraine – that it is a war that, much like Afghanistan, they decided to take, and at what point do the costs just become too high and the benefits just overtaken by the costs?

Dr. Vickers: Yeah. So, you know, what's different, obviously, is, you know, Putin is not Mikhail Gorbachev, you know. But what is similar is the conditions that Gorbachev faced. If he really wanted to any future for the Soviet Union – you know, and he really bungled this – but he understood that you had to have better relations with the West, you had to revitalize the Soviet economy. You know, the Chinese critique of Gorbachev is that he liberalized politically before he fixed the economy, and therefore caused himself political trouble as well. But any Russian leader, including Putin, faces those same things right now. Now it would be much harder to reintegrate Russia given all the horrific things they've done – you know, as Eliot talked about earlier – but another Russian leader might come to a very different conclusion about Russia's future.

You know, they're destroying Russian power right now with this war. I mean, it's incredible. And really, Russian power beyond military power, but Russia's future. And so, in that sense, it's starker than it was for Gorbachev with the decaying Soviet Union. So – and even Putin might come to that conclusion at some point, although I think it's going to be tough for him.

Dr. Jones: Thanks, Mike.

Two questions for Emily. First one is, briefly, in part based on what Mike just said, your sense of whether the sanctions are having any impact. And then, second – and this is a great way to start to end us – is your thoughts about Zelensky's greatest hits in speeches lately, because he's made a number of them over the past couple of weeks.

Ms. Harding: Yeah, too many to cover.

Real briefly on the sanctions, I think Mike hit on this earlier, but some interesting numbers. There was a great article in The Economist last week where he talked about that Russia's GDP was down only 2 percent last year, and that was against estimates of 11 percent down, and that next year – the 2023 projections – are .3 in positive territory, which is bigger than the projections for both the U.K. and Germany. And that's really saying something about the way that the Russians have scraped together the ability to keep their economy going.

There's also a really interesting thing – speaking of, you know, old things are new again and flashing back to the end of the Soviet Union, Mike – but right now, with all of the Western companies that are abandoning assets in Russia, there's a new rule apparently that if you're closing part of your assets you had to get a permit from the government in order to do so, and then the government sets a price for those assets. And it's usually at about a 50 percent discount. So we're back to gangster capitalism and Russian oligarchs snapping up assets on the cheap.

It'll be really interesting to see if they manage to keep the oil prices at the \$70 a barrel that are needed to balance their books. If they keep selling to China at the rate they are, then that's probably going to help. But Mike's point about how only about half the countries in the world are actually engaging in the sanctions regime is really critical. Sanctions only work if they are comprehensive. And these are partially comprehensive. They're a great signaling mechanism. They are hurting, but they're not hurting to the point that Putin's going to change his calculus.

Dr. Jones: We've got the Chinese, the Indians, and plenty of other countries that are willing –

Ms. Harding: The Turks. Yeah.

Dr. Jones: – Turks – that are willing to trade.

Ms. Harding: Exactly.

On Zelensky's greatest hits, I mean, I could go on about this for a lot longer than the five minutes we have left, but I think some really important points. When he came to the U.S. and he spoke to Congress, he did define this is a global struggle. It was the Ukrainians on the front line of a global struggle. He led with thank-yous – thank you for all of the support you've already given me – and then talked about how I am fighting this fight, we are fighting this fight for you, so you don't have to. He had a fabulous line about a candlelit Christmas and how they were going to have a candlelit Christmas in Ukraine, not because it was prettier but because, if there is no electricity, the light of our faith in ourselves will not be put out. He did a really great job of citing American historical references that he knew would really speak to the audience at hand. He quoted FDR. And there was a really – (laughs) – fantastic moment at the end where Pelosi handed him the flag that had been flying over the Capitol that day, and she offered to take it back and, like, hand it to an aide who could carry it out, and he said: Absolutely not; I am carrying this thing out myself and I'm carrying it high. And that, I think, was a symbolic moment that was just genius on his part, but then also, you know, really symbolic of the power of the relationship.

When he spoke to the U.K. Parliament, he, I think, made very explicit the reference that a lot of people are making to Zelensky as descending from the same tradition as Churchill. He talked about visiting the war rooms on his last trip to London, and how he was offered the opportunity to sit in Churchill's chair and feeling the courage that comes with having to make decisions in the darkest hour. These cultural references that he makes are just – are just fantastic. And then I thought his gesture of presenting the Parliament the helmet of a Ukrainian fighter pilot – to talk about how last time he was there he thanked them for the tea; this time that he's coming he's going to thank them in advance for the planes that he wants them – he wants to get for Ukraine. He said – he wrote on the helmet something like: We have freedom; give us the wings to protect it. And this is, again, like, we're fighting this fight on behalf of the world.

He spoke in Munich right before we came on. And I haven't seen the full text of that speech yet – they were still processing it – but he had a great line in there as well, and that was: Goliath must lose. Again, painting this as a global struggle and the bigger fight of the little guy versus the big guy, and how he needs our help to continue that fight.

I mean, we knew that he was a performer before the war started. I think his ability to translate that real talent for speaking to people into continuing support for the Ukrainians has been one of those lessons that I think leaders are going to look back on for generations.

Dr. Cohen:

You know, I wrote a book about civilian leadership in wartime, and I would be quite happy to give him a chapter in a new edition. I mean, he really is of

that stature. There is just so much that he's done so well. It's quite extraordinary.

Ms. Harding: Yeah.

Dr. Jones: So very briefly, Eliot, if you were designing the next year or so of the U.S. approach to Ukraine, how would you – I mean, strategically, how would you – how would you set U.S. strategy? How important is this war in Ukraine and important to keep providing assistance?

Dr. Cohen: And we've talked about what the – what the stakes are.

What I would say is – first, I'd look back and I'd say, you know, you mentioned how Hostomel was a close call. Well, you can flip it the other way around. There were missed opportunities. You know, if we had been given them the tanks early last fall, they would now be more or less available and ready for battle and the units would really be trained on them. If we had given them HIMARS in the early spring rather than – I think the first ones got there in June and we kind of dribbled them in. You know, and that's been our story. We've done sort of the right things and we've said sort of the right things, but what we haven't really seen, I think, is a sense of commitment, of urgency, and scale.

So rather than coming up with a clever strategy, what I would like to see us do is full commitment – you know, as Mike said – that we're in this to win and to really defeat Russia; urgency, we're going to move fast; and we're going to move at scale. And I think the problem is we got out of the habit of making decisions that way. That's a wartime pace. The wars that we've – all four of us – been part of went on for years and years, and you could sit back and you could have deputies committee meetings and you could say, well, we don't like that and we'll send it back down and it will bounce back up, and we'll do long studies, because we always had such a margin of conventional superiority that we could – we could dawdle, actually. And I think it looks that way in retrospect. That's not the kind of war we have. So more than any strategy, as I said: commitment, urgency, and scale.

Dr. Jones: Well, thank you, Eliot; thanks, Mike Vickers; and thanks, Emily Harding, for participating in what has been a great discussion of the war in Ukraine after one year. This is now the third of our discussions. I don't know that if you had asked me during our first one what – where we would have been by the third discussion I would have been able to tell you with any sense of fidelity, but it's been an interesting – it's been an interesting one year. And we look forward to the next time we do this. Thanks for joining us.

(END)