Russian Aggression Against Ukraine: The View from Kyiv

TRANSCRIPT

Discussion

- Svitlana Zalishchuk, Advisor to the CEO, Naftogaz, Former Member of Ukrainian Parliament
- Hanna Hopko, Former Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee of the Ukrainian Parliament, Expert, Russian Warfare
- Nolan Peterson, Senior Editor, Coffee or Die Magazine, Former U.S. Air Force Special Operations Pilot
- Peter Rough, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute

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A video of the event is available: https://www.hudson.org/events/2067-virtual-event-russian-aggression-against-ukraine-the-view-from-kyiv2022

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Peter Rough:

All right. Hello everyone, and welcome to Hudson Institute. My name is Peter Rough, I'm a senior fellow here working on European affairs and it's my pleasure to moderate today's discussion on the Russian military buildup around Ukraine and events happening in Ukraine itself. As you all know, if you're a close follower of Hudson Institute's programming, we've had a variety of officials on and observers over the past several weeks. My colleague, Ken Weinstein, for example, interviewed Toomas Ilves, the former president of Estonia recently, General Ben Hodges, the former commanding general of U.S. Army Europe was on with my colleague, Mike Doran and I hosted three German intellectuals last week to give us a view from Berlin, to give us a sense of the German soul and how they view the developments in Eastern Europe.

But of course, the world is most interested in what Ukrainians and Ukraine has to say, given that it is the epicenter of events in Eastern Europe. And so for that, I'm thrilled to have today with us three people out of Kyiv, one by choice, an American national who has made Ukraine his adopted home, two Ukrainian nationals who will tell us about the feel from the street, the political situation in Ukraine, and what they expect going forward in the weeks to come.

Svitlana Zalishchuk is with us. She is a multifaceted, very talented individual. She is a politician, a journalist, a democracy advocate one could say. She played an important role in the Euromaidan protest in 2014. Subsequently, she was elected to parliament and she also advised the deputy prime minister and prime minister on foreign affairs issues. Most recently, she joined Naftogaz as an international affairs advisor to the CEO. So, it's a thrill to have her with us today. I know her because she is also a young leader at the Munich Security Conference, an alumnus of that program, and so it's great to have her with us today.

Hanna Hopko is the former chair of the Foreign Relations Committee in the Ukrainian Rada. She was elected also after being an important personality in the 2014 Euromaidan protests to the parliament, and just last week National Public Radio, Mary Louis Kelly did a hit from Kyiv where you discover why it is that she retired in 2019 from parliament, and did not run for reelection, her daughter Sophia, I commend to you that short program from NPR. She's an expert on Russian information warfare, Russian hybrid warfare. She too is an alumnus of the Young Leaders program at the MSC and has a similar affiliation with the WEF, the World Economic Forum out of Davos. Hanna, it's also great to have you. And last but certainly not least is Nolan Peterson, the American on the program from Kyiv. Nolan is a U.S. Air Force special operator, a pilot, a veteran of both the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

He's a conflict reporter who has traveled wildly. In fact, he's traveled to all seven continents, so it's a delight to have him with us, with his experiences and views of the world. He was an international correspondent for the Daily Signal, which is an in-house publication of a fellow think tank here in Washington, the Heritage Foundation, and now he is the senior editor at Coffee or Die, which produces some great, on the ground reportages under his byline from Ukraine. He's also the author of the book "Why Soldiers Miss War," as well as two other books, which you can find on Amazon, so it's a thrill to have him with us today.

As we talked about before the programming began, we're going to have an opening round of comments from all three on whatever they'd like to address on the view from Kyiv, and then we'll have a Q and A
for the rest of the hour. So with that, I'll just kick it over to Svitlana. Thank you so much for being here and looking forward to hearing what you have to say.

**Svitlana Zalishchuk:**

Peter, thank you so much for having us and very good to see you, colleagues. So, when you sent us an invitation, I wanted to have this initial intervention devoted to maybe energy security in Nord Stream 2. These are the topics that I'm working currently on in Naftogaz, but probably I would like to talk about a little bit broader perspective, given the recent developments of what's going on around Ukraine. Basically, I'd like to answer my own two questions, what's going on and what should we do about it? So, since the beginning of the escalation, I feel that the situation is getting dire every single day and Putin is obviously raising the stakes. He's demanding unacceptable concessions that he knows cannot be accepted neither by Ukraine, nor by the transatlantic community.

Putin is also, with a lot of talent, he is playing on the disagreements and differences amongst the allies, amongst the partners. He's weaponizing the guests and he's obviously exploiting the dependence of the Europeans on Russian energy resources. While doing all that, the main question is actually, what is Putin doing? Why does he need all of that? And as I see it, Putin is renegotiating the world order while the West at the same time is negotiating the deescalation in Ukraine and this is how I see this problem because this approach is mismatching and what I'm trying to say, that this is just not going to work. Why? Because Putin is not going to stop. We know that he moved into Georgia in 2008, then annexation of Crimea, occupation of Donbas. We've observed this escalation already in spring. He's escalating now. Even if we managed to escalate the current situation, who told that he's going to stop? He's not going to stop, and he's going to challenge NATO borders as he's doing now.

He may challenge EU borders. He may try to think about the borders of Baltic states. I think that Putin wants a new Yalta and the question is, in front of us in front of Ukraine, but also in front of the transatlantic community, democratic community is whether we have unity and courage and strategy to stop him to have this Yalta. One of the problems I also observe is sometimes when I talk to European politicians and I'm saying these things that, "Look, Putin is not going to stop," I see it in their face, that it provokes in a way their detachment, and you know why? I was asking myself, so why is that happening? It's because actually it's not the first time that Putin is using proper military aggression and he started a proper war in 2014, but why does it provoke detachment from so many political leaders?

And, it feels that the absurdity of this situation just cannot be absorbed. Their normal life cannot be challenged with this idea that Putin is actually preparing, not something just against Ukraine, but it's something much more bigger. Many European and democratic politicians, experts just so deeply challenged by that idea that they prefer still to think and to analyze that this is something happening between just Russia and Ukraine, and by offering some concessions, by offering some pushing Ukraine to implement Minsk agreement, they will be able to deal with that. No, that's not going to happen. Once again, back to my initial position is Putin is trying to renegotiate the world order. And by the way, he said it very clearly in 2007 during the Munich Security Conference, and one of the thoughts I had is that Putin is the leader that is, what, 22 years in the power, more than most of the world leaders in the world.

And while we, Macron, I don't know, Olaf Scholz, you name it, are measuring their efficiency in the power, their responsibility within this four or five years electorate turn, Putin probably is thinking about
his legacy. He's thinking about 50 or 100 years ahead of him. He has been already in the power for like a quarter of a century, and if he thinks that, if he accepts that kind of vision of what he's doing, then the idea of the war, which will be able to kind of break this spine of the history, the trajectory that he's developing in the moment, it's not so unthinkable because he's really trying to change the history. Now, what should we do about it and what are we doing about it? Well, first of all, it's of course, unity and unity, as simple as it sounds, unfortunately is a very difficult thing to achieve.

And, you can judge it from some of the statements that we hear from our German partners when Nord Stream 2 is being just ignored and German leaders refuse to put it onto the table as a lever to counteract Putin. I've also read just recently a minister of economy of France who said that we shouldn't be dragged into U.S. narratives, we have our own interests. I think these are the kinds of differences that Putin is exploiting very well. So, my point is that unity is needed and this unity includes NATO and EU and Ukraine and other democratic states that are ready to counteract Putin. Secondly, I think that we need to shift from this immediate deescalation around Ukrainian borders, to the discussion about long term and comprehensive strategy. How do we stop Putin, not just now, not just this winter, but in a longer-term perspective?

And, this discussion is really lacking. This is what I don't see in public discourse and the last thing I want you to say, we've heard this idea about Finlandization of Ukraine, which was discussed apparently during Macron, Putin visit in Moscow. It's important to understand that Ukrainians have made its very consistent choices. In 1999, Ukrainians voted for its independence. We had free and fair elections, consecutively number of election cycles. We had Euromaidan deliberately because Ukrainian chose its democratic, European, Euro-Atlantic future. Ukrainians enjoy their freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of gatherings, and they're not going to make concessions on that. So, it's not up to any leaders in this world to tell Ukrainians what choice should it be. Moreover, I would say even if one of the Ukrainian leaders decides to even think about that kind of Finlandization scenario in order to satisfy Putin's appetite, I think it's just simply impossible and Macron should know it.

Why? Because if you look at the opinion polls, the majority of the Ukrainians, more than 50% support EU and Euro-Atlantic integration. It's part of our constitution, the constitutional majority in the parliament voted for that. So, it's just this option is just simply not on the table and by pushing Ukrainians to accept that, I think that we risk to create internal tensions in Ukraine itself. It's only adding the oil to the fire, that would be my response to President Macron. So to conclude, unity and a long-term comprehensive strategy to counteract Putin. This is the thing that we should look forward to together.

Peter Rough:

Well, I couldn't agree more. I agree with essentially every word that you just uttered and perhaps just as one addendum, it is worrying when the West is pushing for deescalation, Putin is pushing to renegotiate the world order. That naturally lends itself towards a Yalta-style scenario where the West in return for deescalation is prepared to put things like Finlandization on the table, which is a world-order negotiation of sorts. And as to the Western mentality, it reminds me of John Kerry when he was secretary of state, somewhat aghast, responding to one of Putin's interventions by saying he's behaving like someone out of the 19th century. It's really considered, for a lot in the West, as behavior of a different era and it's unimaginable that it could take place today. But that's enough from me, on to Hanna. I'm looking forward to hearing what you have to say.
Hanna Hopko:

Thanks a lot, dear colleagues. It's my honor to be here today and actually I think it's a very important discussion. So, geopolitical actuality of Ukraine is only growing given the increased hybrid attacks on Western civilization, and I think it's worse to mention that Putin aggression against Ukraine and against the West will embolden the Chinese in the South China Sea and Taiwan also. So, actually we could say that two countries or two leaders, China and Russia, against democratic nations, and of course, with the key idea to rule forever and also to keep their vision of how to govern their nations.

And actually in Ukrainian example, within last 30 years when Soviet Union collapsed and Ukraine renewed independence and statehood, we proved that Ukraine is a democracy in action, and also Ukraine is a contributor to European security, Ukraine provides solutions to hybrid threats to democracy like disinformation, cyber security attacks, law fair, and strategic corruption, and talking today about different diplomatic efforts, transatlantic efforts, how to see some progress in deescalation, and of course, some of European leaders, they would love to push Ukraine for some concession or painful compromises just to see, how to say, a hybrid peace.

Actually these days in Ukraine, many citizens of Ukraine just watched a movie about Munich, what happened in last century and what their consequences were. So, actually it's crucially important for the European values-based community and Euro-Atlantic civilization to remind about values and to reject the approaches which we've seen in 1938. So, actually I think that also it's really important about comprehensive strategy to talk about this. Why? Because it seems like all these talks within eight years, and I remember the first attempts of peaceful settlement of the conflict, Minsk I and Minsk II, and what are the results of Normandy Format? Let's be honest. Even ceasefire is not in place, long less than ceasefire is not in place with rubble of heavy artillery.

Instead, we see a massive build-up at the border with Russia. So, no progress of implementing Minsk agreement by Russian side, and unfortunately Putin is trying to use the weaknesses of some of our Western European colleagues to push Ukraine to implement political part of Minsk agreement without any achievements or any progress in security part. And, I think that it's crucially important that the collective West and transatlantic community will be very strong passing the messages to Putin that stop blaming Ukraine because actually, this is a Putin mistake, not delivering even the ceasefire and instead we've seen passportization, which is ongoing in the temporary occupied territories and it's now important for us in Ukraine also to be united and to express our readiness to resist, but the key for us to see that the West will resist as well and not to allow any, how to say, concessions or some compromises.

And what I would like to see, if Putin invades Ukraine again, it's wrong approaches because it demonstrates the weakness of the West. Instead, I would prefer to see, for example, Putin, you have one week to deescalate the situation. If deescalation hasn't happened, then Nord Stream 2 will be finally stopped and no more talks, and then if we don't see within a week deescalation, then sanctions of all the guards around Putin will be implemented because Putin, let's be very frank, he's afraid of sanctions against his inner circle and Putin became very weak within his 22 years of destroying Russian economy, making Russian citizens even poorer, the level of poverty has increased. So, Putin is afraid of disintegration of process within Russian Federation.

So, let's also consider Putin's weaknesses and become stronger in pressing or, how to say... Let's be more diplomatic, encouraging Putin actually to implement his obligation actually to withdraw his troops
from Ukrainian border and to demonstrate deescalation because Putin is playing these games. Like last year spring, when he started to bring his artillery to the Ukrainian border, then we've seen this Biden, Merkel deal on Nord Stream 2, and which was perceived as a weaknesses of the West.

And, I would recommend our European colleagues not to use this situation for different ideas, wrong ideas, like Finlandization of Ukraine or push Ukraine for political part of Minsk implementation because this will become a destabilization factor inside Ukraine because patriotic movement experts, they will not allow to cross this red lines because we already paid a big price.

Peter Rough:

It's interesting you say that because what I hear sometimes, granted, I think they're somewhat fringe voices, but what I hear sometimes in Washington and in some European capitals is war would be so terrible for the Ukrainians that we need to make certain political concessions, but it turns out the Ukrainians don't want to make those political concessions. So, I think we should be careful in going too far and perhaps one more point, again, I think great points you make, and I would subscribe to many, if not all of them, I suspect that if there is a further incursion by the Russians into Ukraine, that Ukraine demonstrating resilience and resistance and the West support for that resilience and resistance are mutually reinforcing. The West will want that Ukraine will stand up to the Russians and the Ukrainians will want to see that the West is by its side. So that would be, I think, an important dynamic. With that, over to Nolan. I'm looking forward to hearing your thoughts.

Nolan Peterson:

All right, well, thank you first off for inviting me to be here today. It is a real honor to speak with such a distinguished group. I just got back just a couple of hours ago from a military training event here in Kyiv where two American army veterans, one from Iraq and one from Afghanistan, were running Ukrainian civilians through combat drills and these Americans were using skills that they had learned fighting insurgencies to teach Ukrainians to wage their own against a potential Russian invasion maybe as soon as in the coming weeks. It's just absolutely surreal for me to witness and to observe these everyday Ukrainians running around the snow with Kalashnikovs in their hands training, basically, to defend their hometown street by street if they have to. It's hard to believe that such a thing is still possible in a European capital, in a European country in the year 2022.

But, this has also been the reality already for many Ukrainians for the past eight years of war, and based on the most recent Russian troop movements over the past few days, I think we can clearly say now that the buildup phase of this confrontation is nearing an end and we're now entering into the waiting game. Russia already has the military hardware in place to launch a major attack, and I think the last piece of the puzzle that we are waiting for is the movement of troops, personnel to basically compliment that equipment that has already been put in place and we're starting to see that now. Most troubling, from my perspective, is the movement of Russian national guard units to Ukraine's border, and those units are not used as an offensive force, those would presumably be used as an occupation force. So, that's sort of a troubling sign of what we may actually be looking at here, again, possibly in the next few weeks. Like I said, Russia now has the military power on Ukraine's borders to execute some sort of military operation on short order.
And by as soon as this weekend, Russia may have the forces in place to execute the so-called worst case scenario, which would be an attack by about 100 Russian battalion tactical groups from multiple vectors across Ukraine, possibly including an assortment of Kyiv, Ukraine's capital city, an attack likely preceded by waves of airstrikes and missile attacks meant to inflict massive and irrecoverable losses on Ukraine's military right off the bat. And the overall intent, according to many analysts, is most likely a change in government here in Kyiv. The ongoing conflict in the Donbas has killed more than 14,000 people over eight years. The kind of war we're looking at now would kill that many people in a matter of days. At this point, I think if you believe that this is all a bluff, it's an act of faith. The evidence points clearly in another direction. Russia is preparing for a major military action soon.

And, although many Ukrainians were initially skeptical about the likelihood of a major attack this winter, the mood has shifted here in Ukraine and many people now believe that a major offensive is possible. And here in Kyiv, I've interviewed many people who are now making plans possibly to leave the city, particularly people with families or children. There are people buying supplies, getting ready to possibly ride out a siege here in their homes, and of course, there are many people, civilians, who are choosing to take up arms as part of a territorial defense force or a resistance unit should Russia invade.

In fact, my 57 year old father-in-law and my 59 year old uncle-in-law, who are both Soviet army veterans of the Afghanistan era have joined territorial defense forces and are ready to fight should Russia invade. In my recent reporting, I've used the word limbo quite a bit, and that certainly describes the lives of civilians in Ukraine right now, but it also describes the situation for Ukraine's 430,000 combat veterans of the war in the Donbas, many of whom belong to Ukraine's first operational reserve, which is a first pool of manpower who could be mobilized within 24 hours in case of a major Russian attack.

And, I recently interviewed one veteran of the Donbas war who showed me his so-called veteran's suitcase, that's what he called it. Basically all his gear, ready to go on short notice to go back to war should he be ordered to by Volodymyr Zelensky, the commander in chief. As a veteran myself of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, I know that it is hard for any man or woman who has served to come back from war and especially when your war isn't over yet, but today Ukraine's than 400,000 veterans of the Donbas war have the added burden of knowing that within 24 hours they could be ordered to kiss their families goodbye, throw on a uniform, grab a gun, and go face a Russian invasion.

But I have to say, and this is very striking as an American because this is not the American way should we be facing a similar situation, but the mood here is far from panic. There's a social media campaign right now in Ukraine called don't panic, prepare and I think that's quite emblematic of the national mood as this country faces a crisis. I was recently out at the border, Ukraine’s three-way border between Belarus and Russia and the border guard troops there were relatively calm, the situation was pretty tranquil, but they were extremely cautious about not doing anything or not acting in a way that Russia could exploit as some sort of propaganda pretense for launching a wider war. For their part, the Ukrainian nation, I believe, is right now giving the world a masterclass in how a democratic society should act in a moment of crisis.

And here in Kyiv, I've done stories on civil society groups, which are teaching Ukrainian civilians combat first aid, where to find the nearest bomb shelter, even how to take care of children in a combat environment. And like I said, civilians are now flocking to territorial defense forces and other military units and military training courses preparing possibly to defend their hometowns against the Russian attack, just like when the war began in 2014 and thousands of Ukrainians joined civilian volunteer
battalions to go defend the country when their regular military was caught off guard by the Russian invasion of the Donbas. Ukrainians today are not waiting for the government to save them, and I have no doubt that even if the Ukrainian military is defeated on the field of battle, the Ukrainian people are going to go on fighting until they have their freedom. I am however worried about what that freedom may ultimately cost Ukrainians, based on the amount of firepower Russia now has poised in the border.

The recent surge in lethal military assistance to Ukraine by the U.S., the UK, and other NATO allies has certainly been a sign of solidarity with Ukraine, and those weapons will make a difference on the battlefield for Ukrainian troops. However, unfortunately with a Russian defensive now possibly a week or a couple of weeks away, I think it may be too late for that Western aid to make a measurable overall difference in Ukraine's ability to repel a Russian attack, particularly when it comes to an air campaign, comprising Iskander missiles and airstrikes. At this point, I think the West also needs to begin a major concerted effort to prepare for a potential humanitarian crisis of historic proportions if there are millions of refugees in the dead of winter who are fleeing from a Russian attack. Ukrainians clearly have the will to fight.

They've proven that over the last eight years and Western help, whether military aid or diplomatic gestures, it sends a signal to Ukraine's civilians and soldiers that they haven't been forgotten and that their dreams of democracy and freedom and a pro-Western future are still worth fighting for and I think that's a message that the whole world needs to hear. We need to remember that just one human lifetime ago this country was on the deadliest battlefield of the deadliest war in human history, and if we think something like that isn't possible again in our day and age, we are sorely mistaken. We are not immune from history's cycles of war and peace. It could happen again, and I think I'll close with one of my favorite lines from literature, from my favorite author Ernest Hemingway. He wrote, "If we win here, we will win everywhere." And, there's no better way that I can think of to describe why the fate of Ukraine is important for the United States, for Europe, and for every democracy around the world.

Peter Rough:

That's great, Nolan. Thank you, and I was going to ask you as an opening, what you would say to isolationists or restraintists in the United States who say that Ukraine is a place far away, and it's not really in the American interest to involve itself in a country's affairs that sits outside of NATO. Some of them might even argue that within NATO American obligations are questionable. You hinted at that and you brought up some aspects of it. I don't know if you want to encapsulate it in a few kind of direct points, but that might be useful to some of our viewers who are unfamiliar with Ukraine.

Nolan Peterson:

And, I think as a segue to answering that question, I think it's important to note that Ukraine, throughout the course of this war, eight years of conflict let's remember, has never wanted or asked for foreign soldiers to come fight their conflict for them, and I've been here since the war started for eight years, and I've spent a lot of time in the Donbas front lines, never once has any soldier ever said that they want Americans or NATO soldiers here to fight their own war. They just need the help to fight that war for themselves. So, I think it's really important when we talk about trying to prevent this war from happening, to our assisting Ukraine. We're not talking about sending American soldiers to Ukraine.
That's been some media dialogue that's been going on and it's completely off base, it's completely the incorrect, it's inaccurate, and it's not what Ukraine is asking for.

However, to the point that we should start sanctioning Russia now, and we should start punching Russia now, of course we should. If you walk up to somebody in the street and you put a gun to their head and say, give me your wallet, you've already committed a crime, and that's what Russia has done to Ukraine. They have a gun to this country's head, and why for the life of me are we not punishing Russia already? Why have we already not canceled Nord Stream 2? Why have we not already levied additional sanctions, targeting the oligarchy, punishing the Russian economy? Russia has already committed the crime, and in the year 2022 countries should not be threatening, particularly in Europe, a major land invasion just to get what they want. And so yes, I think history speaks pretty clearly that when major wars begin, they usually don't stay quarantined within the countries where they started, and we're already seeing a level of anxiety within NATO and Poland, and the Baltic states.

Basically the closer you get Russia, the more of an existential threat Russia looks to you, and as soon as the bullets start flying and there's a major attack, that Franz Ferdinand scenario is always possible. I don't think a war will start accidentally. I think that's very unlikely. I think Russia will start the war when it decides it is ready to start, again, a larger war. There's already a war going on. If Russia decides to re-invade, it will be a deliberate choice, but once that conflict begins, there was always a chance for some unforeseen circumstance to escalate that conflict way beyond what Moscow intended originally, and if you have millions of refugees heading West, potentially toward the Baltic states with the amount of aircraft, anti-aircraft systems, electronic warfare systems in Belarus, the threats to commercial air traffic right now are astronomical, there are so many opportunities for this thing to snowball into a much greater conflict.

Above all, we have to do everything we can, first of all, for the sake of the millions of innocent Ukrainians who are going to suffer in this conflict, but also to prevent this war because this is going to pose an absolutely, astronomically existential threat to the security of Europe and we cannot let a major war exist within Europe, because if it does, the chances of this then escalating into another unthinkable catastrophe, like I alluded to in my remarks, is quite high.

Peter Rough:

Thanks, Nolan. Hanna, if I could go to you. You began discussing the Minsk agreements during your opening presentation and Minsk has been much in the news, not only because Macron apparently raised it to Moscow and he might be coming to Kyiv to talk about different modalities or mechanisms within it, also because I think there’s some confusion in Washington as to what Ukraine's actual position on Minsk is. Chancellor Scholz was here in Washington and a quote was given to him by a Ukrainian official saying that Minsk is problematic. He says, "No, President Zelensky stands behind it." How does Ukraine, if we can say such a thing as Ukraine given that there are a lot of divisions, obviously, within politics and society, but how does Ukraine think about Minsk? Is this something that could be fruitful in the time going forward, or is Normandy essentially dead as Minsk, a dead letter and disadvantageous to your people? Thanks.
Hanna Hopko:

Thanks, Peter. Let's be honest, how we could talk about now a Minsk implementation having the gun on our head? This is a massive buildup. So actually without deescalation, we cannot come back or return to a discussion on Minsk implementation because it's unfair and it's for the appeasement of the aggressor, so it's a wrong approach. So, now instead of taking leadership and not following the blackmail of Putin, the West should prove that they are strong enough to explain Putin what is his place with Russian economy, which is about the same as the state of California or a country in Europe, such as Spain. So, I think that this is a very mistaken approach now to talk or to consider Minsk as a way out of this situation when we are about, as Nolan mentioned, of a full scale and new invasion with missile attack on Kyiv and actually I agree with Nolan, and he's a great expert in the military dimensions of this aggression, this hybrid warfare.

So, Putin prepared all forces, including different, guys, which are probably in different towns in Ukraine and he will just sit and wait when to activate them for the destabilization scenario. So, let's be honest about it. In 2015, I received a letter from Vice President Biden at that time because Ukraine was pushed to implement Minsk agreement. At that time, we were a very weak army. We started to build from scratch, and in that letter, Biden has written like, if Russia fails to implement the Minsk agreement, each part, we will impose tougher sanctions. Now, Biden is the president of the United States and nothing, no progress on Minsk agreement implementation, what I mentioned, no long-lasting ceasefire, no exchange of hostages, all for all, no withdrawal of heavy artillery. Instead, new massive build up with threat of full-scale invasion, like a big war.

And, this will not be the war, just will how to say, NATO members like Poland and Baltic states and others, they will be a part of this war because it's about their future. The fate of Europe will be sorted in Ukraine. So, actually the destiny of Europe depends on Ukraine, let's be honest. And, what I also wanted to add to Nolan's arguments, why Ukraine matters to the American citizens or to European and others. Besides Ukraine is a contributor of European security, let's also keep in mind that Ukraine is a big contributor of food security and more external threats we have, less products... Ukraine from Soviet times used to be the bread basket of Europe, and now it's also the same, and many other arguments, but the question is now it's not just about Ukraine. If we allow Russians to behave in such an aggressive way, it means that China tomorrow will act similarly in the Pacific region.

And, then authoritarian regimes are like the mafia, they will unite their efforts to destroy Western civilization in hybrid waste. What we've seen in Czech Republic with the exposure of... You remember this case, poisoning of opponents. When Putin killed his opponent in Berlin, then the Schroederization of the West, it's already happening. So, let's wake up and finally to stand with Ukraine because it's about you. We will survive. The lessons we learned from the last century, two world wars and in the Second World War, Ukraine pays the biggest price, 8 million of people to stop Nazi regime.

Now, we are stopping Putin's regime and also we are helping Russian citizens because they deserve a better future and Putin is working against Russians because actually he destroys Russian economy and actually even Russian oligarchs, if today the U.S. will impose sanctions and the EU impose sanctions, I'm sure that some oligarchs will be very unhappy with Mr. Putin and who knows what could happen. So, my question to the West, Soviet Union collapsed within two weeks. So, now are we ready for different scenarios? What if something happens in Moscow, in Kremlin, do we have a plan B? Because it's not just about Ukraine, Ukraine will resist, will win, and I just have no doubt about this.
Peter Rough:

Thanks, I think also one can see the scenario where the West sees Minsk as a way to get to deescalation, so leaning on Zelensky essentially to commit to certain concessions rather than the reverse, which is to pressure the Russians to deescalate and then potentially returning to a discussion about the status of various components of the peace or the war in the Eastern part. Svitlana, if you want to react to any of that, or as you mentioned at the outset, you didn't get to talk about energy, which I know is a big passion of yours, so perhaps you could touch on what's been said, and then also give us the energy component to this.

Svitlana Zalishchuk:

So, I wanted to give a couple of ideas of what the West could have been doing to Putin. I just read that recently Putin brought back his $87 billion yacht that was standing in Hamburg port, and just recently Putin brought it back to Russia, obviously being afraid of having it arrested by the West if Putin makes some military move. I think there are a lot of yachts standing in some European ports. I think there are a lot of painful and sensitive dots that Putin and his immediate circle around him, oligarchs, people close to Putin have in the European Union, in the United States, in other democratic countries, and they I think, have to be pressed upon, so that Putin understands how painful can it be. The problem is that the West keeps on trying to play by the rules while Putin playing with the rules.

And, this is the trap that the West finds itself at the moment. So, it seems to me that we have to go out from this comfort zone and bring together something really tangible, something that shows Putin that this is really unacceptable, and this is the red line. Now Nord Stream 2 by the way, and the gas of course, is another kind of sensitive point of Russians. You should remember that two thirds of all the taxes that is nourishing Russian budget is coming from the gas money. It's gas money that is supposing Russian economy. So without this money for Russians, it will be very difficult to even finance their own military industry, and it was obvious in the very beginning, yet in 2014, that Europe is very dependent on Russian energy resources. Approximately 40% of natural gas is being imported from Russia, but Europeans kept on being the hostage of Russians, despite the fact that they have seen the invasion into Georgia, invasion into Ukraine in the station of Crimea, all kind of interference into the national elections around the world.

But, Europeans prefer to be dependent because it's kind of easier in that way. So, that's why we have Nord Stream 2 on the table, that's why we discuss about it. However, once again, just to underline, if Russians want to pump more gas, transit more gas to Europeans, they don't need an additional pipe because the capacity of Ukrainian gas transportation system is three times bigger than the capacity of Nord Stream 2. So, I think that, of course, the history doesn't know the conditional mood and I'm saying if the West was more strategic, that Nord Stream 2 was not there, there would be a proper plan how to decrease the dominance of Russians in the hemisphere in Europe, and therefore Europeans would be much less sensitive to the leverage that Russians have against the West and this is what we is saying like, "If you put sanctions against us, we will retaliate. We will just switch off the tap and you will feel it because it's going to be cold in your homes."

That's why I'm talking about this longer term and comprehensive strategy, because once again, even if however after the intervention, and Nolan, it sounds as if it's really imminent and there's no way to stop it, I believe that there is still the way to stop it, this invasion, but even if we managed to deescalate this
situation, we definitely not should be calmed down because Putin is there until the end of his life, obviously, and Putin's not going to stop because he wants a new Yalta as I said in the beginning.

**Peter Rough:**

At Hudson, we have a Kleptocracy Initiative, which actually works a great deal on identifying and targeting corrupt Russian money, essentially. So, I'm happy to hear that some of the recommendations you're making align very much so with what my organization is doing. Svitlana, since you're in the corporate sector as it were, can you give us a feel for the private sector and the business community in Ukraine is faring right now given the pressure they're under? Nolan mentioned that it may be imminent, commercial flights begin to shut down. I can't imagine that this is all good for trade and commerce and the rest, but maybe you could just give us an anecdotal sense for how things are going.

**Svitlana Zalishchuk:**

I think that the Ukrainian economy starts to suffer, and obviously in the current situation, foreign investors are not sitting there and knocking Ukrainian doors to invest something into Ukrainian business, as you can imagine. And, I think with even without invasion on the ground, we have this economic invasion in the country without a doubt and slowly our currency is devaluing and we observed it already during several weeks. And, I think many business preparing the contingency plans. At the same time, from what I hear from corporate business, that had offices really challenged with what to do further, what kind of strategies should it be? More money, less money? Should we close the offices? Should we continue operating? So, this kind of situation is not helpful, and I think it's already building up for economic crisis in the future, whatever happens with regards to the military invasion.

**Peter Rough:**

Thanks. Maybe, Hanna, since you've already touched on high politics with Minsk, amongst other things, could you take us down to the street level? Nolan mentioned that there's a certain resilience or optimism amongst the average Ukrainian. Do you share that sentiment? How would you describe the mood at present in Ukraine?

**Hanna Hopko:**

We organized round table with the representatives of chief commander and also local communities from different regions of Ukraine, discussing the territorial defense and how to build this architecture and to make it effective. So, the spirit of of our citizens is like, "We will win." Actually, this is a message to Russians to stop Putin and I read also a letter written by some military representatives from Russian Federation calling Putin to stop his plans and not to invade Ukraine because they don't think that this war will help Russia, and contradicting with Putin's message, that Ukraine poses a threat to Russia. And, also some filmmakers mention problems, which Russia face now. It's like 2,000 territorial claims within the Russian Federation.

So, actually it seems like some voices within Russian Federation, they are starting to speak more loudly and also preventing Kremlin and Putin from very risky steps because I can predict if Putin dares to re-invade or to conduct another incursion, so actually we could imagine instead of Russian Federation seeing Moskva, so actually some processes might start it in return within Russian Federation because if
you implement some hybrid attacks against other nations, one day this will be like... How it's called? Will be back to you, and actually the spirit, the mood of society, because it's already eight year of war, and people of course, and the civic identity of Ukraine became much stronger.

And, also then Euro-Atlantic support also has been increased. So, this is like Putin already lost Ukraine. So, he will never return Ukraine back to the Russian sphere of interest. So, he has to finally accept the reality, never, because Ukrainians change. We are a sovereign nation and we are contributing to European security. Our global mission is to help nations, also minorities, which are suffering from authoritarian regimes to become free. So, this is why it's in the interest of West to support Ukraine, to stop authoritarian regimes, to extend their powers.

Peter Rough:

Well, that was such a passionate rallying cry, and we basically have run out of time. I think we should just end there. Thanks to all three of you. I hope you all stay safe in the coming weeks and months, and God bless you all. Best of luck to Ukraine, but we're not just wishing you luck, we're going to be doing our best here from Washington to help support you all. I'd also just add that Nolan's a great follow on Twitter. He has a lot of the ground action of documented, including what he just described earlier, which was that training of a U.S. Army veteran on the ground with great video and amongst other things. So, I'd commend that to you and you can find so Svitlana and Hanna online as well. Thanks again for joining us. We'll have more to come on all things Ukraine in the coming weeks and I appreciate you joining us at hudson.org today. Thank you.

Svitlana Zalishchuk:

Thank you, Peter.