“2022 Washington Humanitarian Forum: Closing the Gap”

Panel 2: Humanitarian Assistance Amidst Great Power Competition in Syria

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FEATURING
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CSIS EXPERTS
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INTRODUCTION
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Transcript By
Superior Transcriptions LLC
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Kimberly Flowers: Welcome back. Good afternoon.

If you’re just joining us online or in the room, you are here for the second Humanitarian Forum at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and we’re so glad you’re here.

Hope you had a good lunch, you could stretch your legs, get more caffeine, if needed, and also hope you networked. Maybe introduced yourself to a new person or continued conversations or gave some thoughts on the panel and other discussions that we had this morning.

So just a quick reminder. In this room, we’re not doing breakout panels, right. So, these are those country-specific conversations we talked about first thing this morning.

In this room, we have a conversation on humanitarian assistance amid great power competition in Syria led by the very capable Jon Alterman, a senior vice president here at CSIS and director of the Middle East program.

Next door, we have a conversation on aiding Afghanistan under Taliban control that will be led by Katherine Bliss, who’s a senior fellow and director with the Global Health Policy Center.

We hope you enjoy, we hope you stay engaged, and we’ll see you at the coffee break afterwards.

Jon, over to you.

Jon B. Alterman: Thank you very much, Kimberly, and thank you all for coming.

I’m Jon Alterman, senior vice president, the Brzezinski chair in global security and geostrategy, and the director of the Middle East program, and I’m delighted to be joined today by a really remarkable panel of experts to talk about what I think is a very, very important issue of humanitarian assistance amidst great power competition, and the case study we’re going to be looking at with specificity is Syria.

Syria has been a battleground for great power competition amidst a really profound humanitarian crisis. About 6.8 million Syrians have been forced out of the country; a similar number had been internally displaced from a prewar population that was only 25 million people. So about more than half of Syrians have been forced from their homes.

Syria’s close relationship with Russia and Iran has politicized the humanitarian response with Russia, in particular, using its position in
international organizations to instrumentalize humanitarian aid to advance its interests and those of its partners.

We are fortunate today to have speakers who have spent decades on the ground both administering aid as well as researching, writing, and advocating for humanitarian aid provision in Syria.

We begin our conversation today with a one-on-one discussion with Ambassador David Satterfield. David is now the director of Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy. He came to that position after more than 40 years as one of America’s most accomplished diplomats, largely focusing on the Middle East and adjacent areas. He served as the U.S. ambassador to Turkey, U.S. ambassador to Lebanon, and for two years as the acting assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs. He was also the director general of the Multinational Force and Observers, the peacekeeping force in Sinai that helped secure Israeli-Egyptian peace.

David has other business in Houston today that will take him away from us shortly, but we’re grateful for an opportunity to listen to a bit of his wisdom before he has to go. David, thank you very much for joining us today.

David Satterfield: Thank you very much, Jon. It’s my pleasure to be with you. I only apologize for the need to depart a bit earlier than I otherwise would have hoped. But delighted to be part of this important discussion.

Dr. Alterman: So, you have looked at the humanitarian problem in Syria, both from a Washington perspective and the perspective in Ankara. You have seen the problem of getting international support for pure humanitarian assistance because of the problems in the U.N.

How should we think about structures to get around the problem of instrumentalizing support? The Multinational Force and Observers, of course, was created to get around a Russian veto in the U.N.

Do we need to be thinking about some other structure than U.N. Security Council clearance?

Amb. Satterfield: Sure.

Jon, to pull the lens back a bit, let’s examine why we are as an international humanitarian community, where we are with respect to the cross-border humanitarian assistance administered at present under the six-month mandate of U.N. SCR 2642, which mandate will require a new resolution to extend on or by January 10th.
We are at this place because of Russia. And Russia is at this place for two different reasons – one relating to Syria; the other relating to a far broader challenge involving Russia-Europe, Russia-the United States, Russia, and the world at large.

To repeat what, I think, is well known to everyone here, Russia, certainly, supports, in principle, the concept of further validation of the sovereignty of the Assad regime over all Syrian territory and, in principle, supports the idea that the groups – opposition groups present in the remaining territorial place where they can operate – Idlib, the enclave with 4 (million), 4.2 million population – ought not to be a place where Russia would describe as terrorist organizations can continue to function.

But those ostensible Syria-related motivations for Russian policy towards the Security Council resolutions that have also authorized cross-border assistance are secondary by far to the much broader Russian strategic interest in holding cards – very powerful cards – vis-à-vis Europe, the West, and, implicitly, the United States.

To review, though, where we are in terms of humanitarian assistance, this has been a success for the international community. The ability under the U.N. Security Council resolutions of prior years to mobilize a cohesive effective effort to feed over 4 million people, the vast majority of whom are food dependent on this assistance, is exceptional.

It is a near seamless meshing of different U.N. organizations, NGOs, operating out now of a single coordinating hub just on the Turkish side of the Bab al-Hawa crossing point that has allowed that population – those millions – to stay under difficult circumstances, fed and given basic medical care. That's the positive news. This has been an extraordinary effort by a very large humanitarian community.

But that effort has been threatened over the course of the last four years by implicit or more than implicit Russian threats to veto the Security Council resolution authorizing that assistance to continue.

What would be the consequence were Russia to actually pull the trigger on this to veto the resolution? The international community – governments, aid organizations, NGOs – have been working intensely, particularly over the course of the last three years, in anticipation of just such a Russian decision.

They have examined in detail what alternate arrangements might be possible to provide humanitarian assistance, particularly food assistance, into the Idlib enclave.
I have to tell you that all of those consultations have led to a common judgment that were the U.N. Security Council resolution to be vetoed by Russia, not extended, that it would only be possible for the international humanitarian community to provide something in the range of 30 (percent), 35 percent of the current level of food assistance into Idlib.

Why is that the case? It’s the case because – two reasons. First, the coordination mechanisms that exist right now through a variety of U.N. specialized agencies are quite extensive and extraordinary. To reproduce them would not be possible.

Individual NGOs, individual international governments, could not, by their own judgments, having had these years to review it, replicate the coordinating structures the U.N. has.

But that is not the most important factor. The most important factor is that minus the international legitimacy of a Security Council resolution, many of the entities participating in this effort would no longer, by their own internal requirements including security-related requirements, be able to continue to join in the effort.

The Security Council resolution, that authenticity provided, that guarantee, as it were, of security for the cross-border effort into Idlib, is absolutely essential. That’s not a theoretical judgment. It is the product of years of discussion aiming at exactly what you are considering right now, what could be done were there not to be a Security Council resolution. It just won’t work.

What’s the consequence if only 30 (percent), 35 percent or even a higher number – 40 percent – of the current food assistance could be provided into Idlib and the answer is a stark one. It would be starvation, certainly, in the winter months, and that, in turn, would precipitate further displacement.

That further displacement can only occur in one direction, across one border, and that’s the Turkish border.

Atma Camp, one of the largest concentrations of refugees in the world, is, literally, built right on the Turkish border fence. The only thing that keeps the millions of displaced in Idlib in Atma is the fact that they can be fed there and given medical care. The moment that ceases to be the case they will, predictably, move.

Where do they move to? They move into Turkey. But they don’t stay there. The Turkish government has made very clear and on this there is no political divide between Erdoğan and the AKP party and the opposition alliance. It’s a common view. Those new Syrian displaced, whatever the
numbers are – 1 ½ (million), 2 (million), 2 ½ (million), 3 million – will not be allowed to stay in Turkey.

What begins as a humanitarian crisis in Idlib becomes a transit through Turkish territory and then becomes, and I’ll use the starkest terms, a trans-Balkan trans-Aegean migration and a political crisis for Europe, particularly, for Germany.

Now, that fact is well understood by Vladimir Putin, and it is the driving element in the calculus that he has confronted on past renewal occasions and will confront again as we approach January 10th and the expiration point for 2642.

Does Putin pull the trigger or not? It will not be Syrian considerations – legitimacy of the government, sovereignty over territory, denial of territorial space for oppositionists. It will be whether he wishes to use this lever, as he would see it – this card – against Europe and now, post February, in the context of European, EU, NATO support for the campaign against Russian forces in the Ukraine, a new element that has been added to an already extremely tense, extremely difficult, policy mix.

I cannot tell you – I don’t know anyone who could – whether Putin’s calculus in January will involve the trigger or not on vetoing extension or, simply, not renewing the cross-border resolution. It would be the final bridge Russia could burn with Europe.

Explosions on pipelines, cold winters, and the prospect of another cold winter in late 2023-2024 as the fighting continues, if it continues – those have been powerful messages to Europe. This one, releasing millions of displaced into Europe, would be the most dramatic step Putin could take and it would have profound political consequences for many European states, notably, Germany.

Does he do it? Does he not? We can’t say. What we can say, though, is that in trying to determine what is the best course to follow, obviously, the humanitarian community – public, private, governments, NGO – need to consider focusing upon what alternatives they can muster.

But those alternatives cannot accommodate the delivery of assistance minus a resolution necessary to avoid an almost certain displacement of population out of Idlib into Turkey, through Turkey, into Europe.

That’s the reality we/our European partners face, and it’s the reality Putin knows all too well and has to contemplate for his own decisions, which will have to take place over the next 60 days.
Dr. Alterman: So, David, if I could draw on your years of diplomatic experience, as you look at a broader U.S.-Russia conflict, does Syria represent an opportunity or is Syria merely an afterthought, collateral damage, to a broader bilateral relationship?

Amb. Satterfield: Syria is collateral damage to a broader bilateral relationship. The humanitarian suffering, which is profound, in Syria is, obviously, a matter of considerable concern for the U.S. government, for all of our partner governments.

The prospect of further destabilization, radicalization, in Syria, projection of a radical threat from Syria, that’s also a concern, including, interestingly enough, a concern for Russia itself.

One of the original motivations for Putin’s move in 2015 to intervene in the Syrian conflict, beyond the validation of great Russia and its ability to stand up to the international community, to normal concepts of rule of law, rule of order, and show what Russia could do for its partners was accompanied by a Russian concern that further fitna, as you will, in Syria would only result in the generation of terrorist threat against Russia itself that’s matched by a parallel Putin absolute visceral conviction that we in the West – in fact, the world, in general, not just the West – Arabs, non-Arabs, east, west, north, and south – are absolutely nuts.

In our quixotic pursuits of democratization in nondemocratic societies, we have unleashed chaos, disorder, and radicalization, which threatens Russia.

But if you have to answer your question today, it is a byproduct of a side story to a much bigger conflict, which is driven by Vladimir Putin – and we should make no mistake about this – and his determination to pay back the world for what he believes was the world’s – not the U.S., not NATO, not the West’s – deliberate destruction of the Soviet Union and then calculated humiliation of the nascent Russian Federation in the early years after ’91, collapse of the ruble in ’94. He will show us who is stronger.

Dr. Alterman: Is there any way to either extract some part of the humanitarian relief operation from great power competition or some activities from great power competition or – I mean, the picture you’re painting is that there’s nothing to do.

But I’ve known you long enough to know that your approach to any problem is there’s lots of things we can do that just don’t get us all the way we have to go but here’s what we have to do now.
Amb. Satterfield: The thing that we had been doing, and I speak in my past role in the government, and the thing that I know is being done now is all possible preparation to increase that percentage of humanitarian assistance that could be managed, particularly into Idlib, were there not to be a Security Council resolution.

The problem, though, is not one of great power competition. It is the requirements, or they are the requirements, of both governments and of NGOs and other international organizations to move across an international frontier without an authorizing Security Council resolution.

What would be required to void that concern? At a minimum, it would be assurances, not just from Moscow but from Damascus as well, that there would be no threat, no challenge, provided to those movements. That is – and I will be as blunt as I can – an impossible goal. Russia is, if it does, going to veto the resolution because it doesn't want the aid moving. It wants to precipitate the crisis for Europe.

The Damascus government – the Assad regime – has zero interest in the world in doing anything other than seeing the migration out of Syria of a further portion of its population. This has been the great paradox and one of the greatest tragedies of the Syrian war is that you have a government that doesn't wish to contain that population. It is perfectly happy having half of the population or more depart – fewer people to govern, fewer people to have to control.

So, I see no motivation, should Russia take the decision to veto the resolution, where either a Russian assurance to the humanitarian community or a Syrian government assurance would be forthcoming. Quite the opposite.

Dr. Alterman: I know you have to go shortly. But before you do, I want to ask you about the Turkey dimension. How should we be engaging Turkey on this issue and what should we be doing with Turkey that we're not yet doing, given the humanitarian issues?

Amb. Satterfield: Jon, we have many policy challenges with President Erdoğan. But the policy towards humanitarian assistance into Idlib, the absolute necessity of preserving a U.N. Security Council resolution, is not and has not been a point of division with Erdoğan – with the Turkish government.

It is a point of unity of purpose, a unity of policy formulation, and intent. No state has more at stake more immediately than Turkey in allowing humanitarian assistance with the necessary attendant resolution to continue to flow into Idlib.
The Turks have been very good partners, despite all other areas of disagreement both with us, with the U.N., and with critical international partners, the penholders Norway and Ireland, the EU in general, on all of this.

The Turks have worked as much as they could to see if alternate arrangements into Idlib could be managed. But the problem here isn't Turkey. The problem here are the requirements of U.N. agencies who manage the coordination of this massive assistance effort to have a resolution and the requirements of NGOs and other international parties, states, and substate entities to have an authorization to allow them to do a cross sovereign border movement.

But the Turks are not the problem here. The Turks have been assets throughout because they’ve got a lot at stake.

Dr. Alterman: But, looking forward, you talked about the importance of preparing alternatives in the event that the resolution gets vetoed.

If that happens, what will we need to do with Turkey we haven’t already done?

Amb. Satterfield: What we will need to do with Turkey that we have not already done is to work to assure that as much as possible the Turks facilitate those entities who do remain able and willing to move cross-border assistance.

As I said, we think somewhere in the vicinity of a third of current assistance levels, perhaps slightly more, could, indeed, be sustained. That will require maximum Turkish government facilitation at the cross-border points, which would, in principle, include more than just Bab al-Hawa as the point of entry in. That’s what will be needed.

Dr. Alterman: I know you have to run. Thank you so much for taking time to talk to us today and sharing your wisdom.

It’s been not exactly encouraging but, certainly, enlightening and educational. I’m very grateful to you for taking the time.

Amb. Satterfield: Right. And, Jon, I’d just leave you with the message that this issue has profound implications beyond the humanitarian. It has implications for the strategic relationship into the future between Russia and Europe, between Russia and the United States, Russia, and the international community.

We have, all of us, been focused for years on the possibility that Russia will pull the trigger. But that focus has not produced an overcoming of the
obstacles to cross-border moves by governments, by the U.N., and by private entities minus that critical U.N. SCR.

Dr. Alterman: Wonderful. Thank you very much. Have a good afternoon.


Dr. Alterman: Thanks so much.

Now I’d like to introduce a really remarkable slate of panelists, and once I introduce you – once I introduce them, you’ll understand and once you hear them you will understand even more.

Amany Qaddour serves as the regional director of Syria Relief and Development, a humanitarian organization operating on the ground in Syria since 2011. She’s currently an associate faculty member and a doctor of public health candidate at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and is also a visiting scholar at Brown University Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs. That’s quite a mouthful. In 2020, she was awarded the American Public Health Association’s Outstanding Leadership and Advocacy Award for maternal and child health, and she briefed the U.N. Security Council in 2020 and again in 2021.

Jonathan Robinson is a global fellow with the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies at Brown and a contracted humanitarian operations specialist supporting the U.S. Naval War College’s Humanitarian Response Program. Jonny (sp) spent nearly 10 years living and working in various conflict-affected environments in the Middle East, working with the Carter Center’s Syria Conflict Resolution Program, the International NGO Safety Organisation’s Syria team, and Caritas Switzerland. Since 2019, Jonny’s (sp) research has explored Russia’s actions in the humanitarian space, and I would also caution you he is – or underline he is attending this event in his personal capacity and any views he shares do not represent his organizations past or present.

Natasha Hall is my partner in crime, a senior fellow in the CSIS Middle East program. She has over 15 years of experience as an analyst, researcher, and practitioner in complex humanitarian emergencies in conflict-affected areas with a particular emphasis on the Middle East. Her work focuses on conflict resolution, governance, displacement, environmental issues, resilience, and civilian protection. Earlier this year, she published a report on the international aid crisis in Syria entitled, “Rescuing Aid in Syria.”

So, thank you all for coming. It’s a little bit of a bracing analysis of where the
future lies for Syria.

Dr. Qaddour: Thanks. Can you hear me?

Dr. Alterman: Yeah.

Dr. Qaddour: I was told not to tap it. (Laughs.)

So, thanks for having me, first off, and to CSIS and I’m happy to be, actually, among colleagues and friends here today.

I think – I don’t know why we don’t all just go home, actually, after what Ambassador Satterfield kind of – the picture he painted for us.

But I think what’s going on on the ground is, you know, after 11 years now some really glaring gaps have been exposed in the humanitarian sector for a situation as complex as Syria, and I think on the humanitarian side, like, as an actor really recognizing the frustration and fatigue that we feel after so many years in this situation.

The ambassador touched on this but, really, is identifying that – recognizing that the population is at the mercy of a U.N. Security Council resolution every six months every year. I think that’s the point that we’ve reached just where we recognize that it’s such a short-sighted response that does not adequately meet the needs of those in protracted conflict.

I think we could say that about Syria but, obviously, this is setting the precedent for many other crises right now. And I think – and I do want to touch on this because he emphasized this, maybe not in these particular words – but recognizing some of this post-conflict narrative that’s emerging right now, this normalization related to what’s happening in Syria, many of these conversations actually happening in parallel to the ones we’re having right now where there is a dire humanitarian situation.

I think zeroing in on the ground, and I – as a humanitarian and public health practitioner, I might use just a few key examples since the ambassador gave us sort of an aerial view of some of the different humanitarian needs, one of those being cholera, as a case example of what’s happening in Syria right now, exposing the deep vulnerabilities within health infrastructure in Syria on the ground.

We have a slew of both suspected and confirmed cases, not only in the northwest of Syria – where, as you mentioned, over 4-point-so million in the population scattered about in various displacement camps and other precarious housing – but also across the country. And for those who’ve sort of followed what’s happened in Syria over the past many years, you know,
when we think about the different aerial attacks to health infrastructure, to civilian infrastructure, that has made this system – essentially, crippling the health system, health infrastructure, for us as health responders to be able to adequately respond.

I know we faced this during COVID. We faced it in the past during polio at a time we thought it was actually eradicated, and, for us, this has really been difficult to deliver lifesaving critical services with continuity to the population that’s in need, and I think Ambassador touched on this as well but, really, just in terms about thinking – even funding to respond adequately to these needs.

According to the humanitarian response plan, only 30 percent of that funding has actually been secured right now, leaving this population deeply vulnerable. And then just closely tied to health, for us, is water and sanitation – WASH – infrastructure, and this narrative around early recovery where, as humanitarians, we feel frustrated with cholera, for example, and many other infectious diseases where you can’t adequately respond only on the health side.

Well, with WASH infrastructure, for those who are familiar, this sort of falls under a development mandate or an early recovery mandate, and for us, as humanitarians, this is where there’s a distinct line that we’re often not able to cross and now 11 years later, obviously, again, exposing that vulnerability.

I think, just in terms of sort of critical assumptions around Syria, I think, because there aren’t these sort of mass escalations in violence, aerial attacks that are not as prominent anymore that does not mean there is not volatility and violence and continued instability, particularly in the northwest.

For those of you that have followed this, just a few days ago there was a violent aerial attack from government of Syria allies to one of the largest and most densely populated camps in the northwest, killing over 10 people, one of them being a woman and several children.

And so, this constant influx and escalation in violence also makes it hard for humanitarian responders to respond when over – with this particular camp over 400 families were displaced. So just in terms of thinking – being able to navigate some of those constant phases of instability.

And then, obviously, in the backdrop, in not only northwest, across Syria and, obviously, in some of its neighboring countries, like Lebanon has massive economic deterioration in the region – food security, soaring rates of malnutrition – and then just recognizing that amidst this there are also
other deprioritized sectors.

So, at this macro level we’re seeing, obviously, people just unable to secure livelihood day by day, but then thinking about some of these other more invisible consequences where you have violence against women and children, for example.

You have over 50 percent of school-aged children in northwest Syria out of school, and some of these consequences, you know, we don't necessarily see that immediately. We'll probably see that in the next five, 10, 15, 20 years just in terms of thinking long term, again, related to the humanitarian sector as more and more families are pushed into poverty.

And then I just want to sort of back away and just think about in terms of the U.N. Security Council resolution, again, as a humanitarian actor, the sheer exhaustion of just constantly having to have this in the background and, really, just thinking rather than focusing on service delivery as how will we maintain the ability to – for access, for coordination, for technical support.

Just in terms of thinking of the U.N. mechanism as what might only be feasible or possible through the U.N. and certain activities that are a hundred percent U.N. led at this particular time for us from a health standpoint – sorry – is vaccines, for example. COVID, cholera, vaccines for children, and then other elements like insulin, anesthesiology, drugs for surgeries, and other kits that are essential for us in terms of the clinical management of rape, for example, for sexual violence and survivors of that. So just in terms of thinking about that.

And then the other two streams that are quite important for us, really, is the coordination piece tied closely to access in negotiation, and as a humanitarian agency for us we absolutely need sort of that interlocutor, that buffer, because as humanitarian organizations, I think we're already exposed to enough scrutiny in terms of operating in this highly dynamic context, and risk mitigation and aid diversion, in particular, take an inordinate amount of our time away from our service delivery.

So, I think, without that sort of U.N. support, U.N. cover, we do lose some elements of that legitimacy and credibility, and I think just – this is something I’m very passionate about, and Natasha knows because we’ve worked on this together – is really these crushing, bureaucratic impediments for humanitarian actors on the ground that are constantly scrutinized for some of these elements.

And then I just want to stop there because I know Jonny (sp) and Natasha are going to touch on some of these, but, really, is just – you know, so many
of this – that so much of the contingency planning around the cross-border resolution every single year, I think, this is going to set a precedent, and despite however much innovation and creativity we’ve come up with as humanitarian actors there’s only so much we can do when these are our parameters and sort of the larger elements at play in Syria.

Thank you.

Dr. Alterman: Thank you.

Jonny (sp), you’ve spent a lot of time looking at how the Russians deliver aid, looking at ways the Russians shape aid. We’ve heard about a really profound set of humanitarian needs. What’s the Russian approach to those needs been in Syria?

Jonathan Robinson: Yeah. Great. Thank you, and thanks for having me here.

I think, before I look at the approach in Syria, it’s important to take a step back and really unpack how Russia frames humanitarian assistance in general because it is different to how we all commonly would understand it.

You know, first off, it’s young in its understanding. Its first ever regulation governing foreign humanitarian assistance, as it calls it, was in 2000. Its first policy was in 2007. And if you compare that, say, to the U.S. with the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 you really see that difference. So, it’s very young in its understanding.

Also, when you read different government documents, commentators, and look at websites of Russian entities that have delivered aid in Syria, you see that Russia has wider notions of what humanitarian aid is. Certainly, it encompasses humanitarian aid as we see it – that narrow definition of saving lives, alleviating suffering to a certain extent, also disaster relief after natural disasters but also peacekeeping.

You know, the main aid implementer in Syria is by the Russian Center for Reconciliation and Conflicting Sides. That was set up as a peacekeeping conflict resolution thing, according to Russia – Russia’s perspectives.

And then the final element that they – that, certainly, Russia considers humanitarian is cultural diplomacy or political diplomacy, and that’s things like academic exchanges, music exchanges, building statues. This kind of thing is considered humanitarian.

That’s a longstanding Soviet legacy from there, and Yevgeny Primakov, the former head of the Russian humanitarian mission, even acknowledged this in an interview in 2019, saying that for many Russians humanitarianism is
more considered within the sphere or realm of culture than it is anything else. So very different, wider views than our narrow definitions.

And then when you start going down into the policies you start seeing Russia explicitly stating foreign humanitarian assistance, as they see it, that wider view, is an explicit soft power tool for them to achieve their objectives. They state this in a 2016 policy. It's very clear, and they use it very much to – they state that they're using it to boost their image as a credible actor in the world as well as promote cooperation with their allies. And, also, when you then go a step further and look at military journals, which are publicly available – you can go and read them – you start seeing many military commentators who talk about humanitarian aid going a step further saying, well, actually, humanitarian aid, as we see it, is part of hybrid warfare. It's a hybrid – it's part of the hybrid warfare toolkit.

And so, they see it as, you know, foreign humanitarian assistance, you know, by the U.S. or the U.K. or wherever it might be is a way for its adversaries to collect intelligence, to undermine certain kind of structures in places Russia operates. But also, conversely, Russia also thinks it can use humanitarian aid that way.

So, you know, that’s one. You know, there are just four areas to kind of think about when we kind of start looking at how Russia approaches aid in Syria.

And so, over the past 10 years Russia has built quite a robust ecosystem. I've tracked at least 40 Russian entities that have delivered aid in Syria. These have delivered over – I found over 4,000 individual aid deliveries to at least 852 communities around Syria. So, it's quite significant.

These are both government entities – ministry of defense, Russian Orthodox Church, Akhmad Kadyrov Foundation from Chechnya but also NGOs or seemingly NGOs. I prefer to call them masked state actors because when you start diving into them many of these entities have, you know, very strong links to the Kremlin or pro-Putin politicians, and so a lot of political connections there.

This system is self-sustaining. Those entities I mentioned really support the rest of that ecosystem. So, it doesn’t have to rely on outside donors or the U.N. to help it with its aid deliveries, and all of this sets up this system to be insulated from outside influence.

It doesn't need to coordinate with the U.N. in Syria. It doesn't attend Cluster meetings, for example, in Damascus, and it often, you know, doesn't need to follow the same rules as the rest of the international community in Damascus. You know, it doesn't have to register. It doesn't have to operate with a local partner, for example. They can kind of go where they want.
And I argue this quietly competes with the U.N. It undermines, certainly, the humanitarian principles that govern a lot of our work that we do as most aid is delivered by military entities in – from Russian military entities and really blurs that independence and neutrality line, and also could create a lack of trust from folks on the ground.

You know, you think of those 862 communities. If their first impression of the international aid system is Russian entities – you know, when you look at the aid that Russia delivers, you know, I've had friends send me pictures of it and things like that and it's little more than kind of shopping bags filled with expired food.

You know, it's not sustainable, it's not reliable, and often, you know, if you look at the those 800-odd places, around, you know, 98 percent of those places saw single visits – one-off visits. They're not reliable. You know, only around 21 locations saw sustained aid.

But I'll, maybe, stop there.

Dr. Alterman: Not to interrupt you but to quote you. One of your papers talks about how Russian aid is about supply, not impact, which I thought was just a really helpful way to capture the idea of we'll show that we did something but it's to show what you're doing, not to affect conditions on the ground.

Mr. Robinson: Yeah, very much. Yeah.

I mean, I was in Damascus in 2017 and I was with a European NGO – a country director – and he was rang up by a Russian officer who had just made one of these surrender deals – so-called reconciliation deals – and said, we promised the group we're negotiating with some aid, so you need to come and deliver it. And that just highlights for me that delivery service that, you know, Russia, certainly, views with that.

Dr. Alterman: So, Natasha, we've heard about the situation on the ground in Syria. Can you help us link this to the international diplomacy, to the U.N., to how Russia is trying to shape its actions on the Security Council to drive things in Syria and how it's trying to use things in Syria to advance Russian interests in New York and elsewhere?

Natasha Hall: Right. Right. Yeah.

I mean, Jonny's (sp) comments and your question bring to mind this image that I really can't get out of my head. Not too long ago, Russian government outlets and affiliated accounts widely distributed this video showing Russian soldiers distributing humanitarian aid in southern Syria. The
regime and Russia had both just taken over large parts of southern Syria, and I suppose the Russians wanted to show goodwill so you had this video distributed of Russian soldiers – armed Russian soldiers – sort of pushing clearly terrified civilians into this line and at the front of the line was a Russian soldier with a Kalashnikov squarely pointed at each civilian – elderly person, man, woman and child – that got to the front of the line and giving them this, you know, tiny shopping bag of, I presume, aid of some kind.

And, I mean, I think that that image kind of says it all, in a sense, and I think the fact that Russia wanted to widely distribute it also says it all. Because, as Jonny (sp) was saying, Russia sees this as part of its hybrid warfare toolkit.

But the fact is Russia doesn't really provide aid, right. So it's mostly manipulating aid that others provide. And just to give you sort of a frame of reference, last year the top 20 donors provided 97 percent of all public international humanitarian aid. Russia is nowhere on that list, and neither is China, because we’re talking about great powers competition, after all, right.

So now we have two members – permanent members – of the Security Council, China, and Russia, who aim to protect regimes’ ability to cut off segments of their population as part of their warfare toolkit, and in the case of Syria you have Russia that has, you know, helped the Assad regime besiege millions of people, and then Russia is able to control international humanitarian aid and redirect it to its ally in Damascus.

I mean, think about that. That’s crazy. They aren’t paying for this assistance. But it’s not just crazy. I think also that this arrangement – I’m glad Jonny (sp) brings this up – it really endangers the humanitarian community’s ability to uphold humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence, and impartiality, right.

But I think endangering those values is actually quite important to China and Russia, that want to uphold inviolable sovereignty even in the name of, you know, war crimes that are going on. And I’ll just give you a couple examples of that and how that has played out in Syria.

In China’s 60-year history on the Security Council, nine of its 17 vetoes have been on Syria since 2011. Russia has cast 17 vetoes on Syria since 2011. This issue is of great importance to them.

And so, I think, looking at their increasingly unified stance on Syria, their reaction to Ethiopia and other contexts where government is systematically cutting off populations in need is, frankly, of no surprise.
And I think that this trend will increasingly put the humanitarian community but also major donors in these very ethically awkward situations because what regimes all over the world – what all of us have seen in Syria is how effective it is to cut off populations and manipulate international humanitarian aid to sort of dispose of these troublesome segments of the population.

So, I don’t think it should be a surprise to us that cutting off aid or, you know, diverting it will increasingly become a tactic of war in the 21st century. You know, I think like that Russian soldier in that video that I mentioned, you know, they’re intimidating people in need. But I think they’re also undermining the credibility of the international humanitarian system, right?

So, I mean, to my mind, and this is something that we’ve talked about a lot, the U.S. government and major donors to the international humanitarian aid system, if we don’t address this in a collective and full throttled way in Syria this challenge will not end in Syria.

We are severely jeopardizing our ability to manage crises worldwide because a lot of precedence is being set in Syria and I don’t think it’s the precedence that we would necessarily want. And, hopefully – I mean, we can talk about some of the alternatives to this resolution or this precedence that is being set.

Dr. Alterman: Thank you very much.

I want to turn to Amany and just talk about what Ambassador Satterfield was describing about the consequences of uncertainty, the constant need to prepare for scenarios where there’s no cross-border mechanism.

Just based on your experience on the ground, can you give people a sense for what the real impact of a constant six-month deadline is for people delivering lifesaving aid to Syrians?

Dr. Qaddour: Yeah. I mean, I think – just in terms of thinking about sort of, to be frank, just the cross-border versus crossline mechanism in terms of communities affected, from our perspective, is really just the trust and acceptance by communities that have been receiving aid now for years from Turkey, as Ambassador Satterfield mentioned, and from humanitarians on the ground in the northwest.

I think that’s one of our biggest concerns in terms of shifting modality – and as you mentioned, I know there was a little bit of a sort of heightened concern – but just also in terms of this population that has been on the move and has continuously been, you know, impacted by violence and
insecurity is where do these people go – where do they go – and I think that’s just as a lot of factors, obviously, in Turkey – I don’t want to go too much into depth because I do want to get back into Turkey after this – but just in terms of thinking, you know, this population that is now sort of between a rock and a hard place in the northwest that, essentially, can’t enter Turkey and also a lot of the threats of actual Syrians in Turkey now being threatened to be returned because of, again, this normalization, this post-conflict narrative, this safe return sort of element.

But, for us, I think, it’s really just the scale of the needs. You know, we’re not in this pre-2014 era where the U.N. Security Council resolution sort of has not been – is not this well-oiled machine.

At this point right now we’re talking about scale in terms of massive needs that have increased since that time and continue to increase, I think, since last year’s humanitarian needs overview. There’s an additional million people that need humanitarian aid since over 90 percent, I think, of the population in Syria is unemployed right now.

And then just in terms of thinking also sort of the funding piece is critical for populations on the ground, again, with these massive humanitarian needs, through the U.N. cross-border resolution I think how funding is channeled is essential.

I think oftentimes people reference, you know, pre-2014 – we did it then; we can do it now. The reality is, is that’s not the case. And I don’t think we’ll be able to meet sort of the needs in this with the same effectiveness that we did – that we do with the cross-border resolution.

Dr. Alterman: Jonny (sp), you talked about the Russians instrumentalizing aid. Can you give us a clearer sense of the way the Russians are – how you are seeing the Russians instrumentalizing aid both in areas controlled by the Damascus government and in areas like Amany is working in the northwest, the northeast – areas that are beyond the control of the central government of Syria?

Mr. Robinson: Yeah. Definitely.

I mean, certainly, if you look at where Russia has delivered aid, those small numbers of locations that I talked about that see sustained aid, you know, the vast majority only see those limited visits.

You know, you see Russia playing that out. You know, in Deir ez-Zor, for example, in the al-Shuhail district, you know, a quite high proportion of Russia’s aid went there. And the al-Shuhail district was the crossing point between the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces in northeast Syria and
the government of Syria-held kind of eastern areas around Deir ez-Zor and Tadmur and things.

And so, while the fight was happening down to Baghuz to get rid of the last ISIS pocket, it was very hard for humanitarians on the northern bank there to operate and follow that down.

On the other side, Russia was setting up aid stations and really using it to project their influence to people to say, hey, we care. We want to help you. And people are – you know, speaking to humanitarians on the ground, you know, there were people crossing the river to receive that aid.

But it’s problematic because, you know, it’s very – it’s not sustained. It’s not with the vulnerable people in mind. It’s to score those political points.

And just to add on to your comment, if that’s all right, you know, we have seen an emboldening of Russia since Ukraine has started. So, we’ve talked about the active undermining of, you know, the humanitarian principles and creating a lack of trust.

You know, when we look at Russia’s aid activities in Ukraine, for example, they’ve actively set up their own humanitarian coordination centers. So, they don’t work through U.N. architecture. These are set up by the United Party, political party in Russia.

So, you’ve got the state still controlling that and that’s actively competing with the U.N. now. It’s not just ad hoc like it was in Syria. And then also it’s even more blurring lines of neutrality and independence. I’m seeing those civilian entities deliver aid in military uniform. They’ll dress up in military uniform and go to front lines.

In some cases, I’ve found cases where they’re delivering ammunition and drones and night vision goggles to troops on the front line as civilian – you know, so-called humanitarian actors, and also delivering a lot of just general food and medicine to troops on the front line as well. So being that force multiplier, if you will.

So really problematic actions there that, I think, Syria set a precedent for that they’re now emboldened to do that and, you know, I think, you know, we’re seeing how it influences Russia’s thinking on this.

You know, I think, according to their own notions and policies they think they’re doing a good job. We’re achieving our policies. It’s not about saving lives and alleviating suffering. It’s about achieving those foreign policy objectives, and I think they think they’re succeeding, and they’re insulated from critique of that and other things like that. Yeah.
Dr. Alterman: So, Natasha, this is a very stark image of what’s happening on the ground of Russia’s efforts, abetted by China, to undermine what has been a humanitarian system that evolved over decades.

How would you make a case – a strategic case – for the importance of preserving a humanitarian system? If you’re speaking to people not necessarily in this room who are committed to a humanitarian agenda but to people who need to be persuaded that a humanitarian agenda needs to be a strategic priority, how would you make that case?

Ms. Hall: Yeah. I mean, I think that we are increasingly seeing protracted conflicts all over the world and, you know, frankly, from the perspective of great powers competition, if you look at what China and Russia are doing, you know, our ability to manage crises affect us. They affect the United States, they affect Europe quite a bit, because we face the displacement that comes from these crises, frankly, and we’re also paying for the vast majority of aid, which is dwindling by the second, as Amany was pointing out, because we’re seeing emerging crises all over the world. Ethiopia and Ukraine. DRC is woefully underfunded. But it’s not China and Russia that that suffer the burden from that, and they know that, right.

So I think that, you know, we need to understand – and this is why I’m so glad that Jonny (sp) is here – humanitarian aid from their perspective because I think, you know, we’ve built this huge international humanitarian aid system and, frankly, in this unipolar world that has emerged after the Cold War, I don’t want to say we’ve gotten lazy but we haven’t really thought about what this multipolar system that is emerging is going to – how that’s going to affect an international humanitarian aid system that we’re primarily funding, right, and that we are primarily sort of indebted to, in a sense.

So, I mean, I would say, quite simply, that if we do not resolve this challenge or at least confront it, like I said, in a collective and full throttled way when it comes to Syria, we will see this crisis come up again and again and again because much like the Assad regime, I think, Russia has seen, oh, this is a great way of doing things.

We’re going to undermine the way that the international humanitarian aid system works, allow – you know, sort of protect these regimes that we actually want really close relationships with on the diplomatic and economic scene, protect their abilities to cut off aid populations, undermine U.S. diplomacy in Syria and Ethiopia across the Sahel, and we’ve seen this play out over just the past couple of years.

This has been a winning formula for Russia, right. They are punching way
above their belt in terms of their economy, in terms of diplomacy, and I think, you know, it makes humanitarians very uncomfortable to think about these issues and, I think, rightly, so.

But I think in order to maintain humanitarian principles and be able to adequately address these challenges that we’re going to face, which are not going to get any easier, we need to really start thinking about how to address them in this multipolar space where we’re seeing these great power rivalries rise, you know, in the Security Council but also elsewhere on the ground.

Dr. Alterman: Thank you.

I want to go to the audience in a second, and if you’re watching online on the CSIS webpage for this event you’ll see a little button that says ask a question. If you press the button, then you can ask a question.

But before we do that, I just want to ask, Jonny (sp), if we look forward five years what does success look like from the Russian perspective in the humanitarian space? What do they want to be doing five years from now?

Mr. Robinson: Yeah. It’s a good question.

I mean, it’s, certainly, hard to find that. Often, a lot of their policies are reactive or setting up processes that have a very practical focus.

But, you know, I think Syria, certainly, set that that precedent to, you know, diversify – as a diversification to Russia’s influence around the world in addition to their political and military actions. It helped reinforce to some of these, you know, rogue states or actors what an ideal humanitarian partner looks like.

It sets that precedent, and so that allows, you know, the Assad regime, for example, to kind of, you know, say, hey, why can’t all Western agencies do as Russia does, because they don’t cause us any problems.

And, you know, I think, you know, we’re seeing it inform their strategic level thinking more and more. You know, I give the example of the cross-border resolution in Syria, that they talked about aid being from Damascus and cross line and this is their experience in Syria and Ukraine, in Nagorno-Karabakh, in Georgia.

They focus on a small select of urban areas that are often on these key frontiers between fighting sides of Deir ez-Zor, Shuhail, Abu Doho (ph), in Aleppo, eastern Ghouta. I could go on. And so, they use this ground experience to help inform some of that.
But, you know, I think the ultimate goal is to continue siloing off their ecosystem from the rest of the community and so they can then plug and play some of these ecosystems in future conflicts or areas that are forgotten about by the U.S. or in between U.S. and someone else. And so, we’ve seen Russia set up centers in Serbia, for example, and really kind of, you know, increase their influence there.

You know, a poll was done in 2020 asking Serbians who gives most foreign aid to Serbia and the results that came back was China, Russia, and the EU, when in reality it’s overwhelmingly the EU.

So, I think, you know, when you start getting disinformation campaigns and things like that with this it becomes quite a potent, powerful tool, indeed. So not a positive outlook, I’m afraid. (Laughs.)

Dr. Alterman: Are there any questions in the room?

Seeing none, many – the United States is increasingly focused on a war in Ukraine, which has no shortage of humanitarian assistance. How would you keep Americans focused on the need for sustained humanitarian assistance to Syria?

Dr. Qaddour: I mean, you can’t because, I think, we just see right now a total desensitization to Syria and I think many other contexts – as Natasha said, so many virtually off the radar.

I think we have to be cautious about talking about Ukraine and parallels with Syria because oftentimes, it’s – you know, it’s a zero-sum game if one comes at the expense of another.

I think, generally, with Syria we do see, obviously, a lack of focus right now. With cross-border resolution every now and then, you know, there’s a shift of attention for a small portion of the year for those not involved in the Syria space.

But this is more, just broadly, in terms of really – I’m trying to think of how to articulate it. I think with us just purely focusing on the humanitarian aspect is what is going, I think, to impact the humanitarian system, at large.

For us, I think, when we look at Ukraine, you know – and people are often surprised. This is not a surprise to us. We have seen this for 10 or 11 years. So many of these attacks that have happened in Syria those set a precedent for Ukraine for this to continue to happen.

I think it’s also set a precedent in terms of continuously trying to unmarry
humanitarianism and human rights because so many of these elements have human rights violations and that’s what oftentimes sort of shackles us in terms of not being able to respond for some of the underlying deep-rooted issues rather than just continuously addressing the symptoms. And that’s what I think – and Jonny (sp) mentioned reactive. Trying to be constantly reactive is what’s difficult.

I think, for us, the reality with Syria is we’re recognizing funding is, obviously, dwindling. It’s not just because of Ukraine. It’s just because of donor fatigue. We know that’s the case. We have so many other protracted crises globally that are happening at this moment.

So, I think we have to be realistic and for us, just from the humanitarian side oftentimes, something that’s looked at as a bit of a soft issue is really prioritizing those needs amidst sort of this political backdrop.

Dr. Alterman: Thank you.

I see a question right here. If you’ll wait for a microphone. It’s coming from – it’ll be there momentarily. There we go.

Q: Can any of you speak into, like, the aid that goes into, you know, the Kurdish areas and how this power struggle with aid might affect that part of Syria?

Dr. Qaddour: So, I am trying to get back into Turkey, but I’m going to take a stab.

You know, I think this – I’m going to throw this to Jonny (sp) in a bit – but just in terms of thinking, you know, demographic reengineering is not something new. We see this in Syria. We see this in so many other contexts where certain populations either have aid cut off or are sort of the preferred population.

I think for those of us operating from Turkey this has been a little bit of a difficult element to navigate in terms of humanitarian needs rising, including for the Kurdish population, and this is why – and I can’t remember who touched on this – we also have sort of this whole of Syria approach in terms of response from other hubs simply because some of the geopolitical dynamics in the host country that’s allowing you to access this population from that area is quite difficult.

And I want to be very mindful and not go into too much detail. But maybe I’ll hand it over to Jonny (sp).

Dr. Alterman: Jonny (sp) just has to get back into Rhode Island. So that’s not a problem.
Dr. Qaddour: Yes. Yeah. I just – (laughter) –

Mr. Robinson: Well, hopefully I’m going to score some brownie points here. But CSIS has written a great report about some of the great power dynamics of northeast Syria, I think, in a report last year, I think it was. So, definitely, I think, check that out.

But in terms of, you know, what I’ve said about Russia being kind of quite shallow and symbolic with its aid, you know, when you look back at cases all – dating all the way back even to Chechnya in the 2000s, you know, Russia counts on the vast majority of people will be helped by someone else.

So it doesn’t have, you know, needs in mind when it does aid. And so, in northeast Syria, you know, Russia can just carry on the same way it has in government areas, just doing token aid efforts, trying to show its profile that it’s around and diversifying from its military and political power.

But for the U.S. to kind of keep that going and keep that goodwill going they have to invest an awful lot of amount in that. And so, you know, I think that’s where you can, certainly, see some of the – that kind of great power conflict come out.

I don’t know if Natasha has any thoughts as well.

Ms. Hall: Yeah. I mean, I would say it’s complicated in northeast Syria because you have – you do have great powers competition literally happening right there on the ground.

I mean, I think one aspect of this that’s important since we’re sort of talking about the cross-border responses that – the Yarubia (ph), the cross-border for the U.N., was cut off a couple of years ago and what you’ve seen since is this emphasis on crossline aid by U.N. organizations. So, this is, essentially, what would happen if the northwest was cut off, right.

I mean, in my –

Dr. Alterman: And by crossline aid you mean coming through the Damascus government –

Ms. Hall: Right.

Dr. Alterman: – going across a battle line?

Ms. Hall: So, yeah. So, Damascus being the point of entry for all U.N. aid, which is probably about 90 percent of U.N. aid right now.
But when I speak to NGOs on the ground that are actually the ones getting access to populations all over this very dynamic area, they're saying that, you know, the U.N. agencies can't be there because they are somewhat under the control of the government of Syria, right, or, you know, Russian machinations or whatever it happens to be.

So, you have this very awkward dynamic where NGOs that are actually delivering the aid and implementing the aid are not able to access U.N. funds and the U.N.-pooled funds. So, you're seeing, you know, massive gaps in services. You're seeing a cholera outbreak right now.

I mean, none of these things were - I mean, all of these things were predictable, right. We were predicting that waterborne illnesses would occur if this went on and, yet we're still seeing these gaps and we're seeing these gaps because of the lack of coordination, and this would go back to your previous point about what case can you make for the international humanitarian aid system.

And the case I would make is that you can actually coordinate, see what the needs are on the ground in a very complex environment where you just got rid of an organization called ISIS. You have the Kurds. You have Arab-dominated areas. But you can coordinate amongst different groups that have different access to different populations and actually meet the needs of people on the ground. Because if you don’t do that, you know, you have a situation like we do today.

So, I'm not speaking too much about Turkey. But happy to get into that.

(Laughs.)

Dr. Alterman: So let me ask you a question about Turkey because, I mean, what Ambassador Satterfield laid out was, potentially, pulling the trigger and provoking a crisis for Turkey. Turkey and Russia have, basically, reached an accommodation of sorts in Syria.

What do you think – you've been to eastern Turkey. You've often lived – often live in eastern Turkey. What are the consequences for Turkey if Russia decides it’s going to break this? What does that do to Turkish-Russian accommodation in Syria?

What does it do, do you think, to the broader Turkish-Russian relationship, which is one of several hundred years and not a lot of happiness?

Ms. Hall: I would answer that question in two parts.

The first thing I would say – because the ambassador didn't speak to this – but I think, you know, I've been working or I had been working on the
ground in Turkey since 2015. So, this was sort of just prior to a coup attempt on President Erdoğan, which then provoked quite a mass exodus, I would say, of NGO workers and humanitarian workers because the Turkish government, like many governments, I think, are suspicious, frankly, of international humanitarian workers.

They see us as, you know, sort of spies or agents or whatever. I can say this because I will go back to Turkey, but it'll be fine. (Laughs.) I won't live there. So, I mean, I think that there was this component of their response that is needed if there is to be a veto of the cross-border response and that is to greatly facilitate much more than it is today the NGO presence because it's – all of this will fall to NGOs, and I'm still hearing from NGOs that it's difficult to get visas, you know, even for U.N. officials – high-level U.N. officials.

They aren't fully facilitating that in a way that they could be, given all of the various impediments that we've spoken to about a contingency plan and that the ambassador spoke to. You know, so that's one aspect that can happen.

But I do think that, you know, there is this kind of bromance between Putin and Erdoğan, which has resulted in somewhat of a stalemate in the northwest.

So, I think the Russians acknowledge the concerns of Turkey and sort of the pressure that they would face on their northern border. So, it really depends on how secure Turkey feels on its northern border to be able to contain a humanitarian crisis or the displacement that, you know, might occur should there be a veto of this U.N. Security Council resolution mandate.

So, I think that there's a little bit there. And I have seen the Turks and the Turkish government use their – you know, their conduit of, I guess, nicer diplomacy with the Russians to advocate and prioritize the extension of the cross-border response, and I think we've sort of gotten past this issue that, I think, the Turks for a long time were sort of hoping that the international community would give them the money and then they would control the humanitarian response.

I think we've gotten past that. But I think that's still sort of an inkling in the Turkish government's mind that, well, worst case scenario we'll just control the entire humanitarian response into northwest Syria, which then you get into some of the issues that Jonny (sp) was talking about in terms of issues with the humanitarian principles there.

Dr. Alterman: Do you think that a Russian veto would be a nuclear option with regard to
the Russian-Turkish relationship over Syria?

Ms. Hall: I think that's the question, frankly. I think that Russia to date has been adequately negotiating for concessions that it wants, right, because I think it's OK, frankly, with the cross-border response as long as it can keep getting what it wants, as long as it can hold it over the international community's head, because now every six months everyone has to talk to Russia, right, and that's exactly where Putin and Lavrov want to be. They want to be at the table, and this gets them at the table, which is even more powerful, given how the invasion of Ukraine has been going.

So, I mean, to your point about it being a nuclear option, I think that depends also on how Turkish elections go next year. But I think that any administration – any Turkish administration – will quickly realize that it is a nuclear option for them. The question is whether they'll realize it too late, I think.

Dr. Alterman: I wish I could say that this panel has been an upper. (Laughter.) But it's, certainly, given me a lot that I feel I need to think about.

I am grateful to our remarkable panelists. I'm grateful to the humanitarian agenda in USAID.

I'm grateful to you for your attention and your interest. Please stay on for the rest of today's program, and please join me in thanking our panelists. (Applause.)

(END)