

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

DOES THE WEST'S UKRAINE POLICY NEED A REALITY CHECK?

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2024

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STELZENMÜLLER: Good morning, everyone. Good morning. Everybody out there in the ether, wherever you are listening to or watching us. My name is Constanze Stelzenmüller. I direct the Center on the United States and Europe, and I, joined here by four of my distinguished colleagues for an event that we are calling: Does the West's Ukraine policy need a reality check. Tomorrow, as you all know, is February 24th, the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion. And compared to the buoyant atmosphere of the first anniversary in 2023, a year ago, when we all said the West is back, Ukraine will win, the mood has given way to a much gloomier. Self-doubting atmosphere. And so we will be commemorating the second anniversary today by asking and hopefully answering some of the hardest questions about this war and the West's support for it. This is a collaboration between the Center of the United States and Europe at Brookings, which I direct, and my colleague Michael O'Hanlon and his Strobe Talbott Center on Security Strategy and Technology. Thank you again, Michael, for partnering, partnering with us as you do so often. It's always wonderful. And this this discussion for the next hour is going to be based on a written debate that we published on February 15th, with contributions by six colleagues, four of whom are with us: Asli Aydintaşbaş, Michael O'Hanlon, Steven Pifer and Angela Stent are with us today. Melanie Sisson and Tara Varma also contributed but can't be with us today. There is a link to the written debate on the webpage, where we have a webpage where you, listeners or watchers signed up and it is very much worth reading the written submissions. They are crisp, they're interesting and thoughtful, original. But of course, as I said, we published it on February 15th and things have happened since then. Specifically the death, some would say murder of Alexei Navalny, Russia's most prominent opposition leader. And so we will be swerving away a little from the from the written text and seeking to answer some some of the new aspects respond to the newer aspects that have happened since then. For the next 40 minutes, what we're going to do is I will, as the moderator, be asking panelists to reflect on their responses. And for the last 15 minutes, we will be taking questions and answer from the audience. And viewers can submit those questions via social media using the hashtag US Europe or by emailing events at Brookings, Dot, edu. And fear not, we do actually get those, and we do read them and we will try and answer them, as many of them as we can on some in fact, we're already sent in ahead of time. So thank you all for that and glad to welcome so many viewers to this. Let me start with our first question, which was Is Russia winning? Should the U.S. and Europe push Ukraine to negotiate with Russia? And let me start here with my colleague Steven Pifer, who's joining us from California and who is a former U.S. ambassador to Kyiv. Steve, you assert in your submission to this first question that Russia is not winning. Does that assessment still stand after the most recent recent Russian advances, especially the taking of of Avdiivka? And I might add, the the the killing I think we would all agree

of Alexei Navalny, which, as I can attest from having attended the Munich Security Conference last weekend, had an absolutely chilling effect on, on on the audience there.

PIFER: Yeah, well, let me just first say that. It was the murder of Alexei Navalny. And I think it really goes to the nature of this hideous regime in Moscow that after locking him away in the far north, they decided that they still had to murder him. But on your on your bigger question. Yeah. I don't say at this point you cannot say that Ukraine is winning, but the narrative that seems to have taken hold over the last three months that now Russia is winning. I'm not sure that the reality bears that out. Today, in February 2024, Russia occupies only a bit more land in Ukraine than it did in February 2023, and much less than it occupied in the first half of 2022. And yes, the Russians wanted Avdiivka. I would look back over the last year and say that the Russians have had two major ground victories, Bakhmut in spring of last year and of Avdiivka a week ago. Both those towns were relatively limited strategic importance, and it looks like the Russians paid tens of thousands of lives to take each one. So I'm not sure that this idea that Russia is now on the roll is going to bear out. A big question will be, is now that the Ukrainians, I think, have largely gone over to the defensive, are the Russians able to exploit any of these wins, that this win last week? We'll have to see that. Of course, the big question there is whether they get the weapons and the ammunition that they need from the West to sustain the fight.

STELZENMÜLLER: Thank you very much, Steve. Point well-taken. And that is the perfect lead over to Angela Stent. Our colleague in Washington, DC. Angela, given that the US funding is at risk right now, continued U.S. funding throughout the presidential election for Ukraine. Their allies are visibly struggling to supply Ukraine with ammunition. And what I think we will all agree is the somewhat limited impact of sanctions. What leverage does the West actually have now to constrain Russia?

STENT: Unfortunately, you know, our leverage is quite limited. I mean, new sanctions have been announced just today by the US, by the EU yesterday against individuals who are involved with Navalny's death and against corporations. But as we've seen, sanctions is used to have the limited impact, the kind of leverage that we should be using really has to do with the Russian oil and gas sector. We know that a lot of countries are helping Russia avoid these sanctions. We should really lean heavily on these countries. Countries like Turkey, China, other countries and try although it's very challenging, to get some agreement that they shouldn't be facilitating this. And another source of leverage we have really is our own LNG exports. The Biden administration has now put a stop on new LNG exports in a few years. We would like the Europeans

and we should want the Europeans to buy more of our LNG so that they're not buying Russian LNG. So I think that things in the energy sector, that would make it more difficult for Russia to reap all these windfall profits that are still waiting, reaping from the sale of hydrocarbons. So I think that's one thing where we could be doing more than we can, that I think otherwise, you know, we it's limited our leverage. We obviously can't stop the North Koreans, or the Iranians from selling Russia either ammunition or drones. But we should, I think, focus more on what we can do in the economic sector.

STELZENMÜLLER: Right. And that is a not unimportant reference, of course, to the fact that some European nations are still importing Russian gas and oil. But let me ask you something. A follow up question, which is something I said I wouldn't do, but I think here it is important. Am I am I right that I'm not hearing you suggest that the West should use, the, confiscated Russian central bank assets, to help finance Ukrainian arms and ammunition.

STENT: No, no, I'm, if I didn't talk about that, it's just that I didn't mention it. I mean, I think we should at least be using the interest from these, you know, confiscated Russian assets. I think the question of using all of them, is more controversial, clearly, because there are people who think it sets legal precedents that then could redound against us and the Europeans. So I think that's a question where we probably do have to have more discussion. But I think, yes, we should be using the the interest on this. But most of that money's in Europe, not in the US.

STELZENMÜLLER: Which is also why there is disagreement between American and European supporters of Ukraine on this. I confess my own feelings are mixed here. Michael O'Hanlon, you write that Putin hopes to fracture Western political will and deplete Ukrainian manpower. How do you persuade the Kremlin that that isn't possible, given the limitations I just listed? But, Mike, your mic.

O'HANLON: It's a privilege to be with you and everybody else. And thank you for your voice of of strategic and moral clarity throughout this debate. I think from the get go you've been a person who recognizes the stakes for not just Ukraine, but for Europe and the West and the world. And so thank you.

STELZENMÜLLER: Buttering up the moderator will not get you anywhere.

O'HANLON: We'll see. But I, I would say that, in response to the question, that I think what we need to do to convince Russia that we are going to be behind Ukraine indefinitely is to keep the spigot open, to open it back up. Now, give you create a chance over the next 12 to 18 months to see if it can, against the odds, be successful in a future counteroffensive. And I'm skeptical. But I think Ukraine deserves the chance to, at least for a while, try to reach that decision on its own, but start talking with Ukraine about what could be a fallback strategy, which is essentially a defensive strategy to make sure they hold on to what they've got today and also be anchored in one way or another to the West in security terms. And if Russia sees this dialog happening and sees the aid flowing, then I think Russia is going to have a hard time believing that it can really win. Unless, of course, Donald Trump is elected president, in which case all bets are off, given Trump's views on this conflict. So I'm afraid we can't completely put the issue to rest, as I'm guessing most of us would agree, until we see what happens with the congressional debate this year on US aid and then the November elections, and if Trump wins, to see if he really would pull the rug out entirely from under Ukraine's feet, or if he would look for some kind of a negotiated settlement, as he's claimed at certain times. But Russia needs to see that Ukraine's military and economic assistance are viable enough, that Russia is not going to be able to launch a major offensive of its own and not going to be able to outwait us. So I think, again, the first step is to get the aid package through. Now, the second step is to start trying to persuade Donald Trump that if he wins, that we need to go for perhaps, a solution that may end the fighting on terms that are less than perfect for Ukraine but that do not abandon Ukraine by any stretch of the imagination. And I still hope that Trump may be persuadable on that front. I don't want to make it all about him, but that's a big piece of the puzzle, and I'm sure that's a big piece of Vladimir Putin's long term hopes for winning this war, thinking that Trump might be his key to success.

STELZENMÜLLER: Okay, quick follow up. Are you concerned at all that Russia might have the ability to deal some kind of a crippling blow to Ukrainian morale, and that would paralyze Western support?

O'HANLON: No, to be honest, although Steve Pifer and others are more equipped to really speak to the Ukrainian polity and mentality. I've only been to Ukraine three times in my life, most recently in September, but I was nonetheless struck by the resoluteness and the fact that there are some debates that President Zelensky replaced his general, that he and the mayor of Kyiv don't necessarily see eye to eye on a lot of things, that there is political churn in Ukraine. That's what's supposed to happen in a democracy when faced with a tough issue. So I look at Ukraine's politics today, and I see healthy debate on a very tough, even

existential issue, with Zelensky still commanding popularity, pushing 80%. So I see Ukrainian toughness. I'd be curious if Steve and others agree, but that's what it looks like to me.

STELZENMÜLLER: All right. Thank you very much. But let me move to Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, our fourth panelist. Aslı, you write, I think, quite compellingly in your contribution to this first question, that we should not think in binaries, fighting versus negotiating, but seek compromise solutions. But tell me, how do you persuade Ukrainians to accept that, given the the horrific crimes that the Russians have committed in the areas that they've occupied, which supposedly are are areas that that house Russian, the Russian speaking ethnic, communities. How do you how do you make that case? I would really like to understand that.

AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Look, I think this is not a binary choice that we have between forcing Ukraine to capitulate and, and, continuing to support Ukraine for as long as it takes. It's everything in between. That is, the everything in between involving ceasefires and half measures, that is how this war would end. I think that, right now, the situation on the battlefield tells us that the wind is not in Ukraine's sails, quite the other way. The momentum has shifted decisively against Ukraine. That requires rethinking in terms of what a victory is. We need to be willing to redefine a Ukrainian victory among allies, but also encourage Ukraine to redefine what a Ukrainian victory is. As it is, the liberation of all territory, that of all the internationally recognized territory that Ukraine has, including Crimea and Donbas, does not really seem achievable, not at the level of support we are providing Ukraine. And I, I'm more pessimistic than others on this call in terms of our ability to sustain even that support, whether the supplemental passes or not. I think, that, you know, American public and society and politicians are telling us that, you know, the support levels at this level is not going to be easily sustained. So a new definition of victory, which is a Ukraine that emerges out of this as a strong, sustainable and sovereign country, preferably a democracy and preferably embedded in Euro-Atlantic institutions, including the EU, is the definition that we need to be seeking, and we need to encourage Ukrainians to, to to embrace that may, of course, involve continued, tragically continued, de facto, control of some Ukrainian territory, including Crimea, for the foreseeable future. But I am not sure that there are other options here. I think the situation on the ground and our slow response in terms of upping the, in terms of, stepping up military production, tells us that Russians can make further gains. It is for the first time this year that people have started talking about Russia winning in some fashion or another. Not winning, of course, as in controlling all of Ukraine, but making greater gains. And I think that is far more problematic. So we do need to start thinking of a new definition for Ukrainian victory.

STELZENMÜLLER: Okay. Thank you.

AYDINTAŞBAŞ: If I could just add one more sentence. The idea is creating a new Ukraine, a type of Ukraine, a strong, sustainable, sovereign Ukraine where people in Russia, people in Donbas, people in Crimea will envy, hopefully in some fashion, you know, whereby the fighting phase is over and we can get to that.

STELZENMÜLLER: All right. Thank you. I, I'm very glad we teased out some, some genuine disagreement. I think that's really important and I'm grateful to you for it. And that actually is a perfect bridge to our second question, which was how can the U.S. and its allies ensure security and stability in Ukraine and Europe, and should Ukraine be given NATO membership at Washington's summit, especially given that the Europeans at the EU Council in December opened accession talks for EU membership. Let me start with you, Mike. Michael O'Hanlon, you've proposed with Lise Howard putting U.S. and allied boots, including Indian and Chinese boots on the ground in Ukraine, a peacekeeping force, in other words, something that has gone a little bit out of fashion recently internationally and something that the NATO allies have categorically ruled out, including, importantly, the US. How do you change their minds? What's your elevator pitch? And it should be an elevator pitch. Mike, the mic.

O'HANLON: Yes, I, Constanze excellent question. The writing that Lise and I have done is begins with the notion that Ukraine does have to be anchored to the West in security terms in some way, but that NATO membership may not be the best vehicle, especially if we are allowing for the possible, possible long term option of a negotiated end to this. Given how much contempt Russia holds for the idea of Ukraine in NATO. So, Lise and I have tried to develop an alternative concept that would, as you say, do two things. It would create a trip wire with Western forces on the ground, not as combat units, but as advisers, but yet in big enough numbers that Russia could not possibly think that it could attack and get away with it. And then secondly, to have a security architecture that someday in a post Putin Russia could include Russia, perhaps, but that in the shorter term would not, but it would include Ukraine. And this could happen actually fairly soon. And I would propose to the Russians, once we really are at a point where the Ukrainians seek a negotiation and we want to support them in that negotiation, we should say to Moscow, if you want to avoid the NATO option, you got to move fast with us on the negotiation over this other security architecture. Otherwise, NATO membership may be the inevitable fallback. So in a way, our option is designed to be potentially more conciliatory towards a future Moscow, but at the same time to get Western boots on the

ground, as you say, which is perhaps in some ways a more robust kind of security commitment than even article five NATO membership might be. So we're trying, you might say we're trying to thread the needle, and that could be a critique. I don't necessarily know how to make our idea happen by June, but I think having a toolkit of options where NATO membership is one of them and another kind of security architecture, maybe a second type, it may be useful to frame things with that kind of a range of possibilities, since we can't yet really know how this war will end, or whether negotiations will be part of it.

STELZENMÜLLER: Okay. Thank you. Mike. Steve. Steven Pifer, you argue that NATO should initiate accession talks with Kyiv at the alliance's June summit in Washington, recognizing that there is no consensus in the alliance on offering membership to Ukraine in wartime. And as you know, both Berlin and the Biden administration are reluctant to do even that. And other allies may very well be hiding behind them. How do you overcome? What I've called a feel good. Forgive my putting myself the axis of prudence, the fear of escalation. That that Washington and Berlin and perhaps some other allies share.

PIFER: Well, it seems to me that two things have become very clear over the past two years. One is that the United States and Europe cannot have a stable and secure Europe without a stable and secure Ukraine. And second, Ukraine by itself is going to be a temptation for Russia in the future. I think Mike's come up with a very interesting idea which but but I'm not sure that you could get major Asian players, China and India to participate. And without that kind of Asian participation you're looking at Europe. It makes sense to me to just do NATO. It was pretty clear, I think, in Vilnius last summer, that there was no consensus on offering Ukraine an invitation to join the alliance now, but there could be a different way you could launch the session talks with the goal of getting to an early invitation. And I think that there's three things one. It's a morale booster. It's a positive message to Ukraine that you're now on a definitive track towards NATO membership. Second, it's also membership to Moscow that you NATO's commitment to Ukraine will endure. And third, if you get to a negotiation at some place between Kyiv in Moscow, which I think at some time is going to happen, it actually, I believe, strengthens Ukraine's negotiating hand. Now, if I could take 30s, I would like to come back to the notion of a ceasefire that also raise, which I think is one that's out there, which I, I very much disagree with unless the Ukrainians want to pursue it. And right now the Ukrainians are not interested in a cease fire. But I see several drawbacks to the West pushing Ukraine to accept a ceasefire. Now, first, I see very little evidence that Moscow is interested in a ceasefire. Second, a ceasefire would allow the Russians an opportunity to regroup, rearm and prepare to launch a new assault at a time of their choosing. And third, the history of ceasefire with the Russians over the last ten years has not been a good one. Every time there's

been a ceasefire, Ukraine has never seen that land come back. So the 2014 ceasefire, the 2015 ceasefire, each time Russia has taken more of Ukraine's territory. And my fear is that if there was a ceasefire, it would basically be de facto acceptance by Ukraine that that territory now belongs to Russia. If the Ukrainians come to the conclusion that they have to accept that, that should be their choice. The West, though, should not be pushing them to negotiate that kind of outcome.

STELZENMÜLLER: All right. Thank you, Steve. I will just say, though, that, well, as you know, I think your suggestion of a sort of an organized path to NATO membership initiated at the at the Washington summit is reasonable and feasible. That also is something that that Washington and Berlin are resisting. Right. But I'm going to move over to Angela. Sorry, the other one.

PIFER: What happened in Vilnius last year?

STELZENMÜLLER: Yeah. Well, such as life. Sadly, I think some of the participants of that push in Vilnius would now agree and in fact, have told me, that that was unhelpful. But sorry, we're not going to. You and I engage this bilaterally. Not here, at least. Angela, moving to you. You write that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a failure of deterrence. So we need to reestablish deterrence by continuing to support Ukraine. And for as long as Russian neo imperialism continues to, quote, redouble the containment strategy which worked during the Cold War, unquote. But and here's my part. We can already see a guns versus butter debate taking place, taking hold on both sides of the Atlantic. So tell us, how should American and European leaders persuade their voters to skimp on butter so the government can buy more guns?

STENT: Well, thank you for the question. I mean, I think the European or many European publics already understand that if Russia wins this war, their security is threatened. It's not going to stop there. And let me just say, you know, as long as Vladimir Putin or someone like him is in power and it's quite possible. But when he's no longer the president, someone who shares his view will be right. That mentality, those Russians will want to take Ukraine. They believe that the collapse of the Soviet Union, you know, was a geopolitical catastrophe, and they believe that Ukraine belongs to them. So all this talk of ceasefires and negotiations, it would just be temporary. I mean, it's when Asli says, well, you if you have a sovereign Ukraine and, and might prosper economically and be integrated in the West. Yes. That's great. If Russia were to give up, its goal of conquering Ukraine, but it's not clear that it's going to do that for the foreseeable future. So I think we have to be very realistic about this. And, you know, I think you have to just persuade

people in Europe and in the U.S. and obviously with the Trump wing of the Republican Party, it's apparently they don't want to listen to this. But Europe's future security is threatened. The European countries, you know, have to spend more on defense. Some of them are Poland is Germany. Obviously, you were at Munich. There's still big debates about that. Maybe Germany will finally, be spending, you know, its 2% or more on defense, other countries. That's part of the deterrence, making the Russians believe that European countries are serious about that. And then in the U.S., again, persuading the public that if Russia wins and if Europe security is, more threatened by this, and if Russia has other aggressive ambitions in Europe, in the end, the U.S. will have to come back to Europe, as it did twice in the 20th century, to to make sure that, you know, Western security is guaranteed and that we are not overrun by authoritarian powers. I know it's not an easy case to make. And in a time of inflation and and war weariness in some parts of Europe, and there isn't much war weariness in Ukraine. It's going to be difficult to make, but you just have to keep, arguing this and and persuading the public. But that requires leadership from, both European leaders and U.S. leaders, and some of that is weaker than it was before. And let me just say one other thing. I do not agree with Asli that the war has shifted decisively in Russia's favor. Yes, Russia has made some territorial gains, and Putin is giving the impression that Russia is winning and it's more difficult for Ukraine. But if you, with assistance comes through, and I realize that's a big if and if the Europeans continue to support Ukraine, I don't think we should be so defeatist. As you said, Constanze, a year ago, there was this, people were almost euphoric that Ukraine had done so well. Now, I think there's excessive pessimism about what's happening. And when I talk to military experts here, they say that Ukraine does still have a chance if it's more on the defensive this year, if it regroups, but it could do better next year.

STELZENMÜLLER: All right. Thank you. I will say there's a new German survey out, followed by a major one. One of the two authoritative monthly service. Surveys, the the big, TV stations do each month. And that how 62% of respondents saying that the German government should give Ukraine, more arms and ammunitions, which is a lot more forward leaning than the government currently. It's it has to be said. Asli, you are, I'm really grateful to you playing playing the role of of provocateur here because I think it's really very important, and especially since the whole purpose of this discussion is to to poke at the hard questions and not think of easy answers. So I have a question for you about your own country, whose role in this conflict is, is very important, but but I think not, not taken seriously enough by, by many observers. And as you know, Turkey's leader, Recep Erdoğan has notably balanced his country's NATO membership with his desire for a peer-to-peer relationship, with Putin's Russia. And he's also pitched himself as a diplomatic mediate between him and Moscow. Has his, do you think, assessment of Russian strategic intentions

towards Ukraine and Europe, and the implications for Turkey changed over the past two years? And your observation? And do you think he would find a Russian sphere of influence in Europe acceptable? Would that be in line with Turkish strategic purposes?

AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Thank you, Constanze. Allow me to sort of touch upon this idea of what Angela and Steve has raised it, and I'll get to Turkey. I think that our webinar is called a reality check. And it's important to remember that a year from now, there is the possibility that there will be a government here in Washington that effectively forces Ukraine to enter negotiations, if not force really strongly encourage. And, and I think that we cannot overlook the fact that there is the danger that Ukraine would be forced to think of peace on Russia's terms, which is not a good idea for European security, not a good idea for Ukraine and NATO. So I think that is important that we start having this conversation of what the endgame is here, starting to craft a new version of Ukrainian victory so that we are not faced with this situation in which Ukraine is, forced to entertain the idea of, peace on Russia's terms. I think that, long war, in other words, another point where I differ from maybe Angela, is that a long war I don't think favors Ukraine. I think long war fever is something whereby Russia can overwhelm Ukraine using the sort of methods it has used using human waves, using the, the, unspeakable level of destruction on civilian centers. But nonetheless, a long war would exhaust Ukraine, but also create the prospect of, cease fire later on on Russia's terms. And, of course, you know, there is the impact this is having on the global South. We've seen the level of propaganda, the effectiveness of Russian propaganda in countries like Brazil.

STELZENMÜLLER: I want to come back to that, shortly.

AYDINTAŞBAŞ: So I skipped that point. This is about cautioning, in terms of real long war, reduction of fighting in one form or another in the form of a ceasefire is war is one where we can bring Western strengths to bear, that is to say, you know, allow for the emergence of a new Ukraine, reconstruction, reform democracy. These are our strengths that are in peacetime.

STELZENMÜLLER: I think you've made your point on this. And I you know, I think it's in its own terms, compelling, which is that, the faster we can support Ukraine, the faster we can we can push for a resolution, the better than this for Ukraine. I get that, but do tell us, do tell us. I genuinely want to know, whether Turkey's take on this conflict has changed over the past two years. That would be helpful for all of us.

AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Look, I think Turks have fought Russia for the last three centuries. They understand what Russia is. Nobody has any love lost for the type of regime and military power Putin is, is, it's trying to spread around the world. If nothing, we have seen what he has been capable of doing in Syria, destroying major civilizational centers in a war that has led to 600 to 800,000 civilians dying. It's not that people have any, notion of, Russia, wanting, peace or stability in the region. I think it's skepticism that the West is going to be able to prevail in this war that seems to have pushed countries like Turkey. And I would say, you know, India, Indonesia, and so on into a situation whereby they are showing more realpolitik. Turkey's best interests are not in Russia controlling the Black Sea or Ukraine. Their best interests, strategic interests are for Ukraine to survive as a sovereign nation on the Black Sea, there's no doubt about that. And I think Erdogan and everyone else understands that. I think their skepticism is about, Western resolve and Ukraine's ability to win.

STELZENMÜLLER: Got it. Okay. So actually, I'm going to stay with you, but but I'm moving into our third complex of questions. And thank you, everyone, for being for being so disciplined because we're sort of ticking along nicely. Given the time. That's very kind of you. Our third question was in the written about how can Ukraine's defeat be prevented and what would be the consequences of Russian victory for NATO. And also you you did write the, the that and you've just repeated that now that Russian victory would have a disastrous impact on European security and with ripple effect even to parts of the Middle East and you've. written and just mentioned the Global South reservations with regard to Western attempts to claim their solidarity. But again. You've you know, I think we all, we all know by now that non-Western powers don't view the prospect of a Russian victory with equanimity or indifference. So what do you think? What actions by Putin do you think would actually induce them to, to to distance themselves from him?

AYDINTAŞBAŞ: I think. I think countries are fully aware of what Russia is. What is important here is, you know, to have more clarity in terms of what the end game is. From a Western perspective, I think a Russian victory would be devastating, not just for European security, but also would have ripple effects. And countries on the periphery of Russia, including Armenia, including Moldova, including, Georgia, including, you know, countries like Turkey and parts of the Middle East. So this is not a desirable outcome for anyone. I'm, I think I think we're all aware of that. But how we prevent that and, and sort of push back against the run against Russia in a way that creates permanent structures. I think people have different ideas. One idea that has emerged in Turkey and in the global South is the way you prevent Russian imperialism is by striking, some type of a ceasefire in Ukraine, whether it's in the form of providing security guarantees, a partial NATO

membership, a NATO membership, and so on. But the whole idea of security guarantees or security assistance for Ukraine should be part of this end game, which could be what Steve has mentioned, the sort of some type of an accession process for NATO. It could be, you know, some of the great ideas Michael has put forth. It could be, security, bilateral security arrangements. But we I think the global South does want this highly destabilizing war to end in Russia. I think, you know, I wanted to rob you of the notion that people have a romantic view of Vladimir Putin or Russia. I think everyone does that.

STELZENMÜLLER: So, yeah, that's an important point, what.

AYDINTAŞBAŞ: This regime is all about. And if anyone had any misgivings this week, was it of, of, of, of a proof in terms of what they're capable of doing. And we know that from Grozny. We know that from Aleppo, and we know that already from Mariupol.

STELZENMÜLLER: And so many murders of of European opposition, of sorry, of Russian opposition leaders from, Alina, Politkovskaya, and to to the, the pilot who defected and, and went to ground in Spain and was tracked by Russian intelligence and and and murdered. Right. So yes. Thank you for that for that point also, I think that was really important. Mike, at the Munich security conference last weekend, US senator and Trump ally, possibly vice presidential hopeful JD Vance argued very strongly that the Europeans needed to rid themselves of their dependency on the US. The Trump camp, of course, as we know, is notoriously skeptical of NATO. How do you make the case to Senator Vance that NATO is useful even to a Trump or Trumpist administration?

O'HANLON: And. I guess I begin with two things. One is the reality of just how much Ukraine has been helped by Europe, even more than it's been helped by the United States in the last two years or even last ten years. So this is real world burden sharing. It may not. It may not mean that Europe does what it should on regular defense spending. And there's still a long ways to go, as you and I agree on that. But what Europe's done historically and in recent times to help Ukraine is very noteworthy, very impressive. And fully already Ukraine is benefiting from European help even more than from American help. But both pillars are required. So again, I hope Congress passes this aid package very soon. The other that the other argument I would make is based on history. And obviously you and I and everyone else on this panel and many others have wrestled with the lessons of the last 100 plus years of European security relations. And when I look, whether I look at a historical or a theoretical perspective, when I see Europe with 4, 5, 6 relatively comparably strong

powers, that's often been a recipe for conflict, in the world wars and before the world wars. Whereas the United States, with its role in NATO, really undergirds the alliance with not just military heft, but being sort of first among equals in terms of size, scale, political clout, economic clout. I think the Western alliance works best that way. And if we leave it to Europe, which means, of course, Germany, Britain, France, Poland, Italy, Spain, all sort of expecting to play big roles, others hoping to play almost as big roles. You understand European security dynamics better than I do, but it looks to me that European allies are the best allies we could ask for, as long as we don't ask them to do it all on their own, because there is no natural leader, especially with Angela Merkel gone in your country. But even then, it would be hard to say how any one country could lead when Britain's not in the EU. When different countries worry more about the southern border of Europe than about the eastern border. So I think only the United States provides that strategic glue and leadership. And if we want to avoid World War Three, therefore, the United States should stay engaged in Europe in a way that it did not prior to 1914 or 1939. That's the best I can do in an argument.

STELZENMÜLLER: Okay, let me. Because I don't have any questions here yet. From the audience. I do want to move to the others, but but quick question. Do you see any role for Europe, for European allies in any, conflict, military or non military, with China?

O'HANLON: That's a good question. I think that the more important role would be, economic punishment. I think any war pitting the United States and Taiwan, for example, against China, would become a multi-dimensional war, and it would make the kind of economic sanctions that were imposing on Russia look relatively minor by comparison to the disruption to the world economy and the way in which I think we would have to try to punish China economically while making ourselves resilient against China's inevitable, economic punishment of us. So that's the realm in which I think Europe has the greatest role to play. It would be nice to have a few European destroyers help break a Chinese blockade of Taiwan, but I'm not counting on it. And I don't know that it's worth the effort to try to get one or 2 or 3 more destroyers in the mix when there's so much to do on the economic side in terms of both deterrence and resilience.

STELZENMÜLLER: Yeah, but but thank you for clarifying that economic point, which I think is important and is one that I think would be worth making to Senator Vance. Steve. Steve Pifer, let me move to you. Our colleague Melanie Sisson, who wasn't able to to join us in this debate, but, has been a, I think sort of one of the most trenchant skeptics in our written debate, which is why, again, I encourage everybody on this call, to go back and look at our written exchanges. Our colleague Melanie Sisson suggests that the U.S. and Europe

need to shape Russia's incentive to negotiate, and she offers the following as incentives calibrated sanctions relief, clarity that Ukraine will not be a NATO member. But thirdly, it signals that Russia will be a part of the continent's future security architecture. Isn't the right a note to everybody here, not just in the four of you, but everybody else who's listening. I'm. I'm quoting my colleague here.

PIFER: Yeah, I disagree. Let me stress this second Mike's point about Europe, because I don't think this is well understood in America. If you sum up military, financial and humanitarian commitments to Ukraine, Europe has now committed twice what the United States has. But coming back to your point. No, I just I disagree with, what Melanie has suggested because it basically leaves Ukraine open to a new Russian assault. Ukraine by itself. I mean, there was the agreement at Vilnius for these G7 security commitments, which now Germany, France, Denmark, Britain have negotiated these things, their agreements to provide assistance. But nobody saying we will send our troops to defend you. That's what NATO brings. And again, Ukraine left by itself is going to be this temptation. We're setting ourselves up for a new conflict at some point in the future. And I think we ought to worry about that, and we ought to worry about also what happens should Russia win this war. And that's where I think that there needs to be a focus on, you know, that there is a threat. A lot of analysts say, you know, Russia would never invade a NATO country, would never talk about invading a Baltic state, but won go back five years ago. Nobody would have predicted what the Russians did in February of 2022 with a full scale invasion. And so, you know, anchoring Ukraine, in a way, in the security structure that bolsters Europe's defense, I think, is the way to go. And talking about a security structure with Russia now seems to me just to be. It's it's it's, it's a, it's a fantasy. The European securities I mean, there was a security structure developed over 30 years that brought Russia and Russia by its actions has absolutely shredded that structure. So the security structure that Europe needs now is going to be one that's designed to deter, contain and defend against Russia at some future point, when Russia changes, when Russia is prepared to live in peace with its neighbors, then maybe you can bring a structure that brings Russia in. But that's a long way down the road, and I think we need to be realistic about that as much as it's not a happy prospect.

STELZENMÜLLER: Right. I think it's only fair to say, though, that, if, reports are correct and the things that, one was hearing and I was hearing at the Munich Security conference, what Melanie says and outlines here is, attempting is attempting line up to, it not insignificant number of members of the alliance simply because I think they're so worried about their ability to provide unlimited support for Ukraine. For over a long stretch of time or, or ramp up with the speed that would be required to help Ukraine tip the scales, as Asli has

suggested. Right. Those two things, appear, I think, to many Western leaders to be currently beyond their grasp. And and again, Steve, I am all I'm just I'm trying to here is go is to pinpoint the disagreements. I'm not taking sides. In fact, a lot of you know what side I'm on in this in this argument. But let me move to Angela and we can we can come back to this, Steve, if I may, but, I do seconds. Yes. Okay.

PIFER: I think you're correct. In 2024, 2024, it's going to be a difficult year. But if you look at projections for 2025, I think the West's ability will have been ramped up. So, for example, between Europe and America in 2025, production capabilities are maybe 2.5 million artillery shells per year. 2025 things can change.

STELZENMÜLLER: All right, well, fingers crossed for 2025. At which time we will have a new presidential administration in the United States. Angela, you are the, our last speaker in the last round of these of these questions. And then I have I do have some questions that have come in online, but you write in your submission that a Russian victory could shake NATO to the core, quote, unquote, not just because Russia might set its sights on the Baltics or Poland, but because it might deepen existing fissures in Europe, making other states inclined to become more accommodationous towards Moscow. I do think that's something that is an aspect of current European security debates that is under-examined. And so, it's also a source of real political vulnerability, right, that could be exploited by adversaries, not least the Russians. So do you have, given but given particularly what what Steven and Mike have have indicated that really it is not just historically the role of the United States to be the, shall we say, the the unifier of the continent who occasionally knocks heads together or takes away the fear of of France or Germany dominating, how, do you have a recommendation, Angela, of how to address these fissures, especially if the U.S. begins to lean away from supporting Ukraine?

STENT: So I think it would be very important for the United States to play a major role. I mean, what I wrote is countries like Hungary, obviously, Slovakia, Italy, Spain, I mean, there are a number of countries in Europe that are already, you know, fiercely debating whether they should be supporting Ukraine, and I think in the event of a Russian victory, would be, you know, quite sanguine about accommodating Russia and going really back to a stance that they had before Russia invaded Ukraine. Whereas, you know, we'd like to think that a Russian victory would unite, the Western alliance, I think it's quite possible that it would do exactly the opposite. And, and then we really be in a much more difficult situation. So, I mean, my recommendation here is, and listening to what my colleagues have said also is it's the U.S. that has to remain very much involved there and to try and persuade the more recalcitrant members of NATO, to rethink, in the event of a Russian

victory, how they would arrange their relationship with Russia. I just wanted to point out, if we are having a reality check, and that's the name of this webinar, Russia has no interest in negotiations at the moment. It's not interested in a ceasefire. As Putin told Tucker Carlson, they still need to "de-Nazify" Ukraine. That means changing the regime in Ukraine and having a country that's really subordinate to Russia. So we should have no illusions. You know, we keep talking about should we put pressure on the Ukrainians to sit down with the Russians? First of all, Putin is not going to sit down with Zelensky. He would only want to sit down with the United States. But beyond that, they really don't have any interest in any kind of ceasefire or negotiation because they think that they are winning now. So I think we just have to, you know, accept that as we go forward with, with our discussions. But I do think that the only way to prevent the alliance in the event of a Russian victory from splintering would be for a larger U.S. role. And clearly, if Donald Trump becomes president in November. I don't see that happening.

STELZENMÜLLER: So, Angela, in sum, what you're saying is that our colleague Melanie Sisson's suggestions of sanctions relief, excluding the Ukrainian NATO membership and and signals that Russia will be part of Europe's security architecture are, as it were, you know, realist, realist transactionist incentives that would not move a Russia that has a completely different take on this conflict. Right? As something that is much more existential for itself and in fact, for Putin's regime. Correct? Your your mic is off.

STENT: Russia didn't invade Ukraine because of NATO. I know that's a big discussion. It's controversial, but it didn't. It invaded Ukraine because Putin and the people around him, and many in the Russian elite believe that Ukraine is not a separate country. And that it belongs to Russia, and they rue the fall of the, of the Soviet Union. And they wanted to reestablish Russia as a great power as it was in the Soviet times. And all of these other things are kind of incidental. And I think they fail to appreciate the mentality in the Kremlin.

STELZENMÜLLER: All right. Thank you very, very much. I do sort of worry, honestly, that part of our discussion sort of revolves around or sort of, our recommendations end in, but we should do the things that currently people are not doing. Right. Rather than saying, this is how we get them to stop not doing them. Right. And but but I will just that we can perhaps keep that from consideration. As you have all said, I think we all agree, this war is not going to be over soon. And, it might be something that I think we could do, more in depth work on, but let me move, to some of the questions that we've gotten online. They are not addressed to anything in particular, but I will lob them at one of you. The first one comes from former Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin, who I think is known to many of you. He wants to know what is our

our definition of Russian strategic defeat? And I'll leave it at that. And in fact, let me let me perhaps lob that at Steve Pifer first and let's see whether any, any, anybody else wants to take a stab at it as well. Steve, over to you.

PIFER: Yeah. My definition of defeat of Russia in this war is we get to a point where the Russian military or the Ukrainian military either pushes the Russian military completely out of Ukraine, or achieves enough success on the battlefield that it can negotiate a settlement on terms acceptable to the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian people.

STELZENMÜLLER: All right. Angela. Mike, Asli, would you like to add your?

STENT: I mean, I think ultimately it's I agree with Steve, but it's ultimately Russia accepting that Ukraine is a sovereign, independent country with the right to choose which alliances it belongs to, if they want Ukraine. And it gives up the idea that that Ukraine and Russia have to be united. I think that would be, that would be the definition.

O'HANLON: If I could, I would just add that I like very much what Steve and Angela just said more than I like the goal of declaring that Russia must suffer a strategic defeat. It strikes me that even though we all know what we mean when we say that, it could be one of these unnecessarily inflammatory concepts. So I would personally not frame things in those terms. I would use the more positive terms that Steve and Angela used about Ukraine's future being assured.

STELZENMÜLLER: All right.

AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Can I jump in agreeing with Mike here? I think Russia's strategic defeat is the emergence of a strong Ukraine as a sovereign state, preferably a European democracy. And and that is perhaps the only way to put an end to Russian imperialism that will also continue to challenge democracies or sovereign states on the, on Russia's periphery, including, you know, some of those that I mentioned, but also Bosnia and, you know, and definitely Caucasus.

STELZENMÜLLER: All right, let me, move to another question asked both by Pavlo Klimkin and by Mr. [inaudible] -- whom I don't know, forgive me -- and that is the role of China here. I think we all remember that

when Olaf Scholz went to, went to Beijing in, early December 2022, he was very pleased, to put it carefully, that, Xi Jinping said next to him and in public that the Chinese really, really didn't want to see nuclear escalation in, in Ukraine. And there is, correct me if I'm wrong, my, my sense is that, Russian nuclear threats have, been somewhat reduced since then, that the Russians have also stopped, shooting up the nuclear plant in Zaporizhzhia. But on the other hand, the Chinese have been, quietly or less quietly supportive of the Russian cause in international fora, and perhaps even done more than that. Perhaps somebody would like to comment on the role of China here. Maybe Angela?

STENT: Thank you. So, yes. The China, I mean, that statement by Xi Jinping, when Chancellor Scholz was there was important. And then Putin's nuclear rhetoric has been rather quiet. But Medvedev, right, Dmitri Medvedev, the once-thought of as liberal president and other Russian political commentators do talk about the nuclear rhetoric, and some of the people that we used to know as colleagues in Russia, the pundits, are still advocating, you know, annihilating London or Berlin or whatever it is. But Putin himself, you know, has toned down the rhetoric. But there is enough of an undercurrent of discussion there to keep everyone on their toes, and I think to reinforce the fear the White House or the concern in the White House, about escalation. The Chinese really are supporting the Russians. We know that they're helping evade some of the sanctions, that they're supplying Russia with components that are being used, both in weapons, and in other industrial fora. You know, they, they keep reiterating their close ties with Russia. And I think we have to understand that Xi Jinping does not want Russia to be defeated in this war, because there would be many repercussions. Nor does he want a leader coming to power in Moscow who would rethink what Russia's foreign policy was and maybe try to repair ties with the West. The Chinese have really done very little to mediate. I know there was hope in Europe in the beginning that they could be mediators in this conflict. They did send a representative to Ukraine, but they've pulled back from that now. They didn't attend the last couple of summits, including the one in Davos, on the Ukrainian peace plan. So I see them as, you know, at least passive supporters of Russia. And, and I'm concerned about what would happen if Russia were defeated.

O'HANLON: Constanze, can I have a quick word?

STELZENMÜLLER: Very. If you can make it a minute or less. Because I am going to have to wrap up.

O'HANLON: 30 seconds, 30 seconds. I agree with Angela, but I would also say it's very important that China has not shipped weapons to Moscow. That's a very important strategic fact. Also, there are elements of the Chinese quote unquote, peace plan that we can live with and should try to work with. So China's helping Russia less than we're helping Ukraine, which is, of course, not to praise Beijing, but just to observe that distinction.

STELZENMÜLLER: Right. All right. I will perhaps counter, counter that with with the fact, you know, the, pointing out that we're seeing for the first time in in posts fall-of-the-wall, post-Cold War history something of a de facto alignment of of Russia, China, North Korea and Iran on supporting, on fighting Ukraine and resisting Western support, which I think ought to concern us more in terms of global stability as a, as a development. But I'll leave it here. I'm really glad that we were managed to tease out so many disagreements. I think that is wonderful. And that was the purpose of this discussion and conversation. I'm grateful to Steven Pifer, Angela Stent, Michael O'Hanlon, and Asli Aydintaşbaş for joining us. And I'm sorry that Melanie Sisson and Tara Varma weren't able to do so as well. But do read all of their submissions and the written debate. And I would also say all of the writers here on, on screen have written pieces around this second anniversary of Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine. You can find links to all of them in the Center on the United States's newsletter. The second newsletter letter, which is just out and which you can sign up from. Steve Pifer has written a very useful explainer of, of the Ukraine aid supplemental's state in Congress. Angela Stent wrote a recollection of Alexei Navalny. Mike O'Hanlon has written an update of our joint collaborative effort, the Ukraine Index, an update for the Washington Post. You can also find a link to that. Asli has written, multiple pieces about, Turkey, and the Middle East, on and its connections to the Ukraine Russia conflict. And finally, I also want to recommend to you, I think, a deeply moving piece by our nonresident fellow, Mariana Budjeryn, where she, who is Ukrainian in origin, where she reflects on her life as a Ukrainian, in the diaspora and her and her take on the revolution of dignity ten years ago and its anniversary today. I, I, I really recommend that you read that on on this anniversary. And again, thank you to everybody. Thank you for tolerating me as your moderator, as always. Thanks to everyone who joined.