Impressions from the Lublin Triangle: An Update on the War in Ukraine

TRANSCRIPT

Discussion……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………2

- Peter Rough, Senior Fellow and Director, Center on Europe and Eurasia
- Žygimantas Pavilionis, Chair, Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee of Lithuania
- Radoslaw Fogiel, Chair, Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee of Poland
- Oleksandr Merezhko, Chair, Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee of Ukraine

Disclaimer: This transcript is based off of a recorded video conference and breaks in the stream may have resulted in mistranscriptions in the text.

A video of the event is available: https://www.hudson.org/events/impressions-lublin-triangle-ukraine-war

About Hudson Institute: Founded in 1961 by strategist Herman Kahn, Hudson Institute challenges conventional thinking and helps manage strategic transitions to the future through interdisciplinary studies in defense, international relations, economics, health care, technology, culture, and law.

Hudson seeks to guide public policy makers and global leaders in government and business through a vigorous program of publications, conferences, policy briefings, and recommendations.
Peter Rough:

Hello, and welcome to Hudson Institute. My name is Peter Rough. I'm a senior fellow here and the director of our Center on Europe and Eurasia. And it's my pleasure to welcome today to Hudson Institute the chairs of the foreign policy committees of the respective parliaments from Ukraine, Lithuania, and Poland, which we can also call the Lublin Triangle in a nod to the Union of Lublin from 1569, between the kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The three countries in, I think it was July 2020, launched this Lublin Triangle, which we can consider something of an alliance or a pact or a configuration of the three countries committed to the territorial integrity of Ukraine, which already at that point, owing to the Russian intervention in 2014, was under assault. So, it's my pleasure to welcome all three of you. I'll begin with my immediate left from Ukraine, Oleksandr Merezhko, who earned his reputation as an expert in international legal matters and international trade.

He has taught, to continue the theme, at the John Paul II Lublin Catholic University in Poland at Kyiv National University. And for our American viewers, also had a relationship with Penn State Dickinson, where he taught in the United States briefly as well. And he's a prolific author. From Lithuania, you might recognize the former ambassador to the US. Welcome back, Mr. Ambassador. He was posted here as the Lithuanian ambassador to the US and to Mexico for five years, from 2010 to 2015. He is a former diplomat, a member of the Lithuanian parliament and really one of Lithuania's strongest voices on foreign policy and foreign affairs. And last but certainly not least, from Poland, Radoslaw Fogiel, who's a member of the lower House of Poland's parliament. He also served as a deputy chairman of the European Young Conservatives and in regional parliament in his home region of Poland. So, thanks to all three of you.

Oleksandr Merezhko:

Thank you.

Peter Rough:

Maybe I would just begin where I left off with my introduction, and that is about the territorial integrity of Ukraine. And perhaps I'll just begin with you. There was a concept rolled out by the former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, together with Andrii Yermak some time ago, the so-called Rasmussen Plan about Ukraine security. Ukraine also wants to be within NATO. Then there have been other concepts bandied about just supplying Ukraine with enough to be able to push out the Russians and to establish deterrence. What is it that Ukraine really sees as necessary for its defense and for its future relationship with the West and with Russia?

Oleksandr Merezhko:

Well, first of all, Ukraine has made its choice and it's a trans-Atlantic choice. We have included in our constitution a provision that Ukraine should become a member of NATO and should become member of the European Union. And I believe that we should become member of NATO as soon as possible. And I'm in favor of it, and I'm campaigning for Ukraine to be admitted to NATO immediately because I believe that it will stop Putin's aggression. And this is one of the reasons why three of us came here to Washington, to continue this campaign. And it is also necessary to underscore that Ukraine is part of the West and we are fighting not only for our territorial integrity and sovereignty. We are fighting for certain values. They're very simple,
but they are absolutely necessary. Values like democracy, like human rights and rule of law.
And we're part of the West.

**Peter Rough:**

And what sort of feedback did you get from your interlocutors on the hill and in the
administration when you bring up this desire to be in NATO?

**Oleksandr Merezhko:**

Well, the reaction, to tell you the truth, was a little bit mixed. Because first of all, it's important to
highlight that some of our colleagues were, I would even say enthusiastic about this. So, they
wholeheartedly support us. At the same time there were some of them who were more hesitant.
But I think that we need to continue our work and we need to persuade those who are hesitant
right now or reluctant right now. But I'm sure that we will prevail eventually.

**Peter Rough:**

And as you, as a Lithuanian, head to meetings with your European Union counterparts and your
NATO counterparts, what reception do you think this Ukrainian application to NATO and to the
EU has within and amongst your European colleagues?

**Žygimantas Pavilionis:**

Well, most important is not to make strong judgments on any reaction because your reaction or
a Western reaction is process in construction. When we revolted against the Soviets 32, 3 years
ago, more or less, nobody wanted to hear us. We had been receiving very big, long, official
letters. "Don't please do it. Stay with Gorbachev. It will be okay." We never listened to those
voices. Then we asked for EU and NATO membership. Nobody wanted to admit us and it was a
fight to get attention. It started with heroes like Dan Fried. Was it '95 when he create the group
of great think tankers who were brave enough to see that it's doable? We can defend Baltics.
Baltics has a future and that vision borne. Look to us today.

I'm joking sometimes, my salary grew more or less 600 times from those years when I began.
We are very, very close to the average of EU. When we started we were, I don't know, 7% of it.
We shine. We inspire. But to make Washington believe, it took about decade. Ukrainians
doesn't have that time. But look what we did with candidate status. Nobody was even thinking in
EU that EU might open door for Ukrainians. And we are very close to start accession talks with
them. It will take three, four years. We consider that in 2027 when Lithuania will be presidency,
they should finish accession talks. And in 2029 they will accede to European Union. But the
problem with American leadership in this region, that you stopped leading. America and the
West, hearing big impressive Putin speech in 2007 in Munich, as a collective West, we kneeled
in front of Putin and we started to listen to every word he says.

He paralyzed our will to have our own agenda, and we fell the victim of his own agendas. And
what kind of agenda it is? Killings, occupations, annihilation, fascist agenda of today. So,
question to the West. Will you continue doing Munich's, Yalta's, Minsk? Will you continue
appeasing the evil and just surrendering territories? Will you allow democracy to be killed
globally, or will you fight for values that are enshrined in your constitution, in United Nations
charter? And I think it's time to fight because actually Ukrainians are doing it for you. They are
dying for us and you. Because if you don't do it, Communist China will learn it. And one day you wake up in totally different world when you will have to defend your values and maybe even your territory in a way Ukrainians are defending it today.

Peter Rough:

I couldn't agree more. And I think Poland sees it very similarly and Polish officials have made their views on this pretty clear. Poland seems to have a special influence in Washington. I think when a lot of Americans look at Poland, they see a plucky tough-minded nationalist country that believes in itself and is willing to stand up to the Russian bear. What kind of reception have you gotten here in Washington, and how are you using your special influence to make the case for Ukraine?

Radoslaw Fogiel:

First of all, this was the whole idea, to come here as three countries, two countries advocating for the third one, Lithuania and Poland. And also to come here together as the countries who once had the biggest empire in Europe, but also the first democratic country in Europe. Our constitution, the constitution of the Commonwealth, was adopted just four years after the American constitution. We have this in common. Our heroes, our common heroes like General Kościuszko or General Pulaski, fought here in the US for the freedom of American people. And I think this is one of the reasons that our histories, our values are so close, so entangled. We lost our independence for more than 120 years. Then we lost our independence again, our sovereignty, for 50 years of Cold War. It's painful to say, but we were sold by some of our former allies in Yalta.

We suffered it. We reemerged. And now we need to do the same for Ukraine. You are asking about our reception here in DC. Obviously Poland is treated as an genuine partner because we are doing our part of the job. We are not trying to hide behind America's back. This year Poland will spend 4% of our GDP for defense. It's twice as much as the NATO requirement. There are others that are not doing it. We need to push them. We need to motivate them. But thanks to that we can equally talk to our American counterparts and they know that we, in our part of Europe, because it's not just Poland, it's Lithuania, the Baltic states, other countries like Czech Republic, we are doing our share and we just need the leadership and the contribution of the American people.

And that's why I must say I was very satisfied seeing that mostly there is about bipartisan consensus when it comes to supporting Ukraine, when it comes to realizing how crucial this is and that this is not a regional war. This is not something that doesn't concern the US, that doesn't concern Africa, that doesn't concern Asia. Because what Putin's Russia is doing, it's not only breaking international law attacking Ukraine. It's not only committing war crimes, raping and killing civilians. They're also trying to terrorize others. For instance, by destroying Ukrainian grain, they try to create hunger crisis in Africa. As it was already said, if another authoritarian regime that is out there will see that you can attack a nearby democratic country and go unpunished, they will not hesitate. This is what makes the whole thing global.

Peter Rough:

Yeah, I think most observers would share all of that. I think the one fear that has put a break on some support for Ukraine among some quarters of the US, and I would say quite frankly this
includes parts of the administration, is the so-called worry about escalation. What do you say to Americans who say, "If we support Ukraine too much, then a nuclear power or nuclear-armed Russia might escalate to threaten the west altogether"? How do you respond to that?

Oleksandr Merezhko:

I heard this argument several times, but mostly from my European colleagues, European counterparts. And I think it's terribly wrong logic behind it. Because first of all, we shouldn't succumb to nuclear blackmail. If we do, someday Putin might start blackmail in the United States and asking for Alaska. So, that's why it's absolutely wrong logic. From what we can see, Putin is a coward. And when his provocations are met with force, with decisiveness, he backs down. The best example of that is Sweden and Finland joining NATO. And Putin not only didn't do anything, he didn't say anything against this. Because each time when he sees that there is strong reaction from the position of strength, he backs down. So, we shouldn't be afraid of him. He's provocateur, but he's also a coward. He's typical bully and we should respond with all strength and it might stop him.

Peter Rough:

Yeah. I also think that he is creating potentially a very hazardous precedent by taking the theory of nuclear deterrence, which has always been one of defensive protection, and creating an offensive blackmail component to it. If other countries around the world see this as a way of deterring the United States or the West from supporting a country like Ukraine, they might conclude that they too want nuclear weapons. And that could, from an American point of view, I think, create a nuclear weapons cascade that's rather dangerous.

Radoslaw Fogiel:

If I may jump in.

Peter Rough:

Of course.

Radoslaw Fogiel:

Because I'm hearing the word escalation quite often recently, and I must say sometimes it makes me laugh. Because if we don't stop Russia right now in Ukraine, if we don't let Ukrainians stop them, this will be the moment that we will have escalation. Let's see at history. It's-

Peter Rough:

Foreign Minister Lavrov threatened Moldova today, "You're next." So, in that vein, yeah.

Radoslaw Fogiel:

It's quite a recent history. In 2007, Putin in Munich during his speech said that NATO enlargement will lead to war. And we conceded. We didn't do NATO enlargement. We just promised something vaguely to Ukraine and to Georgia in Bucharest in 2009. So, we did as Putin wanted. And where did it lead us? To war. We had war in 2008. We had annexation of
Crimea in 2014 and we have full scale war today. So, Putin doesn't need our invitation. Putin doesn't need to be provoked. He's provoked if we are bending to his will. So, right now we can strike a decisive blow to this evil empire without engaging American, European, NATO forces. If Ukraine fails, then Moldova, Georgia, Lithuania, maybe Poland, we will be next. And this will require American boots on the ground because then Article 5 will be triggered. So, if we want to avoid escalation, we need to be decisive and strong right now.

Žygimantas Pavilionis:

And I will also maybe add, this is exactly our mentality of survival. If Russians escalate, you escalate even more, and then they deescalate. Because they know that you are afraid of this escalation and they control you by fear. Remember the first words of John Paul II. "Empires control people by fear." And I remember standing in front of Soviet tanks who killed my friends at TV Tower. I remember we gathered at the parliament and we were not afraid. And I remember the Red Army stopped. We had no guns. We just had our feelings, our identity, and it stopped. The same Solidarność did. The same everybody did.

And this use of fear as an argument not to have a policy, for me it's not America. For me, it's so defeatist. For me, it's just an excuse not to do anything. What I feel after this visit to America, yes, you did a lot, but you are afraid to win. You better do some kind of things you did in Afghanistan. You remember how we attended. If you don't have this end game strategy, if you don't really know where you go in Ukraine, if you don't want to seal it in NATO like you did it in Polish or Baltic case, it will be another Afghanistan. Are you ready for it?

Peter Rough:

I'd also argue that the feckless ending to Afghanistan, at least in part, shaped Putin's calculation ongoing for the full scale invasion of Ukraine. And the next logical step would be, if the Americans fall down and the West falls down in Ukraine, I'm sure Beijing would have its own views on what that means about potentially the Taiwan Straits. That might be overly simplifying it, but political will matters. In the end, this is a political question of political will. So, that then I suppose just takes me to the basic, most fundamental question. If you're in the Oval Office with the President, what would you advise him should his policy be then? What should the American political goal be in Ukraine? And since you're the Ukrainian, I'll start with you and just go down the line.

Oleksandr Merezhko:

Yeah. It's very simple. First of all, would what I would recommend to American president, to provide Ukraine with absolutely all necessary heavy weaponry of highest quality and contemporary heavy weaponry. Second, I would take this brave decision and I would do everything to persuade members of NATO to admit Ukraine to NATO. Immediately. These would be my suggestions. The most basic.

Žygimantas Pavilionis:

Well, if I see President Biden-

Peter Rough:
When do you fly out? There's still time here.

Žygimantas Pavilionis:

... I would say I would remind him his inauguration speech. I was more or less crying when I listened to it because it expressed what those bloodland nations, as we are called by Timothy Snyder, between Baltic and Black Sea, what we feel. We want the world to fight for democracy, but not to sacrifice as in Yalta. A lot of Lithuanians, Poles and Ukrainians dead because of your appeasement policies. Dead. 30,000 troops in Lithuania were fighting the Soviets and learning English, waiting for Americans to come. All of them killed. And when we saw President Bush landing 20 years ago after Prague NATO summit and when he said, "From now on every enemy of Lithuania is the enemy of the United States," we again cried because that's exactly what we expect from America. If you are still America.

So, President Biden, if you want your inauguration speech to become a reality, defeat Putin's regime, the most evil regime on the planet that was never tried, never jailed for anything. Roosevelt and the other guys, they were shaking the hands of the killer for so many years. And if you want to be a monument like Reagan, and if you want to create Europe whole and free that Bush the father wanted to create from '89, do it now. And it's not only Ukraine. Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Cuba, 60, 70% of the problems will be wiped out with one blow that is very inexpensive, to be honest. You are not putting your boots on the ground. You are just giving them weapons.

Peter Rough:

Yeah, I'd like to make this point that our annual defense budget runs between eight to 900 billion US dollars. Basically to deter against two major adversaries, the Chinese and the Russians. And here with, to date, 25 or so billion dollars in military assistance, Ukraine has destroyed a huge percentage of the Russian conventional military, and we have not spilled a single drop of American blood. If that's not, and I don't mean to make it a crass investment question, but if that isn't a good investment, I'm not sure what is. I don't know if you wanted to add.

Radoslaw Fogiel:

Yeah, the efficiency is amazing and we should really take that into consideration. But in the shortest of words what I could say, I would say, "Mr. President, just drop the failed policies of the past and listen to those countries who know Russia and who are right all over. To the countries that were warning US, but they weren't listened. Just listen to them. We'll send you a note."

Peter Rough:

All right. Mr. President, if you're watching, you've got your marching orders. And maybe I'll come back to put a bow on the NATO question. Just come back to you, Mr. Ambassador, because obviously you're hosting the NATO summit this summer in Vilnius. Can you give us a preview of what to expect and where you think the discussion might go? I know it's some months away and the preparatory work is only going to begin. It's also a dynamic situation, but in case I don't see you between now and then, here's a good a chance as ever to ask about your expectations.
Žygimantas Pavilionis:

Well, we are just one of 30 countries that shapes the agenda. But I think it's very natural that we will first of all start with our own military muscles. Defense spending, please. Please. 2% is just the beginning. It's just on what we stand. And ceiling must be much, much bigger. Today, little Lithuania is closing to 3%. We need to build our military muscles. We need to build up our military industries. That's the basics. And then enlargement of Finland and Sweden, 32 countries, and opening the door. Not in the way Bucharest did, but really and actually opening the door for Ukrainians, who are one of the strongest army on this planet, who can defeat our direct military threat like we understand it from Madrid NATO Summit. They are contributive stability. The whole NATO will be happy to embrace them and finish it and send such a message to Russia that they will never ever be able to do it.

Peter Rough:

Yeah, the quip, I think when it became clear that Ukraine was putting up a tough fight early on, was that Ukraine doesn't need to join NATO. NATO needs to join Ukraine.

Oleksandr Merezhko:

Exactly.

Peter Rough:

And I think the last almost year now has borne that out. Let me ask one other question about one other objection that swirls out there, and that of course is this issue of corruption that one hears about a lot. Traditionally, it's no secret that Ukraine is ranked pretty low on the indexes of corruption and all the rest. I quite frankly would argue that corruption comes with Kremlin influence. So, the extent to which you can push the Russians out, you actually help achieve an anti-corruption agenda for Ukraine. But for those out there listening who might be wavering or hear these accusations that Ukraine can't be a trusted partner because of corruption and should we really fund them, et cetera, what's your answer to that?

Oleksandr Merezhko:

Well, first of all, when President Zelenskyy came to power struggle, a fight against corruption was one of the most important elements of his platform, of his program. And what he did, he did more for a few years in power as a president, he did more than was previously done because now we have developed a very advanced in anti-corruption infrastructure, which consists of elements such as, for example, special agency, anti-corruption agency, or prosecutor office, also anti-corruption prosecutor office and so on. And the most recent examples, as you can see, in these days we have a wave of resignations, a wave when people got fired.

Because if we have the policy of zero tolerance to corruption, because we understand that corruption is our serious enemy, especially in times of war, it might cost us a lot. If there is any suspicion regarding corruption, it might damage the supply of financial support and weaponry from the west. We are aware of this and we are committed to continue the struggle. And in the recent days you can see that even if there is a shadow of doubt related to corruption, these people are being removed no matter which positions they take in the government.
Žygimantas Pavilionis:

And can I add just one word from Lithuanian road to transformation? We had our own little oligarchs, our own thieves. So, the habit was to steal to survive. My salary was $5 a month. How can you live with a salary? Well, I was not stealing, but everyone was stealing. That's a Soviet habit, to steal. And you know when we killed that virus? The EU accession. When we had German, Scandinavian, American business coming, when we introduced competition laws, state aid laws, they were coming in saying, "What? This guy's taking bribes. We don't want to live in the country. We invest to make it fair."

And now America and Germany is the biggest trade partners, the biggest investors. We are pure like Scandinavians. We are Scandinavian banks, telecommunications. If you leave country in a gray zone, if you do not open the door to you and NATO, if you expect them to be pure like I don’t know what, forget about it. So, this is our responsibility. Open the door. We kill that virus. Let's kill that virus inside the family. EU is the best on that. But for you to make that miracle, we need a fence. We need a big American fence for those animals never come to the territories that never belonged to them.

Peter Rough:

I would agree with that. I'd also say though that I think the war itself has had some cleansing effect-

Žygimantas Pavilionis:

Yes.

Peter Rough:

... or at least that's my impression from the outside. There's always going to be a certain amount of war profiteering in any conflict. But clearly Ukraine would not be able to match the Russians if these weapons weren't getting to the front lines. And so some of these accusations strike me as silly because I think when it comes to matters of war and death, there has been a national rallying around the flag and around Ukraine. It's possible, speaking of the battlefield, to check the Russians at the front but lose the war because of economic collapse. And so setting aside the military aid, what does Ukraine most need on direct budgetary assistance, on economic? We just had the mayor and deputy mayor of Bucha in yesterday or the day before. And when I visited Bucha in November, generators were big on the agenda. I mean, what are some of the things that you need and that your friends and allies in the United States can help rally and provide, aside from the military stuff?

Oleksandr Merezhko:

Yeah. Yes. We are in difficult economic situation because by waging this war... And we should remember that Putin is waging this war not only against Ukrainian army, but against Ukrainian people, against Ukrainian critical infrastructure. Power grid, for example. He's destroying deliberately. And we already have huge losses. They amount to 300 billion US dollars, and our economy is continuing to be damaged by Russian aggression. The very fact that eight million Ukrainians became refugees, had to leave their homes and to go abroad. It's a huge blow to our economy.
Because of the blackouts, small and medium sized business is just dying. We are bleeding economically. But to me, I'm not economist. I have my own kind of perception and my own version of what is to be done. I believe that now our first priority should be human capital, development of human capital. What I'm afraid of most of all is that we can lose a new generation of young people. They can go abroad and they can stay. That's why it's extremely important for us, with the help of our friends, our allies, to create such conditions in Ukraine which would give chances and opportunities for young people to stay and to work on the rebuilding their motherland. It's extremely important. And I believe here in what I call civilized-

**Peter Rough:**

And to stop Putin from stealing your children, which I would say-

**Oleksandr Merezhko:**

Exactly.

**Peter Rough:**

... is also just an unbelievable crime of epic proportions.

**Oleksandr Merezhko:**

Yes, yes. What's happening? The transfer of children, deportation of children forcible, it's one of the elements of genocide, according to the Convention of the Prevention of Genocide of 1948. It's terrible crime. So, our biggest priority are people in Ukraine, to help them to survive. Because budget deficit right now is five billion US dollars per month. It's huge. It's huge. We don't receive the same amount of money as help from the West, but it's going to be another challenge. But right now we have to survive and we have to liberate our territory.

**Peter Rough:**

And eventually encourage the refugees you're hosting to return to Ukraine to help rebuild, presumably.

**Radoslaw Fogiel:**

We'll offer them our hospitality as long as it's needed. They're not refugees in Poland. They're our guests, and we've accepted a few million of war refugees from Ukraine without creating one refugee camp. There isn't even one refugee camp in Poland. They are staying with us, with our families, with our friends, and we will do it as long as it takes. But of course they deserve to go home. They deserve to go and rebuild their home country. Last time when I was in DC in November 2022, I was invited to speak at this fundraiser. They were raising money to build a bomb shelter in one of the Ukrainian schools so the kids can go to school. Imagine. You need a bomb shelter so your kids can attend classes. No one should be doing that. It is not normal. And this is what we are against.

**Peter Rough:**
Given the enormous generosity that Lithuania and Poland have shown to Ukraine, and generally in these various trackers like the Keel Tracker and elsewhere, the Baltic states, Poland and really one could say the entire B9 states of Eastern Europe, are outperforming a bit some Western European countries. The Riga Format was just announced by your foreign ministers. The Tallinn Pledge is a very robust pledge coordinated by the UK and of course Estonians and others. Both of your governments are members of both that format and that pledge. Is it fair to say that, without describing Europe as split between East and West, what might be an antiquated way of looking at it, that there's perhaps, putting it in a positive way, a new leadership emerging where Eastern Europe leads Europe welded together between your three states and others into a new direction? Or is that over-interpreting events? And I'll take the ten-year view, I don't know.

**Radoslaw Fogiel:**

Definitely. Definitely. Now it's time for our region to lead, especially that we have such an expertise in the topic. And I don't want to point fingers because what we need right now is-

**Peter Rough:**

We need headlines. You got to point. You got to point fingers.

**Radoslaw Fogiel:**

But we also, more than headlines, we need-

**Peter Rough:**

Make my public affairs team.

**Radoslaw Fogiel:**

More than headlines, we need solidarity and unity in Europe within NATO right now. So, yes, we are spending 4% of GDP. Yes, Lithuania is spending 3%. And yes, there are countries that are not doing their fair share, but we expect them to catch up. We expect them to get better. Because only when we work together we can achieve anything. NATO has been quite dormant for a while. We believed that-

**Peter Rough:**

Even brain dead, some would say.

**Radoslaw Fogiel:**

Yeah. We believed after the enlargement when Poland and Lithuania and Czech Republic joined... Just recently we accepted Monte Negro, but this was just technical. I think we believed that Fukuyama was right and there is nothing awaiting us, that there will be prosperity and peace, but unfortunately we may live in the best of possible worlds, but it's not a perfect world. And as Zygimantas said, we need defense. We need defense spending. We need deterrence, not appeasement. We need real deterrence because only then we can be safe. So, yes, if that
needs some courage, if that needs some conviction, if that needs some decisiveness to do this, to encourage other, to motivate other countries, we are ready to do that.

Peter Rough:

I'll stay with you and then have you answer that as well. I would say it's unclear if there's an offensive coming, a counter offensive. No one really knows how that's going to unfold on the battle front in the coming months. But I do have the sense that both Ukraine and Russia are prepared to fight for some time. And there are some, I think, analysts who worry that at least in some parts of Europe there's going to be flagging attention or interest or willingness to the support. Do you think that we can maintain a strong transatlantic cohesion on this? And if you worry about it, what are the ingredients to strengthening it, making sure it doesn't weaken?

Radoslaw Fogiel:

I'm not sure about Russia, but I'm pretty sure that Ukrainians won't stop. They won't stop fighting. They will fight till they win. I'm absolutely sure. But on the other hand, we need to avoid a situation when Ukraine's held hostage by Russia. You can very easily prevent, even taking into consideration that we have some sort of frozen conflict. You can very easily prevent any external investment by firing a missile or two every week on Kyiv or Lviv. No foreign company, no foreign investment will come to a country like that. So, that's why we need this decisive victory, as we said before. And of course there is some growing fatigue in Western societies, as terrible as this may sound. We know from our meetings on the Hill that American constituents also sometimes are sometimes worried, "How long will it take? How much longer are we going to be sending equipment?" So, the easiest way to cut it short and to avoid this fatigue is to sit down, make a plan, make a strategy, help Ukraine as much as they need and end this war here and now.

Žygimantas Pavilionis:

I will subscribe to every word Radoslaw said. Sometimes when I was ambassador here from 2010 to '15, and I heard all those romantic speeches about reset with Russia, I was thinking, "Is it America?" I felt more Americans than those authors of appeasement policy. Because what it means, appeasement? You are embracing the evil, embracing something that is completely different from your values. And you have very stupid idea that with the money you can change the killer. Like pouring money into his pockets, opening the markets, giving him technology, you will make him, I don't know, priest. I don't know. You will civilize him. It's so stupid. If you give him money, you demand him to be democratic, respect human rights, minorities, it's an exchange. You build that society according to your model. You fight for that freedom. You never give money. So, only last year the civilized West started to decouple from Russia. But what about China? What are you doing with China?

China turns Russian to gets gasoline station, but it's pumping all the muscles against civilization. So, decouple. Little Lithuania, seeing Taiwan next to Ukraine, open Taiwanese representation. We're extending all the ties because we see this is the next war there. We are the litmus test, like Carl Bildt was calling us from '93. We feel it because we are the frontline nation. We know when somebody is going to be attacked. Nobody was listening. But decouple now. Great alternative chains. And we did it and China sanctioned us heavily. Everything. They said, "Oh, Lithuanian economy fell down by 5%." You know what? Last year was the biggest growth in Lithuanian economy. Together with American brothers and sisters, we entered far
away to Australia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, all those wonderful great countries. And we grew. Our trade with America grew. And now I'm kind of happy.

I don't have any useful idiots in my body. No Chinese, no Russian agents. My trade is 98% just with free and democratic countries. I know even if the Third World War happens tomorrow, if we wake up with some little news in Taiwan Straits, I'm okay. But you are not okay. Germany's not okay. I was in Italy. An Italian brother said to me, "Oh my God, we need to go to Lithuania to have some expertise. Because we are in the problem with previous governments tying our hands to China, Five Star Movement and so on." So, decouple now. Build. Have a strategy.

If Lithuanians and Poles are telling to you, "You have six months till Vilnius NATO Summit to save the world in our part, to make it very clear to Russians that Ukraine is not yours, it's not gray zone, it's NATO. Forget about it." As you said, for Russians in '93 in the Baltic, more or less case, and Polish advancing your plans, end of story. You save the world. But if you continue appeasing and playing and doing nothing, evil comes by itself when you do nothing. It will finally destroy your own lives and your own economies.

**Peter Rough:**

I would say I'm not going to defend Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton by any stretch of the imagination. I think the reset was a huge mistake and we have deluded ourselves over time, but I still have hope that intuitively the average American grasps what's at stake in Ukraine. And one can see that just by traveling into rural America and seeing Ukrainian flags in places who couldn't even find it necessarily on a map. But we recognize that when somebody named Vladimir Putin, the very quintessential Russian bad guy, invades brutally another country, that there's a right and wrong dimension here. But even beyond that, we've grown a bit war-wary over the years because there's a perception that we've invested in these liberal democratic crusades, be it in particular in Iraq, but to a certain extent also in Afghanistan. But now there's an additional layered argument here for Ukraine, and that is there's a hardheaded national interest at stake, connection to Taiwan.

The fact that the transatlantic economy is really the centerpiece of our trading relationships in the world. Something like 45 or 46 US states trade more with Europe than they do with China. And if Russia is able to break through, destroy Ukraine and begin to threaten the borders of NATO and the rest of Europe, the system begins to really collapse. Not to mention, how is Europe going to support an American effort on China when it's under a threat from Russia? So, there's a lot of, I think, also very hardheaded national interest arguments that one can make divorced from the obvious right and wrong, which I wouldn't diminish at all, and the Russian war crimes that are being committed in places like Dnipro or the torture chambers found in Kherson, and God knows what happened in Mariupol.

We don't have any insight there, et cetera. But I still have hope that there is an American character and American soul there. We just need strong leadership. And we have an American president who's a bit aged, who doesn't get out there as much and make the argument. The State of the Union is coming up. Hopefully that's an opportunity for him to show some energy and actually speak to what's at stake. But from that high-minded comment to something more pedestrian. You're a member of the Rada. How is that functioning today? Are you all meeting? Do you actually pass laws? I know there's an emergency powers in play that's been extended for President Zelenskyy. Do you worry at all about the executive having so much power and the
parliament being a bit diminished? Of course during wartime, we with Lincoln know what that's
all about, but explain those dynamics to us a little bit.

Oleksandr Merezhko:

We are functioning very effectively. We hold plenary days. Usually it might be two days in a row.
The only thing that for safety reasons, we don't tell when exactly we have these plenary days.
We can share information about that, even on Facebook, only one hour after this plenary is
finished. But-

Peter Rough:

Do you meet in the actual parliament?

Oleksandr Merezhko:

Yes. Yes.

Peter Rough:

Or in a secret location?

Oleksandr Merezhko:

No, we meet in the building of parliament. Luckily, due to Americans, we have a reliable air
defense for which I'm extremely grateful as a citizen of Ukraine, as a member of parliament. So,
interestingly, we have more unity among ruling party, ruling faction, and opposition. We hold, for
example, online discussion of the bills and we are trying to adopt these bills by way of
consensus when a position is also involved. We became in some ways even more effective.
And in my observation, the concentration of power in the hands of president didn't happen. We
still have democratic process. We still have our own checks and balances, and we still have a
parliamentary presidential republic.

Peter Rough:

Well, it'll be a sign that you've won the war when you all start fighting with each other again in a
normal democratic process. Well, thank you to all three chairmen for being here today.

Oleksandr Merezhko:

Thank you.

Peter Rough:

It's a real pleasure for us to host you at Hudson Institute. Please join us for future events at
hudson.org. You can read all of our materials on Ukraine, the war, a strategy for victory, the
weapon systems that we know that Ukrainians need, the support that they deserve, on our page
at hudson.org. Also, on the Center for Europe and Eurasia page within hudson.org. Again, I'm
Peter Rough, senior fellow and director of the center here. And it’s been a real pleasure having you three here today.

Oleksandr Merezhko:

Thank you.

Radoslaw Fogiel:

Thank you very much.

Žygimantas Pavilionis:

Thank you so much.

Oleksandr Merezhko:

Thank you.

Peter Rough:

Thanks.