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**CAROL
SAIVETZ:**

Good afternoon, and welcome to the Starr Forum, and to our Focus on Russia series. I'm Carol Saivetz, senior advisor at the Security Studies Program at MIT. And I co-chair the Focus on Russia seminar series, along with my colleague Elizabeth Wood from the history department. I'd also like to thank Michele and Sabina for helping us put all of this together.

When we started discussing the seminar, it was in the middle of the summer. And it was before many recent events in Ukraine and within Russia itself. And, of course, we couldn't be more timely, given what's happened in the last month-- the Ukrainian successes on the battlefield, the Russian apparently military disarray, the Russian mobilization, and most recently, Putin's nuclear threats.

So we have three terrific speakers today who will address many of these questions. And I'm reminded to say, please use the Q&A function on the Zoom screen to ask your questions. And Elizabeth and I will field the questions.

So our first speaker today is Volodymyr Dubovyk, who is an associate professor at the Department of International Relations and Director of the Center for International Studies at the Mechnikov National University in Odesa. He has conducted research at the Kennan Institute at the Woodrow Wilson Center, and a long list of other places. And he's en route to Tufts University as we speak to be a visiting scholar there this year.

Our second speaker will be Mike Kofman, who serves as a senior research scientist at the Center for Naval Analysis and a Fellow at the Kennedy Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center in Washington, DC. If you've read anything about Ukraine in the last year and about the military situation, you have seen Mike quoted, or you have seen his tweets, et cetera.

Steve Simon is the Robert E. William Fellow at the MIT Center for International Studies. He has served on the National Security Council as senior director for the Middle East and North Africa during the Obama administration, and as the NSC senior director for counterterrorism in the Clinton White House. He has been at MIT now for two years, and we're glad that he's with us as well.

So our first speaker is Volodymyr. Why don't you kick us off.

**VOLODYMYR
DUBOVYK:**

All right. Thank you, Carol. Well, it's my special pleasure to be with you today. It's a-- it looks like a great panel, and I'm really impressed and humbled by the number of people who are listening to us now. But, of course, this is not because of people speaking on a panel, but primarily about the subject.

The subject interests people still, and that's a big deal to us in Ukraine. Because one thing that we would really not like to see is for people to lose interest to this war, and not to care about it anymore, and not to have a sustained interest in helping Ukraine to withstand this pressure and aggression from Russia.

So I think that this is very important that we still will get the support, which has been forthcoming from-- been coming for seven months now. Frankly, I mean, of course, the primary carrying of the burden is by Ukrainians. And without Ukrainian heroism and resistance and resilience, we wouldn't be able to claim some success in this war. But also, the assistance that is coming-- diplomatic, political, financial, weapons supplies-- is very important to us.

I mean, we we're always understand here in Ukraine that know without heroism, if we only have sticks and stones, you wouldn't be able to fight Russian military back. And still, it's a very complicated conflict. It's asymmetric conflict. It's definitely something which is not-- which is far from over.

I mean, the first-- I will start from the end. Is this war going to end anytime soon? I don't think so. I don't think so because apparently Putin is doubling down. He made this announcement about so-called annexation, and things like referenda-- again, quotation marks. And he's also mentioned the partial mobilization that what they're doing.

So instead of actually quitting and saying, OK, we're done. We're quitting. Let's sit down and seek some kind of a peaceful resolution, he's doubling down. That's the kind of person that he is. He's made a lot of mistakes. He's cornered. There is no clear exit strategy for him or off-ramp.

But he never likes to lose. And this is the biggest conflict of his life. And the guy is turning 70 today. He is not probably in a good mood. He is still hoping to be able to turn this around.

He might not be able to, and I hope so that he would not be able to. And yet, he's fighting. And there will be mobilization, and there will be people appearing on the front line, more people on the Russian side. And I'm sure that Michael Kofman will talk more about this. We understand that many of those people would not be properly trained or armed. But still, it's a big number of new people on the front line, so it'll be more pressure on the Ukrainian military.

On our side, of course, we are having high morale here in this country because of the offensives. Well, one in the Kharkiv region, and now going into Luhansk region, another one in Kherson. I mean, all this offensive is not an easy affair. It's not something that comes to Ukraine easily. It has a high price, a steep price in the lives of Ukrainian military. And many of them are wounded, many of them are dead.

So it's not like the easy ride or something for Ukrainian military, or not at all. And for the country in general. The country is in ruins in many ways. The industry is in ruins. There's no trade. The gross domestic product is dropping, like half of it will be after this year.

A lot of people are still IDPs-- Internally Displaced Persons. And a lot of people are refugees. Are they going to come back? To where? We will have places to live? What kind of businesses? Like in my profession, for instance, university professor, I'm seeing a number of students dropping. Why? Because some of them are not capable to be paying for their tuition.

Businesses have stopped. People don't have jobs. It's a complicated situation. And a lot of what we still have, stability in our economic system, is also thanks to support coming from the West. So it's not just weapon supply or security assistance, it's also humanitarian assistance and so on.

But the people are reasonably optimistic. Because, after all, we haven't lost it. I mean, we've shown to everyone, to ourselves and everyone around the globe, that we are capable of fighting back, that we are strong, that we are resilient, that we are not a failed state. There been this debate between August of last year and February of this year, is Ukraine a new Afghanistan? [INAUDIBLE]. We've shown quickly that, no, we are not.

The government is running. The military is fighting. The president is in town. He probably didn't exactly say in those words-- I don't need to write a new nomination. But his behavior was charismatic enough, and he stood up to the moment. And that's why he is where he is right-- he is something of a rock star right now. And I'll take a second now to put more light because I've been told that it's not enough light.

OK. So let's hope will be better. Yeah, that's good-- somewhat better, not drastically. Yeah, well, I am on the road now, and I'm trying to improvise. But hopefully, the sound stays.

So Ukraine is proving that Democratic country can be resilient, that asymmetric conflict not necessarily is to be lost by a smaller country or weaker country. Russia, of course, has huge resources, and financial, and they have nukes, and their population is three times more than that of Ukraine. But still doesn't mean that Ukraine were doomed to be failing. We know now this for a fact.

The economy is trying to find some solutions. Like, for instance, in my hometown of Odesa, it's often been in the news. It's been attacked, not to the extent like Kharkiv was, for instance, or Mariupol, or Mykolaiv next door to Odesa, but still has been attacked.

But yet, there is now trade. There is now grain deal, which is working. And that's interesting subject that Russia has threatened in recent days to maybe "torpedo it," quotation marks, withdraw from it. But I don't think they will do it. It's actually beneficial to them. And I think they're going to stay, which means that would be a lot to an economy of my hometown and the region. But people are involved in the transit trade and grain and so on, fertilizers and things like that.

Politically, Ukraine is consolidated to the unprecedented extent. And you would assume that because this is war or annihilation and genocide. This is really a war on anything Ukrainian. So people are getting together. And I mean, even those who were not-- who were infighting, who were quarreling, who had some political disputes between themselves, right now we're united.

Like, for instance, there are still lingering questions in terms of performance by our government and leadership and the president prior to February 21. Apparently, some mistakes have been made, and some warnings have been heard properly and acted upon them. But we have decided to go back to address those issues and questions, outstanding questions, later when the war is over.

So for now, we are trying to get together-- our act together and act in defending our own country, and our liberty, and our freedom. And also, I think, our democracy. Because frankly, Ukraine is a Democratic country. But it becomes a complication when it comes to the issue of when this war will end.

Because in a country like Russia, you have one guy who decides, who is the decider. In a country like Ukraine, you don't. Because Zelenskyy is not almighty. He's not a King. I mean, like I said, his ratings are up in the sky. But he has parliament. He has a position. He has media. He is public. He has military which has been fighting.

Assuming for a moment-- imagine for a moment Zelenskyy says, OK, let's sit down and give some land to Russia, his ratings will drop really quickly. So it's an open political system. And therefore, he's limited in what he can do.

So when someone in the West, or in the East for that matter, think that we can just ask Zelenskyy nicely, or even pressure him, to sit down and negotiate some peace deal and stop the war, it's not that easy for him. He's not free to do what he wants.

So the easiest thing for the war to be ended would be for those who started it to end it, to stop fighting and withdraw the troops. But instead, of course, we have the so-called annexation and so on. We'll see where it goes.

I mean, for the future of European security, the end of this war, how it will end, will be, I mean, hugely important, hugely important. So it's not just about Ukraine at all. It's about a bigger-- much bigger space.

I'm now in Warsaw for several days. I talked to a lot of prominent experts here. They do see this war as something which really has meaning to them. Sometimes you would feel that this is their war. The war is waged on Poland and not just on Ukraine. And there is a similar feeling in many other countries in the region.

So everyone is having this wake-up moment. And everyone is understanding this is a threat, a major threat and a challenge that needs to be dealt in a strategic way. And the Ukraine is the [? forepost. ?] Ukraine is the first line of defense. That's why there is a lot of support. So it's not just values, it's also self-interest by many countries in the West.

And I would conclude here, and I would say that, of course, we-- in Ukraine, we're doing everything we can. We're doing everything we can not to lose this war, not just for ourselves, not just for future generations of Ukrainians. But basically, for the future of many future generations of Europeans. Thank you.

CAROL

Great. Mike.

SAIVETZ:

MICHAEL

KOFMAN:

OK, great. Well, let me pick up from there. I'm going to focus, as I'm sure most folks anticipate, on the military situation. So here's kind of my view of the current military situation, which is that Ukraine has the initiative. And at this stage on the battlefield, it also very much has the momentum. It's been able to convert its advantage and manpower and morale, together with Western military assistance, into much greater combat power.

Ukraine has demonstrated the ability to conduct concurrent offensives on different fronts. And it's been able to take advantage of much greater flexibility along its interior lines, which is a way of saying it's much easier for the Ukrainian military to shift forces within Ukraine from one theater of operations to another, rather than it is for Russia to move units around back and forth to try and defend different areas.

The Russian military has been stretched quite thin across a pretty broad front. In many areas, Russian forces appear exhausted. Moscow has been unable throughout this war to resolve the longstanding mismatch between the political aims and the military means.

So the political goals they've had, broadly speaking from my point of view, were unachievable with the military means and how they were trying to apply it. And it's been very clear since the summer that they do not have the military resources to defend the territory they're trying to hold, and certainly not the territory that Putin has said that he's going to annex, or that is, essentially that they have annexed as of a week ago.

So the Russian military has been suffering from a structural deficit of manpower. They've had problems with retention. They've had big problems with rotation. Most of the Russian military had been deployed. In Ukraine there were no fresh forces in order to conduct a rotation of troops, which means over time the Russian military have gotten exhausted, morale drops, and soldiers have wanted to quit and to end their deployment.

And they've had big issues with recruitment. That is, the various piecemeal solutions they pursued over the last seven months were largely a way of kicking the can down the road without resolving the structural problems. And in the process, they were cannibalizing the force, using a lot of their officers and their better equipment without a good strategic outcome from the Russian point of view.

So at this stage, Russian forces, from my point of view, are generally in retreat and struggling to stabilize their lines in Luhansk. They're also in retreat in Kherson. Although, I think the fighting there is much more bloody and difficult, and the density of Russian forces is much higher. But the Russian position in Kherson in the coming month could go from a precarious state to an untenable position if Ukrainian forces advanced sufficiently, especially if they're able to bring artillery within the range of the main supply crossings.

Ukraine is trying to maximize what it can gain ahead of the looming winter. During the winter, the war may return to a less dynamic and more attritional form until the renewal of offensive operations perhaps sometime next year. Part of the Ukrainian approach is not just about achieving these objectives, but also preserving the force. I think Ukraine has already demonstrated pretty effectively in September that it is able to retake territory and is, in practice, winning the war.

So it's achieved a lot of the political objectives that they wanted to achieve, and also a lot of the more operational objectives, too. But I also fear that too many people have begun to assume because Ukraine is winning the war that the war has already been won. People here need to be a little more cautious and more careful.

More medium to long term, the Russian military is very vulnerable. It's quite vulnerable heading into the winter, and the potentially is going to be in a pretty difficult or precarious state coming out of the winter, too. But Ukraine's military potential, to a substantial extent, also depends on sustainability of Western military supplies, in particular, ammunition. They've got a very significant plus-up ahead of these offensives in the fall, but it's unclear what they can expect in the coming months. Let me turn a bit to Russian implementation of wartime measures and mobilization.

So the Russian implementation of wartime measures, for example, stop loss, that is, soldiers have their contracts extended indefinitely. They can no longer refuse to deploy. They can't leave the military. Conscripts, once they're conscript service has ended, can actually be mobilized now too and what have you. It's not going to fix morale, but it's going to an extent fix some of the retention issues they've had.

The mobilization, as they have pursued it, I think in practice as a phase general mobilization, the added manpower could potentially extend the war. And it's going to address maybe quantity, but certainly not the quality of Russian forces or their ability to effectively employ these forces on the battlefield.

I think initially, the Russian military will try to throw the manpower they've gotten onto the line in a desperate attempt to stabilize it. Obviously, much of this manpower will be untrained, or at best, have maybe two weeks of familiarization training. Then over time, try to create additional units and new formations.

But that being said, mobilization would have been a much more dangerous development in this war if it had taken place in April. In fact, I think many of us anticipated that given the disastrous initial invasion, that Russian political leadership would consider mobilization much earlier on in the spring as opposed to now. At this stage, it's actually a much less dangerous course of action for Ukraine.

So I think fortunately, Putin is, from my point of view, a master procrastinator rather than any kind of strategist. And has spent a lot of time sitting on his hands as the situation deteriorated, watching his options go from bad to worse. And now mobilization looks much more like a desperate measure, and it's likelihood of success I think is quite limited.

On top of that, the Russian military is pretty limited by its overall capacity to employ forces on the battlefield. And by that I mean that no matter how much manpower they mobilize, they can only sustain and effectively command some limited number of forces at any given time in the operation. Although, they can generate reserves, they can generate additional units to conduct rotation, much of what's going to happen to mobilization, I think, remains to be seen.

I have to be very frank here that mobilization may not change the trajectory, and it may not change at all the outcome of the war, but it could extend it. That said, these are pretty modest confidence assessments. Because mobilization is incredibly understudied in my field. It introduces a degree of uncertainty. I think a lot of folks are being overly deterministic or dismissive in discussing the subject, and here we have to be careful.

Mobilization also poses a really high risk for Moscow going into the winter. They're not mobilizing these personnel in the spring for an offensive. They're mobilizing them to stabilize the line headed into the winter. If they're not able to effectively supply them, if morale really drops, all sorts of things could happen with this army that I think would be a real risk for Russia and for the political system.

That said, to me, mobilization represents a commitment of the regime to the war. I think to some extent it is a point of no return. Certainly annexation is. And it indicates that the war is likely to go on, at least as long as Putin's in power. Because he severed much of his ability to revise down minimal war aims.

Now, I'm not saying certainly a leader after him who might care far less about Ukraine might not have this Ukraine fixation, could do that, could revise Russian war aims. But now I'm skeptical [INAUDIBLE]. OK. That's-- I'm not here to talk about politics, but much more about the military matters.

Let me close out with a couple of points. And I would be remiss if I didn't mention the subject of nuclear escalation, since it seems to be all that everybody is talking about in the last two weeks.

So prior to mobilization, I think Russian political leadership had a choice between three broad options. The first one was retrenchment-- that is, a withdraw from indefensible territory to revise their political aims. The second was mobilization, which is what they elected. And the third is escalation.

These were not mutually exclusive. Thus, having followed through with mobilization, the other two options still remain. Putin may would offer a withdrawal, or he may follow through with escalation if mobilization fails. From my point of view, the present threat of nuclear escalation is quite low. This is just one analyst's personal opinion.

On the other hand, it's probably the highest it's been certainly since 1983. And I think the overall threat of nuclear escalation has grown over the last two weeks because the political stakes for the regime have risen considerably. And I think long term, the risk of nuclear escalation is increasing as a result of both the announcement of mobilization and annexation.

Still, my impression, at least right now, is that the likelihood of Russia losing the war without necessarily resorting to nuclear weapons is quite higher than the likelihood of Russia resorting to nuclear use as it is losing the war. And I think quite a few conventional escalation options still exist between where we are now and potential nuclear use. I could be wrong about that. And, of course, folks should keep in mind that major powers or nuclear powers have fought a number of conventional wars since nuclear weapons have been invented in the 20th century. And they've lost them without resorting to nuclear use.

I'm not saying that that should be an optimistic roadmap for how this continues or how it ends. I'm just suggesting it as a history we can look at to essentially say that the risk of nuclear escalation is very real. It's not necessarily as high as I think it's being portrayed publicly. That's just my own personal view. But also not necessarily that if Russia is losing that Putin is going to use nuclear weapons. OK. On that, I'll turn it over to Carol, who I think I hope I stayed within my time.

CAROL

You did a great job. Thank you. Steve, you're on. Steve?

SAIVETZ:

STEVEN SIMON: There you are. Hello, everybody. Thank you for inviting me to participate in this panel. I really appreciate it. I'm going to start with a little bit of ancient history and then move briskly towards a couple of temporary judgments.

The first point I want to make is that in recent decades, Ukraine hasn't been a major feature of US foreign policy, in Europe or elsewhere. The salience of Ukraine and US internal deliberations really grew as a function of increasing tensions between Washington and Moscow. Already in Obama's first term, efforts-- serious efforts to reset relations with Russia foundered over Syria and Libya, among other irritants.

In 2014, we saw the seizure of Crimea, another setback; episodic attempts to revive arms control-- talks went nowhere. Russia's Arctic Policy was an irritant as well. Still, there was cooperation in the P5+1 context, and that was sort of an interesting exception to the rule.

The release shortly after Trump's inauguration of a joint CIA, FBI, NSA report, or at least the unclassified key judgments, engendered yet another bilateral dispute. Among other things, the intelligence community averred that the Russian government had meddled in the 2016 election to Hillary Clinton's detriment, thereby implicitly calling into question the legitimacy of Trump's victory in that election.

During the Trump administration itself, Putin announced new weapons systems with a strategic dimension, underscoring Russia's alleged ability to penetrate any US defenses. The tone coming out of Moscow was increasingly hostile, and to all appearances, unmollified by the then president's adulation of Putin. And, of course, Ukraine was at the heart of Trump's impeachment in 2019.

Under Biden, tensions continue to grow, and many observers awaited a finely balanced strategy toward Russia that simultaneously conveyed resolve, while ratcheting down tensions. Such an approach is difficult to sustain, however, because whatever one does to show resolve and reassure allies is bound to be read as a threat, which, if anything, ratchets tensions upward.

Ukraine's interest in NATO membership and Washington's refusal to say, in essence, are you kidding, and to disavow the prospect of membership may or may not have spurred Putin to invade. I defer to my colleagues on Russian matters.

It does appear, though, that the United States administration was aware of the brittle nature of the relationship, of course, and the question of NATO membership for Ukraine in that context. But it considered adequate reassuring remarks about the very long lead time for Ukrainian accession to NATO, with the implication that regardless of Washington's declaratory posture, as a practical matter, NATO membership was just not in the cards.

Now, unlike 2014, the US apparently enjoyed good access to communications within the Kremlin at this point. The White House used this information publicly and in capitals to mobilize opinion and put pressure on Putin by undercutting his communications strategy, which turned on public denials of his secret intentions as a way to hamstring international opposition and impede a coordinated response to his move when he finally made it.

The US promptly moved to supply Ukraine with the means to blunt the Russian offensive. The window for this was opened by the Ukrainians themselves around Kyiv, and by a Russian plan that carried excessive operational risk. While there were no guarantees yet that the Ukrainian government would be decapitated, it suddenly-- there are no guarantees yet that the Ukrainian government would not be decapitated, decapitation suddenly became an unlikely scenario.

The administration's instinct was to push back hard. In April, the US Defense Secretary talked about the war as an opportunity to weaken Russia, and he walked that back. But my guess is that he reflected war aims that were evolving within the White House. Just weeks before then, Biden departed from the script of a speech to let loose on Putin saying, quote, "For God's sake, man, this man cannot remain in power," unquote.

Over the summer, Biden further stated that the US, quote, "will not pressure Ukraine in private or in public to make any territorial concessions," unquote, and that arms transfers were meant to ensure that Ukraine will, quote, "be in the strongest possible position at the negotiating table," unquote. America's goal, according to Biden, is straightforward. We want to see a Democratic, independent, sovereign, and prosperous Ukraine with the means to deter and defend itself against further aggression. Those were fairly audacious aims, I think. One might agree.

The administration used the power of the dollar as a reserve currency and the threat of severe sanctions to jam the flow of inputs to the Russian economy and undermine Russian oil exports. The Russians themselves were clearly on their own way toward eliminating their largest market for natural gas. This was accompanied by a massive appropriation for Ukraine. Economic support funds were around \$50 billion. Now, for perspective, that's nearly double the 10-year appropriation for Israel.

And at that stage, \$10 billion for weapons, the Biden administration has now provided a total of almost \$17 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since the Russians invaded. This is a major statement.

My sense is that this response came naturally to the senior-most members of the administration. They do believe that the US has a custodial mission and that it is obligated by moral sentiment and strategic necessity, as well as pre-existing deep mistrust of the Russian leadership, to hold the line against Russian aggression.

In this respect, they embody the DNA of post-war American foreign policy. And it does revolve around Russia and European security. It's seen very much in those terms. The president, as is well-known, was disinclined when vice president to intervene in the Syrian Civil War and was eager to withdraw from Afghanistan. He is after big game-- see under Taiwan.

The third task after sanctioning Russia and throwing money and weapons at Ukraine was managing the European response to the conflict. To some extent, this was like herding cats. At one end of the spectrum was the imperial fantasist, Boris Johnson, soon to be booted from 10 Downing Street. And clustered around him were the NATO members geographically closest to Russia, whose threat perceptions were at code red.

The Baltic, Finns, and Swedes sought membership in NATO, but were opposed by another NATO member, Turkey. At the other end of the spectrum was France. Germany was and is somewhere in the middle. Like France, its military contribution has not really been very impressive, but it faced the highest cost of all NATO members arrayed against Moscow for the US administration. Therefore, blocking German defection was vital.

The US also sought to suppress oil prices, both to show voters that Biden was working on inflation and to reduce Russian revenues. This effort included Biden's controversial visit to Saudi Arabia over the summer.

At the sharp end, the US support covered a wide range of consumables, and a narrow, but well thought through range of platforms, especially the M777 Howitzer and HIMARS, along with the targeting data to make most of these systems combination of power and precision. They were used for several purposes, as Michael discussed. But degrading command and control by striking headquarter's elements, and combat support by striking depots, stockpiles, and convoys was most effective in hobbling Russian operations.

Now, here's where we get to the meat of the matter. Biden has the political wind at his back. A poll of 1,000 Americans just last week showed that 73% agreed that the US should continue to support Ukraine, despite nuclear threats. Now, there was somewhat more support among Democrats than among Republicans, so watch this space after the midterms.

In another poll, 66% of the respondents said Washington should continue to provide weapons to Ukraine, and that was up from August where it was 51%. A majority of Americans, nearly 60%, said they were afraid the country was heading toward nuclear war with Russia. 65% thought the war may escalate if Ukraine is provided longer range weapons that could hit Russia itself. But fewer Americans, down to 35%, believe that Ukraine's problems are not the country's business, compared to 40% in August.

So for those thinking about the war and midterm elections, 68% said they were more likely to back a candidate who supports continued military aid for Ukraine. And 72% said they were more than likely to support a candidate who supported, in turn, Ukrainian refugees. So from the administration's perspective, there's a lot to like.

As in 1973, US weapons are outscoring Russian weapons. The Ukrainians are fighting effectively and making serious gains in the Northeast, and could, in theory, loosen Russia's hold on Kherson. NATO, a priority for the administration, is growing. Washington got to say, I told you so, to the Germans regarding Nord Stream 2.

Putin wasn't looking that great. And over the long run and other things being equal, Russia would indeed be weaker. And as noted, public opinion favored the administration's approach. So what's not to like?

The OECD estimates the global cost of the war at nearly \$3 trillion, and the IMF has recalculated global growth downward by a little over 2%. These are potentially destabilizing numbers and could weaken Western European support for current NATO strategy.

Putin has succeeded in assembling a coalition of his own-- China, India, and, of course, Saudi Arabia in the OPEC plus context. Both China and India have said they wished Putin would negotiate, but they have not posited an "or else."

Putin's unapologetic threat to use nuclear weapons-- that's another thing not to like. Bill Burns, the CIA director, said a few days ago that we don't see any practical evidence today in the US intelligence community that he, that is, Putin, is moving closer to actual use, that there's an imminent threat of using tactical nuclear weapons. And in the same TV news interview, he conceded that it was hard to say whether Putin was bluffing.

An intelligence problem that hinges on leadership intentions like this is a real challenge. The IC expresses itself-- the Intelligence Community expresses itself generally in probabilistic terms. OK, there is a 65% chance that the tall guy with the beard walking on the portico is Osama bin Laden. But in the absence of historical inference and access to Putin's brain, what does it mean to say there's an x or y probability that he will order the use of nuclear weapons, or that these orders will be executed?

And the community itself might be divided. The Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Intelligence officer for general purpose forces might map Russian doctrine onto the current military situation in Ukraine and conclude that, well, this is when doctrine would call for their use. Analysts elsewhere will point to the high cost and dubious tactical benefits of theater and nuclear use and judge that these factors will preclude it. Leadership analysts might be digging into Putin's psyche on the one hand, and the dire implications for a sultan who loses a war on the other, and assess that nuclear weapons use is likely.

The policy question that the White House is already contemplating is how to respond to Russian nuclear use. This, of course, depends on the nature of a Russian strike or strikes. A nuclear response is highly unlikely, but escalating conventional strikes would be the preferred course of action.

The White House has communicated to Putin that the response, whatever it was, would be quite severe. Otherwise, we've just heard from commentators, like David Petraeus, suggesting a range of response options, including sending the Russian Black Sea fleet to the bottom. Others have proposed leadership strikes.

This is related to the problem of if and when to urge the Ukrainians to rein in their offensive. The onset of winter might achieve this outcome one way or another. This is a fraught question on many levels, and it might well not be possible, in which case NATO states become hostages to fortune in a nuclear environment. I'll stop there. Thank you very much.

**ELIZABETH
WOOD:**

All right. Thank you very much to our three speakers. We've had a lot of rich topics here. I want to start right away by asking Volodymyr and Mike to comment on the leading pressure points in Ukraine right now. Both of you are specialists on the Ukrainian side-- Mike, I know, on the side, too.

But Volodymyr, what does Ukraine most need from the West, in terms of politically, socially, financially to help at this moment in the war? And Mike, we had a question from one attendee about-- so they're making advances, and you commented on this in Kherson and in Kharkiv. But what about Zaporizhzhia? What are going to be the inflection points as we go forward for the Ukrainian army? Let's-- Volodymyr first. What do you think-- what do we need most the West?

**VOLODYMYR
DUBOVYK:**

Well, we need more of the same that we were getting in the previous months. We need a continued supply of weapons and a broadened supply of weapons. Because, of course, the red lines of what can be given to Ukraine or not have been expanded over months. What in the early days of this massive war was considered in Washington as a no-go, that could be too provocative, maybe push Russia to escalate, eventually was OKed and then given to Ukraine. So that's the logic.

But so far, by the way, on the point of escalation, it was a good example then of how do you deal with Russia? I mean, you do not give up land or territory to the bully. You actually do something when you so show prudence and force.

Because when Washington said, OK, we don't want to provoke Russia to escalate so we're not going to give attack arms to Russia-- no tanks, no jets, no missiles will be flying like too far. And what would Russia-- what was Russia's reaction? They escalated-- double downed.

They did the so-called annexations. They did so-called referenda. They did this partial mobilization. So I think it was a more fresh and recent example in the lesson of how do you deal with countries like Russia. You continue to apply pressure.

So the sanctions are needed, too. I mean, of course, we don't have any immediate evidence of sanctions working to the extent that once they apply, that Russia stops aggression right that moment. It doesn't work like this. But they need to be [INAUDIBLE] on. They need to be given time to work, so the sanctions need to stay.

The pro-Ukraine coalition needs to stay. Here, American leadership is instrumental. It's key. It's pivotal. Without Biden administration, there wouldn't be this coalition of tens of countries supporting Ukraine in each of their own ways.

Financial assistance for Ukrainian government-- of course, again, frankly, with all the devastation that we have in Ukraine, we wouldn't have salaries, pensions. Nothing would be paid without Western assistance, frankly, from particular countries and international organizations and financial institutions.

So all of this together-- the refugees. I mean, the countries that host refugees, millions of Ukrainians, they are doing a lot of work and assistance. Support is coming also for IDPs now in Ukraine. In the earlier weeks of the war, actually, that wasn't quite noticed that IDPs are in a difficult situation in Ukraine, maybe even more than refugees. Because refugees, after all, are abroad. They are in safe place. They are given support from particular countries hosting them. But IDPs are within Ukraine, and they're only relying on their own savings. And they renting houses. And they don't have any business back home because their hometown is bombed out and so on.

So there are so many avenues and aspects where the Western assistance is still critical to Ukraine, frankly. Like I said before, of course, we have been resilient. We've been not a failed state, unlike Afghanistan in many ways and so on. But at the same time, of course, this asymmetric conflict still is-- it's very difficult to deal with this ongoing onslaught with Russia-- from Russia against Ukraine.

So therefore, we need more of the same and not-- definitely not slowing down, not losing interest, not saying Ukraine is fine right now because, OK, they are already on the offensive in Kharkiv and Kherson. So why should we give them more assistance and weapons because they're doing all right already. Wrong logic. They need to double down. More, weapons are needed for a broader counter-offensives there by Ukrainian military.

And the same way Ukraine shouldn't be given too much because that would be devastating for Russia. We should be pushing for Russian defeat. I think Russia should be taught a lesson here. I mean, no one wants a major destabilization within Russia or disintegration of Russia. That would be a dramatic event. And naturally, I think negative for Ukraine, frankly.

I might be in a minority here in this country or Ukraine. But I don't want Russia to disappear or disintegrate. But I just want a different type of Russia. Are we going to have it anytime soon? Probably not, unfortunately. But eventually, maybe we would have a better neighbor called Russia. But for right now, yes, Western assistance is still instrumental-- all sides of it, all aspects, all faces of it. And I hope there will be sustained attention and support for Ukraine in the coming months.

**MICHAEL
KOFMAN:**

OK. I'll answer the part of the question I thought was to me, which was first regarding-- I even kind of forgot the beginning of it, but I think regarding the challenge. I think the real challenge is material and economic sustainability. I think the Russian strategy at this point is to try drag the war out as long as they can, and to push it will enter 2023, if not past 2023. I don't know if they'll be able to do that. That's just my impression that that's what they want to do.

I think they've come to realize that they can't tackle political support, and all their dreams of political support for Ukraine would fall apart over the course of this year have not come true. So instead, they are trying to drag the war out beyond material sustainability in the West. I think they understand that there's an issue of economic sustainability for Ukraine.

And also, probably are banking on the fact that Europeans can make it through this winter in terms of energy prices and availability of supplies. They might really struggle to repeat that feat at the end of 2023. There's just my impression of the Russian aims. So I think that's the long-term challenge. And that's why I always encourage people to think beyond the events of the last month, month and a half, and more to medium and long term.

Question regarding Zaporizhzhia-- I don't know. I don't predict future operations. Let me just be very clear about that. That's not the business I'm in. I think we've had two inflection points most recently-- one a month ago when a shift of initiative and momentum to Ukraine with the launching of Ukrainian offensives. And we had another inflection point with the regime's full commitment to the war most recently. And then act in the mobilization. I think for now, those will certainly do to try to assess and figure out what they mean and their implications.

The only I can say is that wars don't go on as they have typically in any given phase. So it's best to avoid straight-line analysis, which is not to assume that the world will continue as it has now. Just as that would not have served you well over the summer, and the summer would not have served you very well over the spring.

But generally, as an analyst, I tend to be more on the conservative side in terms of assuming worst-case outcomes while hoping for the best. It's the job of politicians to hope for the best. The job of analysts is to think about and plan for the more worst-case outcomes.

The only I will say is that can hope for an early and an easier and a quicker Ukrainian victory. But wars tend to go on longer than people expect. And certainly, they tend to go on longer than people want. That's usually the pattern. That's the best I can offer.

**CAROL
SAIVETZ:**

Building on what you both said, and bringing Steve into the conversation as well, questions have been asked in the chat about what would an end look like? Is there a possibility of a negotiated settlement? What are-- I hate the term "off-ramps," but what are the off-ramps that would be-- that could be facilitated in order to stop the war short of the end of 2023 or going into to 2024? Mike, what do you think that Russia would accept at this point?

And to Volodymyr, what do you think the Ukrainians would accept and the Zelenskyy government would accept at this point? And to Steve, is there anything that you think that the United States could be doing more than it is now, aside from arming the Ukrainians, in order to facilitate some kind of a ceasefire? Mike, you want to start-- pick up where you left off?

**MICHAEL
KOFMAN:**

I mean, I can. I was hoping Steve would start off, but--

**CAROL
SAIVETZ:**

Where is Steve?

**MICHAEL
KOFMAN:**

--yeah. I would say-- my short comment would be-- I mean, I don't know what Russia would accept at this point. Because the real problem with war termination is by enacting this annexation, they really cut off their ability to revise down minimal [INAUDIBLE]. So they would have to be taking a major political step back. A lot of this depends on your own kind of perception assessment of Putin's flexibility now that he's gone through with this pretty significant political step.

I think that what they want is to take control at least of these four territories-- four regions of Ukraine that they've formally annexed. That's clearly not happening. They're losing territory on almost a daily basis in terms of control.

I don't know what they would accept. Maybe they might accept some kind of negotiation. But a lot of wars don't necessarily end in a political settlement, and they don't necessarily end in any kind of a stalemate that peters out either.

I'll be very frank. There's a very, very good chance that Russia will suffer a conventional military defeat in this war. Now, maybe not this year or maybe the next. And it'll lose. And it can very well lose without resorting to escalation to use some nuclear weapons.

And I guess the optimistic take is-- there I agree with Volodymyr. The optimistic take is that Russian strategic culture abandons use of force and these imperialistic pursuits-- not that Russia somehow transforms instantly. But at least this teaches a very valuable lesson to the strategic culture in the community and the elites in Moscow.

But this war is a disastrous war. It's a ruinous war, not just vis-a-vis Russian imperial aims in Ukraine, but also their attempt to relitigate the post-cold war settlement. There's a double strategic loss here for Russia at the end of the day. But part of this war was very much about restoring Russia to a position where security outcomes would have to be negotiated with Moscow. And they've clearly, if anything, achieved complete opposite. They blocked themselves from a serious role in European security for quite some time. So I'll end on that, and then turn it over to Steve. I'd be curious to hear his thoughts.

CAROL OK. Steve, and then Volodymyr, please.

SAIVETZ:

STEVEN SIMON: Well, I largely agree with Michael. I think he's outlined things pretty well. I'd just add that for the moment, both the Russians and the Ukrainians have forsworn negotiations. And I'm pretty confident that in Washington, the White House, and certainly the Defense Department, in this case, are sticking to the line that they laid out earlier this year when they said that they would not press the Ukrainians to make any territorial concessions. And I think it's beyond doubt that any negotiation would involve something about territorial control. So I don't see much room for that.

At this point, I'll just say this turned into a game of chicken. And the annexation put forward by Putin was Putin throwing his steering wheel out the window, daring the West to crash or swerve. And I think that's what we are. And if you're in crash or swerve, but you're talking about Ukrainians who've taken a real beating and who suffered war crimes at the hands of Russians and so forth, the inclination is going to be to crash rather than swerve.

CAROL Volodymyr, please. I know you also have to leave us at 1:00, so please answer.

SAIVETZ:

VOLODYMYR DUBOVYK: Yeah, of course. Thank you, Carol. Well, I think it's really flexible, to some extent, of what can be considered as acceptable to Ukrainian public or not. It depends on how this war goes. Because we had a difficult seven months and ups and downs. There have been euphoric moments, optimistic. And then people were down and sad when we were losing a lot of our guys and so on.

Expectations are now raised, and the people are expecting that maybe we'll be able to liberate all of our lands going back not just to pre-February 2022 borders. But frankly, getting our entire Donbas back and even Crimea back. And I think it's kind of feasible. But if we get to Crimea, of course, that would be pushing it, and that would really be putting us in a difficult situation, and maybe pushing him, and he'll be prone to use maybe a WMD. Who knows?

I think Crimea is a big red line for him. I mean, that would be a complete disaster for the guy if Ukrainian military is standing on the border of Crimea, and entertaining this idea of going into Crimea.

With Ukrainian public, I think people understand that maybe some concessions will have to be made. We're not naive. We understand what we're dealing with. Even a weakened Russia is still a very strong opponent, an enemy. And like I said, there's going to continue to be an asymmetric conflict with Russia having upper hand with all the resources and nukes and populations three times higher than the Ukraine with all the assistance we are getting.

So I think when the time comes to sitting down and deciding what will Russia keep in Ukraine maybe, there will be some disappointment among Ukrainian public if we are not returning all of our lands once occupied by Russia. But there will be some understanding and reckoning by this Ukrainian public that, well, maybe we cannot quite return by military force all of this land.

But it's still well ahead of us. I think both countries are still willing to fight to improve their negotiation position. And like I said, the rest is actually limited to what he can do. I mean, we had a round of negotiation early on in Istanbul. And actually, Ukrainian delegation was rumored to be willing to entertain a lot of concessions to Russia.

But then we found out that Russia wasn't really serious about negotiations. And then we found out about Bucha. And then Ukrainian experts had a revolt here about delivering too much to Russia and putting too much faith for future security guarantees that wouldn't be viable or effective-- signing some kind of a new second Budapest memorandum.

So Zelenskyy backed off immediately. And he said, OK. No, we can't do that. And the public attitudes changed dramatically after discovering this massive war front by Russia.

So, of course, people are not in the mood to entertain this idea that Russia can maintain some Ukrainian lands under their control. But eventually, it's realpolitik. It's complicated business. The war is bloody. We're not endless with our reserves of human lives-- our best and the brightest. And financial ruin on our economy is terrible factor, too.

So I think there would be a need for some compromise. I just hope that Ukraine would be needing less of that compromise than Russia, that Russia would be having the worse negotiation position than Ukraine at the point when we sit down for the peace deal.

**ELIZABETH
WOOD:**

Thank you so much, Volodymyr. I know you might have to leave. So we definitely thank you. Volodymyr said he had to go on to another talk.

So I want to take up this thread of the off-ramp for Putin, what's happening with the Russian side of things. We've had quite a number of questions about Putin, his intention. But also, about the infighting among the elites. To what extent do we see the elites in Russia-- could there be-- are there-- first of all, one question was, are there military controls over the nuclear threat in Moscow? Does anybody stop-- can the military stop Putin if he says-- if he orders a nuclear tactical nuke?

Another question is, if we think about Putin's aims, to what extent is he really territorially minded? Is it because of NATO's expansion-- those old chestnuts? But I think an interesting question is also that this week, Valentina Matviyenko, the speaker of the upper house of the parliament, at a forum of parliaments in Indonesia said she thought-- she asked rhetorically, of course, why couldn't the Ukrainian and Russian parliaments begin to negotiate?

So I'm curious whether either of you were seeing any signs of a debate and dissent within Russia. Is there any thought that the war-- it's in several questions-- could lead to Russia's-- to Putin's downfall? Josh Rubenstein, a good historian, pointed out that Trotsky said that not only do revolutions lead to war, but war leads to revolutions. Trotsky was born in Kherson, it turns out. So to what-- how-- what are the chances of something affecting the calculus outside of the war itself from the Russian side? Mike, and then Steve.

**MICHAEL
KOFMAN:**

OK. That's a lot of different questions. Let me try to answer them as best I can. They're not exactly the easiest of questions.

So can the military stop Putin? So the decision to use nuclear weapons is Putin, but the military and the rest of the chain of command does have to implement it. What I would suggest is I would certainly not bank this on the military stopping an order from Putin to use a nuclear weapon. I would not hope to win the lottery in that manner. I would assume that those orders will be followed through. If people don't follow through on those orders, then they'll find people who will. So I'd be cautious on banking that assumption.

But no. There is not a red button on Putin's desk that he just presses. There is a complex command and control process. It's not like in cartoons and whatnot. And Steve maybe, if he wants, he can speak more to that.

Second-- debate on the infighting. So there's a couple of different things that are going on. I think there's definitely a really angry kind of party of war in Russia that is upset at how mobilization is going, and was hoping to launch it much sooner, and really unhappy with how the war's been going because they have maximalist war aims.

I think there are people who recognize that this war's a massive strategic blunder and a disaster. And I think most Russian leaders probably are opposed to the war, but can't speak out publicly against it in any way. I think that the only party with political salience is the party of war, and the people opposed to this conflict have no real political cachet and can't oppose it meaningfully.

I see a bunch of infighting between people who are opportunists, like Prigozhin and Kadyrov having a go at the military structure. But, in particular, Shoigu, and seeing the opportunity to get Shoigu fired and maybe taking his position. And I see people in the military and the security services fighting back. And things like these are not uncommon in Russia in the regime.

I think from Putin's perspective, this might not be actually so bad. But I think from his perspective, it's good that these people are fighting each other rather than fighting him for control. And as long as they're fighting each other, he remains the arbiter of outcomes within the system.

Last, yes, war can lead to revolutions. Certainly. I do think that probably in the system if there is to be any sort of change in leadership on the regime, it will be driven by elites. It will not be ground up. That's my own personal bias on how I see the system.

I think the challenge with personal style authoritarian systems is that it's incredibly difficult to predict regime change. You're probably much better off going off to Vegas and spending your money there. In personal style authoritarian systems, people are replaced from confidence on the basis of loyalty. And they all look very loyal until the very, very last minute, which is why it's very difficult to see coalitions reform and to anticipate defections.

So there is going to be regime change, or if somebody is going to try to retire Putin, I will probably be one of the last people to foresee it. And I think most experts won't foresee it well either. That is my own personal view on that subject. But yes, it's definitely possible. And I think it's quite possible that maybe not this year, but next year.

The war continues to be going in the direction that Russia is losing it. The people may seriously think about-- well, this may be incredibly optimistic. But people may seriously consider that the only way to change Russia's war termination options is to change the leader who launched the war and for whom it's so personally important, as opposed to for everybody else. So--

CAROL Good. Steve, would you like to weigh in? You're muted.

SAIVETZ:

STEVEN SIMON: Now I'm unmuted.

CAROL Now you're unmuted, yes.

SAIVETZ:

STEVEN SIMON: Yes. Prometheus unmuted. So yeah. The first thing is that the betting markets, for what it's worth, are saying that Putin will be around next year, that he's not likely to get overthrown. And I really like those betting markets. They turn out to be fairly accurate.

The second, on the subject of a coup, just picking up on Michael's point about he thinks he'll be the last one to know. [LAUGHS] Well, there are a number of people who will be on that last to know list. The thing is if you're in a position to see-- apart from kind of general conditions that might seem to favor a coup. If you see the thing happening, then the target of the coup can see it just as well. And he will deal with it.

As Elizabeth and I were discussing the other day, this regime is coup-proofed because of the way it disaggregates security responsibilities and stovepipes them. So it's very difficult under those circumstances to form a conspiracy because you can't trust anyone really. And the incentive actually on the part of anybody you approach is to rat you out.

The last thing I'll say about this question, it's just led me to think about our old friend Saddam Hussein. So this guy fights an eight-year disastrous war against Iran, and it impoverishes his country. It sets it back terribly. It was just-- it was an appalling thing.

Well, he didn't face any threat. I mean he might have faced threats, but none that-- I mean, we can now say with confidence-- was successful, despite this disastrous outcome. And then eight years-- well, more than that-- nearly a decade of sanctions didn't change that either.

So you had the Bush administration-- well, the Clinton administration at that point, thinking-- getting out of bed every day and saying, well, this guy is just going to get overthrown because the conditions are so bad in Iraq. And he's so obviously under our thumb. No, he'll be overthrown.

And as we know from declassified CIA material and a book cleared for publication by CIA, by Robert Baer, the US backed numerous coup attempts. And each one failed because Saddam was coup-proofed. It couldn't be done. So when I look at Putin, I kind of think of Saddam. And it just leads me to deep skepticism, I suppose, about the possibility of a coup.

CAROL OK. Mike, you wanted to add something?

SAIVETZ:

MICHAEL KOFMAN: Yeah. Just a snarky comment to make about betting markets, which is the betting markets often, sort of wisdom of the crowds, do tend to do better than experts. Experts are often not very good predictors of things.

But boy, you do not want to look at betting markets predictions on whether or not there would be a war in the run-up to this on February 23. I got yelled at quite a bit by betting markets people that disagreed with the prediction that a major war was likely. And boy did they crash and burn on that call. So they're very far from being always right, too. Sometimes the experts win.

STEVEN SIMON: Thank God.

CAROL SAIVETZ: OK. So we have time for-- I'm going to combine two questions here because we're running close to the end of the hour and 15 minutes. One of our attendees asked about what your expectations were of the European defense architecture sort of post-Ukraine. Will it look different, more NATO countries, Russia's relationship to it?

And then somebody did ask about the role of China, which we haven't discussed at all, and the Chinese willingness to buy cheap Russian oil and to support the friendship without limits. But are there limits? And what do you guys both think about those two questions? I have-- Steve, you want to start? You're unmuted. Start.

STEVEN SIMON: OK.

CAROL SAIVETZ: Since you were unmuted.

STEVEN SIMON: So Europeans are talking in very bold terms about a new security architecture that will be more effectively responsive to long-term challenges, particularly from Russia, which they all perceive to be a problem going forward. And will they succeed in doing this? I think their intentions-- they're not lying to their interlocutors, but they may be lying to themselves about what's possible.

It's clearly strengthening NATO. And I think there'll be a renewed commitment to NATO. Now, they've got to worry about what happens in 2024. Because we might well have an administration that is suspicious of NATO, doesn't like it, and wants to pull the US out of it. If that happens, I think that's when you really get serious European introspection about what their best route to security will be over time.

But I think in this interim, there'll be a lot of palaver about an independent European security architecture, but not a lot of action. And they've got serious economic fish to fry that I think would just suck the air out of the room wherever they are talking about a new security strategy.

CAROL SAIVETZ: Mike?

MICHAEL KOFMAN: OK. European security architecture-- so I think it's going to stay largely like it is, but somewhat expanded. You're going to have Finland and Sweden in NATO. You'll see a bit greater spending, I think. Although, it's going to take quite a few years for NATO countries just to recapitalize all the stocks they've already spent and given to Ukraine. I bet probably at least four to five years on that. There's a lot that NATO will have to do to spend to replenish itself. And the war is far from over.

I think Europe will remain a secondary theater in US strategy. I think that's a secular shift in US strategy and the relative bipartisan consensus. I don't to what extent Europeans really internalize that as the reality moving forward, but it is here, I think, in Washington, DC.

I think we'll hear more European talk about strategic autonomy that won't amount to much. Maybe that's like my own chauvinistic American perspective coming from DC. I think the worst case is that Europeans will dramatically misconstrue the lessons from the war and believe that now that they can handle Russia by themselves. I think this is very much the wrong lesson from this war.

I think that kind of key ability for Europe to operate without the United States is deeply aspirational. And they're a very long ways from being able to effectively conduct large-scale military operations in Europe. Plus, many of those militaries truly lack the depth when it comes to manpower, equipment, and especially ammunition. Large-scale conventional wars very much come down to attrition.

Many European militaries looking at the level of casualties and losses of equipment and what have you, in this war on both sides of the Russian-Ukrainian side, many of those European militaries would have been off of the battlefield in the early weeks of this war. They can't sustain something like this.

I didn't quite catch the question on China.

**CAROL
SAIVETZ:**

Well, somebody asked whether, given that China is sort of a beneficiary of the cheap oil that they're now buying from Russia and everything, what is China's role down the road? What about Russian-Chinese relations? This is a huge topic, I understand. But--

**MICHAEL
KOFMAN:**

Yeah. So let me answer that really glibly and as concisely as I can. I think that China has an interesting role and potential opportunity as to how it reacts to this war. I don't think China is very much the winner of this war. I think that may appear that way at first blush. I don't think Chinese want Russia to suffer a strategic defeat because then they are largely left on their own to face a much more energized and motivated United States.

I think Russia has no option now but China, in terms of vectors of foreign policy. It's going to be much more dependent on China. It will be big question to what extent China will help Russia obviate some of the sanctions and export controls from the United States. Early on, China is typically very cautious, then tries to find some cutouts for cooperation. But it all depends really now on what the Chinese choose to do.

I can't comment on that because I'm not China expert, and I'm not huge into intellectual tourism, the way many people have recently become Russian military experts. So I don't know what they're going to do, to be perfectly honest. But I don't think that China, as it stands, is a very big winner of this war. I really don't. I think actually there's a lot of dilemmas for China resulting from this conflict. I don't know. Maybe Steve has different or more interesting thoughts than me.

STEVEN SIMON: Hey, I'm a tourist, so ask me anything. Look, I think on balance, this hasn't been so bad for China. I mean, I think they're benefiting from cheap oil. And they benefit from having the United States distracted by another threat. And they can keep that threat propped up. And that serves their interest, especially given the dynamics in the Western Pacific. So yeah, I think that on balance, it's good for them.

And when you look at the way the Chinese deal with problematic states, for example, like the DPRK, North Korea, they manage to do a very nice balancing act. And it draws my admiration. And I think they can easily sustain the same sort of balancing act with Russia, so long as Putin doesn't go off the deep end.

**ELIZABETH
WOOD:**

Well, we have had a very rich conversation. Thank you to Volodymyr in absentia, and to Mike and Steve, who are right here, for bringing very different perspectives on this extremely complicated situation-- the military aspects, the Washington views on what's going on. This is something--

So thanks, too, to our audience for all your great questions. We are planning another forum for November probably on what it will take to help Ukraine in terms of rebuilding. Stay tuned for more events. And we wish you all a great day. Carol, any last words? Oh, you're muted.

Thanks to all our co-sponsors as well. Thank you to the Starr Forum for-- especially Michelle English and Sabrina for their excellent technical support, to the Center for International Studies for their financial and moral support, and to the MIT Russia and Eurasia program, with its new MIT Ukraine program, new MIT Armenia program. We are very excited to have everybody working together. Thank you very, very much to all.

**CAROL
SAIVETZ:**

Right. Thanks. You've said it all, Elizabeth. Thank you very much. And thanks, everybody--

**ELIZABETH
WOOD:**

Bye, now.

**CAROL
SAIVETZ:**

--for attending.

[MUSIC PLAYING]