

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

FALK AUDITORIUM

RUSSIA AND UKRAINE: SOCIETIES TRANSFORMED BY WAR
THE 21ST ANNUAL RAYMOND ARON LECTURE

FRIDAY, JUNE 5, 2025

WELCOMING REMARKS

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MALONEY: Good morning. I'm Suzanne Maloney, vice president and director of Foreign Policy here at the Brookings Institution, and I'm pleased to welcome you to the 21st annual Raymond Aron Lecture. The Aron Lecture was founded in 2004, and since then, this event has addressed a wide range of issues and featured many renowned lecturers and discussants, including Thomas Gomart, Annette Becker, Anne Cheng, Camille Grand, Tony Judt, and Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Stephen Breyer.

That tradition continues with our distinguished speakers today. Let me thank the French Foreign Ministry and the French embassy here in Washington for their continued support of this lecture series and for their abiding respect of Brookings research and scholarly independence. This year's Aron Lecture is entitled "Russia and Ukraine: Societies Transformed by War."

More than four years after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and more than a dozen since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and covert war in the Donbas have passed, our keynote speaker, Anna Colin Lebedev, will discuss how these years of conflict have reshaped society and state in Russia and Ukraine and transformed their relationship.

Colin Lebedev is a senior lecturer in political science and a researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences and Politics at Paris Nanterre University, and an associate researcher at the Center for Russian, Caucasian, East European, and Central Asian Studies, where her research focuses on the relationship between state and society in post-Soviet countries.

Anna, we're delighted to welcome you here today and look forward to your lecture. Anna's keynote address will be followed by a brief moderated conversation with Ambassador John Tefft, distinguished chair in diplomacy and security at the RAND Corporation. A career foreign service officer, Tefft served as US ambassador to four former Soviet republics, including both Ukraine and Russia.

My colleague Fiona Hill, senior fellow here at Brookings, who has served at the National Security Council and National Intelligence Council, will moderate the discussion. After their conversation, we'll welcome your comments and questions from the floor. I'm pleased to welcome Agnes von der Mühl, deputy chief of mission at the embassy of France, here to open some welcoming remarks.

Agnes, the floor is yours. Thank you.

von der Mühl: Bonjour. Thank you so much, Suzanne. Thank you, Madame la Directrice. Thank you all and for coming to have this very timely and interesting discussion with us. Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the French embassy and of the ambassador who was in New York, so he couldn't make it, anyway, welcome to the 21st edition of the Raymond Aron Lecture.

I think we celebrated the big birthday last year. 21 editions, that in itself is a story worth telling. When the Brookings Institution and the French Embassy launched indeed this series back in 2004, very interesting time also for French-American relations at that time, their aim was to foster a serious intellectual and strategic dialogue between French and American thinkers, a truly in-depth conversation reflecting our shared concerns, not a superficial chat about the hot topic of the moment.

And I think we've pulled it off. Over the years, this forum has brought together economists, historians, strategists, and diplomats, men and women prepared to contemplate the defining challenges of our time. We don't miss so much of those challenges these days as well. What's striking looking back over the two decades is the lecture's continuity.

Regardless of who was in office in France or in the US, this conversation took place because it's based on something more solid and enduring than political circumstances. Structurally shared security interest, a common commitment to a rule-based international order, and a conviction that rigorous thinking is a prerequisite for effective action.

That is also Raymond Aron's legacy, and it's what this series has sought to honor. So for that, thank you, the Brookings and all the researchers that work with us and speak with us. We meet today indeed, as you said, Suzanne, as the war in Ukraine enter its fifth year. It's not only a human tragedy of staggering proportions, it's also a test for transatlantic security as a whole.

The war has drawn increasing attention to an issue that was already been discussed in Europe and has now moved to the forefront of the transatlantic conversation, the question of European strategic autonomy. For years, this concept was debated in, in the abstract, sometimes with suspicion on this side of the Atlantic, sometimes with impatience on ours.

The war in Ukraine, combined with an evolving American posture that increasingly emphasizes burden shifting has made the question concrete and urgent. Europe is being asked and is asking itself to take greater responsibility for its own security. That does not represent a break with the alliance, but rather, if handled well, a maturation of it.

France has long argued that a more capable Europe is a stronger partner for the United States, not a lesser one. The events of the past few years have given that argument undeniable new weight. Maps and military briefings aren't enough to understand what's happening in Ukraine or Russia. We need to understand societies.

We need to understand what war does to individuals, to families, to communities, to collective identities. We need to understand how people live, resist, and are transformed under the pressure of conflict that shows, unfortunately, no sign of ending. Anna Colin Lebedev is one of Europe's more foremost scholars when it comes to these issues, and we are very proud to have her.

So thank you for the Brookings to invite her, and I'm sure we'll learn a lot about your presentation. What she will offer us probably this morning is not another battlefield assessment, but rather a deep understanding of the human and social dynamics that are fundamental to what these conflicts will decide and of what it will take also for both Europeans and Americans to help Ukraine prevail.

So it's over to you, Madame Professor Anna. Thank you so much.

COLIN LEBEDEV: Thank you very much. And first of all, I would like to thank the organizers for bringing French and American expertises together. It's a true privilege for me to speak here at Brookings, whose work we follow very closely in France. And I'm incredibly honored to share this space and benefit from the insights of Ambassador John Tefft and Fiona Hill. So all three of us have, have knowledge of Russia and Ukraine from different perspectives and I think this is precisely what will make, I hope, the discussion that will follow the- my presentation even more stimulating.

I'm a political sociologist. This is a special French thing. So when it's convenient I say that I'm a political scientist, and when it's convenient, I say that I'm a sociologist. So I work on societies, but from the point of view of the way they think, exercise, and experience power. I've been doing field work in both Russia and Ukraine in the last 20 years. Today I'm working mostly on, on Ukraine. For obvious reasons, it's more difficult for us to go to Russia to do field work.

But my remarks here will be on both society based on what I have been studying for the last decades. So I would like to start this lecture with the story of one of my Ukrainian respondents named Slava. I first met Slava in 2015 in Kyiv for an interview I was doing for a research project on Ukrainian veterans of the Soviet war in Afghanistan.

Born in industrial Donbas to parents who were a steelworker and an engineer who had met in Russia, he entered military school in Kyiv in 1981 and became an officer in the Soviet Special Forces. In 1987, he was deployed to Afghanistan for the last two years of the Soviet-Afghan War. He was among those soldiers who saw the last columns of armed vehicles leave the country, Afghanistan, during the very last years of the USSR.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, his unit was based in Uzbekistan, so he decided to leave the army and return to Ukraine. The situation was chaotic then, and, forced to ensure his family's survival, Slava started working in the 1990s for a company that imported excavators from China.

For a former elite officer, this was a nightmare and a complete loss of social status. But he pulled through, earned enough money to buy an apartment in Kyiv suburbs, and little by little found other professional paths, eventually becoming a writer and a singer. Since 2014, his native city in Donbas, Alchevsk, has been occupied by pro-Russian forces and was later annexed in-- by Crimea in 2022.

When my colleague and I asked Slava about his self-identification, he confessed that even though he had Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian blood in his veins, he had long seen himself as Russian. However, he gradually realized how little he knew about the history of Ukraine, the country where he was born, the country he has chosen.

He started reading books, history books, and thinking differently about his family deported to Siberia during the Soviet repressions. This is why his grandparents met in Siberia, actually. His sister, who had moved to Russia, did not have the same understanding of this history. "She is totally Russian," Slava told us during the interview.

When we had our first interview in 2015, he only wrote and sung in Russian language. But when we met again with him a couple of years later, he had totally switched to Ukrainian. Since the beginning of the war in the Donbas, Slava had been volunteering to help the Ukrainian Armed Forces, traveling back and forth to the front line to play the guitar and to perform war songs for soldiers.

"Alchevsk is a Ukrainian city," he recently wrote about his native town on Facebook, "and we will free it from occupation." Slava's path is an accurate reflection of the complexity of Soviet and post-Soviet destinies in this part of Europe. Mixed identities, entangled lives, a painful history, and moments of radical transformation.

While striking, his evolution from a Soviet army officer to a Ukrainian songwriter is also remarkably representative of the evolution of post-Soviet countries. So how can we think comparatively in this context on the evolution of Russia and Ukraine? The two countries share a part, but only a part, and I will return to that later, of their past.

This context has shaped societies that, in certain ways, resemble one another. A casual traveler, and I think many of you have been these casual travelers, to both countries would, prior to the armed conflict, have noted similarities in architecture, lifestyles et cetera. These similarities were also institutional, since the newly independent states had to develop their legislative and institutional frameworks in a very short timeframe.

Post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine followed parallel paths, blending Soviet legacies with adaptations to new conditions. At the same time, when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Russia and Ukraine were already two distinct and different societies. First, this is because Russia has been the center of the USSR, while Ukraine was considered to be a periphery. Second, it is because of the history of, of Ukraine, more complex than Soviet historiography allowed to be publicly acknowledged, a point that we will return to. Finally, and obviously, each post-Soviet country was shaped by a different geography, a, a distinct natural and economic resources, and a different geopolitical position.

The narrative of the Russian state has been in these last decades-- years let's say, not decades-- to deny not only the sovereignty, but more fundamentally, the very existence of Ukraine as a society distinct from Russia. That was explicitly stated in the 2021 famous article by Vladimir Putin. Vladimir Putin, whom our historian, famous historian Nicolas Werth calls Putin historian in chief.

The article by Vladimir Putin on the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians, which argued that Ukraine was a puppet state and an artificial nation. Every day since the beginning of the war, Ukrainians have been demonstrating the opposite. Reflecting upon what Russian and Ukrainian society had in common does not mean, from my point of view, endorsing the Kremlin's reading of the history and the present.

Thinking about what was shared is a way to better understand what was different, and more importantly, the divergent paths these two societies have taken since the disappearance of the Soviet Union, and even more since 2015 and the beginning of-- '14 and the beginning of the war. Common sense usually dictates that war is deeply transformative, altering conventional social logic while establishing new total statuses, new practices, and new relationships with the state.

Of course, some of this is true. There is nothing ordinary about living under shelling, taking up arms, or having a relative mobilized in the military. At the same time, the sociology of societies at war shows that wartime social behaviors are heavily anchored in the social dynamics that prevailed during peacetime. Wartime transformations are deeply rooted in preexisting social experiences, history, and values. It is on these experiences that I would like to focus for this lecture.

There is a set of usual patterns to rely on when comparing Russia and Ukraine, an authoritarian regime versus a democratic regime, an aging inner circle around Putin and Putin himself versus a young Ukrainian leadership and Zelenskyy as a head of state, aggression versus, versus resistance, and repression versus mobilization.

I would like to take a different perspective and explore three of a much larger number of dimensions that shape the evolution of both Russian and Ukrainian societies. First, the importance of adaptation as a primary social skill. Second, the relationship of citizens to the state, and third, the shift in perceptions in Russia and Ukraine of themselves and of the others.

So let's start with the first dimension, adaptability. It might seem surprising to start the comparison here, but this specific angle has always been incredibly enlightening for me during my fieldwork in both countries. Adapting to a hostile environment is the primary skill in which both Russian and Ukrainian social actors thrive. Resilience and informal practices were already core skills for all Soviet citizens developed in the context of chronic shortages, ideological pressure, and the inefficiency of the social system.

As a Soviet citizen, you needed to constantly navigate between ideological discourses and everyday different realities. This know-how became crucial following the collapse of the

Soviet Union during the chaotic transition to a market economy, the disintegration of social policies and public services, and the need to survive in unpredictable conditions. Those who managed to pull through in Russia and in Ukraine demonstrated a remarkable sense of innovation, sometimes by navigating criminalized economies, creating businesses, learning to live without relying on the state.

Corruption, which external observers often view as dysfunctional, was seen locally as a way to adjust to conditions that did not allow you to run your business in a clean way. These adaptation skills helped Russians and Ukrainians get through the harsh post-Soviet decades. This adaptability has also been central to how both societies responded to the challenge of the armed conflict, but with very different effects for Russia and Ukraine.

Adaptability is what has helped and still helps Russian society to withstand the shock of the war. At the economic level, it remains one of the main tools allowing the economy to function despite the harsh sanctions. And remember the widespread expectations we had of a rapid collapse of the Russian economy in 2022. Macroeconomic policies prevented it, but it was not all of it. The creative strategies Russian businesses put in place, they were already accustomed to these strategies. Front companies, intermediaries, double or triple bookkeeping, et cetera.

At the level of ordinary Russians, adaptation strategies have also been important for self-protection without taking risks. More importantly, as an ethnographic research conducted by my Russian colleagues shows, Russians have used adaptation skills to make the war invisible to themselves. They have put considerable effort into focusing on private matters and convincing themselves that they just need to be patient and let the war pass.

I very often hear the term fatalism used to describe this attitude. I'm comfortable with this term if and only if by fatalism we mean a strategy chosen in a context of limited agency, but not if it is seen as an inherent Russian personality trait or Russian soul, as we sometimes hear in, in France. Every single day, Russian citizens make choices, and if they choose to adapt, it is because this option seems to them to be the best one available to them.

When investigating Russian society today, many analysts tend to privilege structure over agency and focus on what is imposed on ordinary Russians. It's a classical debate in social science, structure or agency. I believe we gain a much deeper understanding by paying attention to everyday agency of actors inside Russian society. Adaptability is also what enables the Russian armed forces to innovate on the ground and take pride in doing so.

I remember a conversation that was way before the war with an engineer, a Russian engineer, who explained to me, laughing, that authorized repair centers and customer services were for the weak. The real fun was fixing high-tech machinery under license with a screwdriver and a piece of wire. Today, we have engineers with screwdrivers in weapon production in Russia, taking pride and having fun in finding counter measures against Ukrainian innovations because, and this is a defining feature of this war, Russia is facing a Ukrainian society in which adaptation skills are even more developed for the very same reasons.

The context of uncertainty and weak law enforcement during the post-Soviet decades trained Ukrainians to operate in impossible conditions. Since the beginning of the war, Western media has loved to use the term resilience, defined as the ability to overcome difficulties, to describe Ukraine. I think this term does not fairly reflect the reality because resilience seems to me reactive more than proactive. I would rather speak about the art of adaptation, and art is the key word here.

The innovation introduced by drones on the battlefield has been widely documented, but the social logic and dynamics of this innovation as a bottom-up process of adaptation is not always fully understood and needs to be investigated more closely.

The reluctance of Western partners to provide Ukraine with enough weapons, alongside restrictions on their use, have only enhanced these skills within the armed forces. This has created conditions that my expert colleagues describe as a jungle context, in contrast to the zoo context in which Western armed forces operate. And of course, this is not to say that we should not provide help to Ukraine because it makes it even more creative and adaptive, of course.

But adaptation and innovation are also evident within civil society. Those of you who have been in Ukraine since 2022, and probably there are some of those in the, in this room probably you have the Air Alert app on your phones informing you on strikes on local... on the cities where you are at the moment. This phone app was built in 72 hours, just a few days after the full-scale invasion, by a private software company because the founder realized that the population needed something more efficient and user-friendly than traditional sirens that we hear in the city.

Three days were enough to find a technical partner, program the software, and negotiate information sharing with the Ministry of Defense. This art of adaptation is today a quality highly valued in the Ukrainian society. It's a great source of pride and a core component of national identity. But of course, there's a darker side to these adaptation strategies, which often resemble self-protection strategies in Russia.

In Ukraine, you have citizens, especially men, who try to make themselves invisible to the state, the same way Russians do, in order to avoid military mobilization. However, there is a significant difference between the two societies. Protecting yourself from anything related to the war is an idea broadly accepted among ordinary Russians. In Ukraine, this choice is costly and harmful to one's social status.

To explain this difference, another variable must be added to the picture, which brings me to my second point, the relationship of citizens to their state. Distrust of the state has been a common feature of both Russian and Ukrainian post-Soviet societies. Opinion polls conducted in both countries before 2014 show a similarly low level of trust in political institutions, a very low level of trust in political institutions. In both, yeah, let's say that trust ratings for government, parliament, local authorities, law enforcement institutions would always be lower than 30%, and most usually lower than 15% before 2014.

In both a competitive political system like Ukraine and an increasingly authoritarian one like Russia, public institutions were perceived as foreign bodies, potentially harmful to their citizens. Since the beginning of the armed conflict, this dynamic has followed two opposite paths: a form of loyal alienation from the state in Russia, and the critical appropriation of the state by its citizens in Ukraine.

Let's start with Russia. The external sides of population loyalty to the state that the Russians are careful to display tend to make many observers view the Russian population either as actively supporting their state or as completely opposed to it, but victimized by repression. This misunderstands the very nature of authoritarian regimes, which as we know from scholarship, starting from Juan Linz, rely on the systematic demobilization of the population. And paradoxically, Russian opinion polls support this, this vision of demobilization, even state-controlled opinion polls showing skyrocketing figures in of support for Vladimir Putin.

Even in these polls, you have these high president's ratings that are inconsistent with low levels of satisfaction among citizens regarding how they are governed, reported by the same

polls. In both independent and pro-government public opinion polls in Russia, there is at least a 20%, 20-point difference between support for the president of the Russian Federation and support for the government, but actually appointed by the same president. So Russians claim to trust their president, but they do not trust the institution that the president appoints and controls.

This coexistence of loyalty and discontent is made possible by a form of authoritarian or social contract. In, in exchange for access to resources, positions, or simply stability and predictability, citizens are supposed to keep their distance from the political life, leave the regime's hands free, and just publicly display their support.

A striking example of this form of loyal alienation from the state occurred in Kursk Oblast. You remember Kursk Oblast occupied by Ukrainian armed forces for a while before being retaken by Russians? So citizens of this region experienced a partial occupation of the region by a foreign armed force, right?

Ethnographic research in the region conducted by the Public Sociology Laboratory, Russian researchers, shows that even in the face of a major threat, Russians do not consider that it their place to express an opinion or to take action. And since the state is perceived as strong and repressive, Russians choose not to interfere in areas perceived as the state's prerogative.

Many respondents in this in this research perceived war as a weather condition. You do not protest against a, a storm. You just wait for the storm to, to pass. This distancing from anything political is accepted and even encouraged by authorities, who are suspicious of both pro-Kremlin and anti-Kremlin activists.

For example, in their recruitment strategy, Russian armed forces emphasize high wages and social status rather than patriotic duty. They do not rely on mobilizing the population for patriotic reasons. So a little side note, if tomorrow the Kremlin decided to mobilize its population, both politically and militarily, for a larger armed conflict, it would be a complete reversal of the social contract established during the last two decades.

In Ukraine, the relationship of citizens to the state has followed a different path, not towards alienation, but towards a quite unexpected appropriation of the state by Ukrainians. Mistrust of state institutions reached its peak just before the armed conflict began in 2014. The main motivation actually for the collective protest that the Ukrainians called the Revolution of Dignity in 2013, 2014, was precisely the rejected, the rejection of the the acting president as the face of a corrupt state system.

The revolution created expectations. The revolution won and created expectations, but the trigger of the change of the relationship was in the, with the state was not that much the revolution, but rather the threat of a Russian invasion, combined with the perception of their state as weak and unable to respond.

The annexation of Crimea was unambiguously interpreted in Ukraine as an armed attack by Russia against their state sovereignty, and the Donbas insurrections were seen as a covert invasion of the country. It was not exactly the case in our societies, but for Ukrainians loyal to Kyiv, it was clearly the case.

As I argue elsewhere in a short book I published, ordinary Ukrainians anticipated that neither their armed forces nor their political authorities, weakened by a, a recent change of power after the revolution, would be able to respond to a, a Russian armed aggression. At that moment, some foreign analysts anticipated the collapse of the Ukrainian state.

I would argue that what reversed this dynamic was the shock of seeing your country invaded. While in Russia the perception of a strong state had a, a demobilizing effect, for Ukrainians, the perception of state weakness encouraged people to mobilize because they knew their state couldn't handle it alone.

In the interviews I conducted over the years with Ukrainian civilians who took up arms in 2014 to defend their country, they stressed this very clearly one of my respondents would tell me, "I didn't take up arms to fight for my state, but to fight for my country." But in the same interview, he would explain me that the state needed his support, and that nobody other that engaged civilians could be the state strong enough to resist Russia.

In the years 2014 from 2022, the war was a powerful driver of bottom-up reforms of the state. The war in the Donbas this, in these years saw a massive engagement of civilians wherever the state was expected to fail. So you had civilians who joined the armed forces, even if they had no military experience. You had small initiative groups organized to provide equipment, food, support to the military, nonprofits devoted to medical medical crews for the frontline, veteran support organizations, groups that lobbied for reforms of the military and for reform of the state, et cetera, et cetera.

So you had military-focused reforms, extremely important during these years, but it went much further. Anti-corruption social movements and the creation of high-quality media outlets were also byproducts of the wartime social mobilization. And the interesting thing is that this, the handling of certain state functions and military functions by civil society actors gradually evolved into a closer relationship with state institutions, between state institutions and activists.

Former civic volunteers frequently entered into close cooperation with or even joined ministries and state institutions to consolidate the the very changes they were fighting for. So when the Russian full-scale invasion began in February 2022, the relationship of Ukrainian citizens with the state was very different from what it was in 2014, and I think Russians did not anticipate that.

While still suspicions, the suspicion of the of the political class still remained, institutions like the army or, for example, the local authority had been, had gained significant trust. One young officer confessed to me in 2023, "The state has become closer to us." He had been among the first civilians who head to the front line in 2014, and, and he had remained a highly visible activist in the subsequent years.

But immediately after saying that the state has become closer to to him, he added, "But that doesn't rule out certain nuances." And by nuances, he meant deficiencies of the state. And I think the very substance of the Ukrainian relationship with the state lies within this term of nuances. Ukrainian citizens today clearly support and assist public institutions, but it's a form of critical appropriation of the state.

It involves close scrutiny of mistakes, failures, and malfunctions. Another of my contact also an officer in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, told me recently, "We have to be there to watch out and help because we know there is always a chance the state screws things up." And Ukrainians cannot afford today their state to fail.

This model of citizenship is crucial to understand for anyone considering peace negotiations in post-war societies. Ukraine is only as strong as its civil society allows it to be, and nothing can be decided in this country today without the backing of the civil society.

The third and last dimension I would like to address is the evolution of the relationship between Russian and Ukrainian societies at the level of ordinary perceptions rather than

interstate relations. What Russia represents today for Ukrainians and what Ukraine represents for Russians has been profoundly transformed by the conflict.

When I look back today at comparative polls that were conducted by both Ukrainian and Russian research institutions on mutual perceptions of the two populations, it is striking to see the strong sympathy between Russians and Ukrainians. Something that actually President Zelenskyy mentioned in his letter yesterday addressed to President Putin, this past sympathy between the two societies. When we, when you look at the data prior to the war in 2013, around 70% of Russians and 80% of Ukrainians claimed their sympathy for the other side. However, what we have observed during this 12 years of confrontation should make us very cautious about how we interpret and define this term of sympathy.

During the Soviet period, the relationship between the peoples of the USSR was described in terms of a brotherhood of nations. I'm sure most of you have heard these terms. But this brotherhood was already explicitly unequal. The elder brother, Russia, was positioned to impose its destiny onto the younger brothers', younger brothers' supposedly lesser nations. Behind the formal equality of all citizens and territories in the Soviet Union, a logic of domination and control exercised by Moscow over its peripheries operated throughout the 20th century.

Today, Ukrainians describe this past as a colonial relationship. For a long time, this was a controversial perspective. Scholars of colonialism working on other parts of the world had long refused to consider the Soviet Union as part of their field of study because the Soviet Union presented the face of a country with official equality between citizens, formal recognition of national identities and languages, and also explicit support for national liberation movements in other parts of the world.

However, this colonial prism on the past is made all the more convincing by the actions, Russian actions today, with Russian political elites now openly denying the very existence of Ukraine. Today's war is seen by Ukrainians, but also by many prominent scholars such as, for example, Timothy Snyder, as a colonial war.

In support of this vision, we have seen actually inside Russia, national minorities-- well, not exactly inside Russia, but the activists representing national minorities, Russian national minorities outside the country in exile, because of course these kind of things cannot be seen publicly in today's Russia. So these national minorities mostly express their solidarity with Ukraine, recognizing in this war, the Russian war against Ukraine, the same patterns of identity erasure they themselves have been victims of.

Inside Russia, the, any debate on its domination over the peripheries is absolutely nonexistent because logically it is deemed dangerous for the stability of the regime. An ordinary Russian today honestly struggle to understand why Ukraine rejects Russian language and culture, which Ukrainians see as weapons of domination as often in a colonial perspective.

Let me add a side note on this issue of colonial war. I often hear from, in France from political analysts in our media that all armed conflicts end with an agreement and mutual concessions. But are wars of decolonization supposed to end the same way? Is it relevant to suggest to the colonized to meet some requirements of the colonizer to give the colonizer a piece of the territory, for example? So if we adopt the colonial framework following the Ukrainians it forces us to rethink the potential conclusions of the war in entirely different terms.

One last point, and I've already been too long, on what the war does to identities. War reshapes definitely in any context the vision of oneself and the other. But history again also

plays a role in shaping the patterns that organize meanings. The history of Ukraine is complex and deeply embodied in the tragic destiny of mid-20th century Europe.

So I will give a few details that many of you of you know, but some of you maybe ignore. Historically, parts of modern-day Ukraine belong to the Russian Empire but only parts. Eastern and central Ukraine spent 70 years under the Soviet rule. But western Ukraine was incorporated in the Soviet Union for only half a century following its occupation by the USSR during World War II.

And this nuance, this difference matters to Ukrainians. Traces and scars of border changes, repression, and violence were never erased from family memories during the Soviet years. If Slava, whom I have introduced in the, at the beginning of the lecture, remembers the deportation of his grandfather to Siberia, it is because in the context of contemporary Ukraine, well, it was possible to pass down these memories through generations.

It's a painful history. Second World War in Ukraine means the Holocaust. It means the position of Ukrainians living under Polish rule, and later trapped between two aggressive powers, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. The Second World War in Ukraine, in, especially in western Ukraine, was an, a time of impossible choices and impossible collaborations, a time of violence both inflicted and experienced.

This historical complexity is completely unknown in contemporary Russia, and this we often ignore. In Russia, it is forbidden today by law to have any public discussion of cases when Russia was not on the right side of history. The Holocaust has little place in Russian history textbooks. September 1939, when the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany both invaded Poland which means a part of contemporary Ukraine for also this moment is not even part of the picture of the Second World War. The Holodomor, the artificial famine imposed on Ukraine by the Soviet authorities that took around, according to the estimation, 4 million lives is unknown to Russians. Ignoring their own dark spots makes it easier for Russians to believe that evil is only on the ukrainian side.

We can also go beyond the, this manipulation of history by the Russian, the contemporary Russian regime, and even add even more complexity to the picture. The history of 20th century Russia is that of a territory more isolated than we tend to think, and certainly more isolated from the outside world than its former peripheries. So the Soviet Union carefully managed to minimize contact between Soviet citizens and neighboring countries. Nevertheless, border populations of the Soviet Union still retained shared histories and connections across borders, such as Kazakhstanis with China, Azerbaijanis with Iran, Belarusians and Ukrainians with Poland, and Moldovans with Romania.

Soviet Russia, by contrast, had far fewer external borders, especially in its most heavily populated European territory where they had only one non-Soviet neighbor, Finland. Russia's borders were mostly with its Russified Soviet republics and not with the outside world. So as the central pivot of the Soviet system, Russia became blind to diversity, ignoring or minimizing the historical and social differences with other Soviet republics that became independent states in 1991.

So since the fall of the Soviet Union, during the Soviet Union, but also since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian population has struggled to understand what the experience of the others was and to realize how how much the identity of the neighbor states was not only post-Soviet, but also linked to other cultural and political areas.

Additionally, post-Soviet Russia struggles to define its own identity without its historical peripheries. As our historian Marlene Laruelle, well-known here in Washington DC, argues

Russia's national self-representation is inherently imperial, referring to a territory that is larger than the state's contemporary borders.

So what Ukrainians today are demanding from Russians goes far beyond simply withdrawing support from the regime or condemn the war. They're asking Russians to free them- themselves from this imperial mindset. Basically, they are calling on Russia to redefine its very identity, and this is for Ukrainians, a fundamental conditions for any future reconciliation and dialogue. But I would add it would also be a chance offered to the Russian society to finally come in terms with the burden of the imperial Soviet past, and I know I sound very optimistic here.

However, last point, despite the Ukrainians' remarkable resistance to the Russian war on meanings and representations, the Kremlin has somehow succeeded in harming Ukrainians in their identity. The Russian framing of the current war as a denial of Ukrainian sovereignty has had a double edged effect. On the one hand, the consistency of Ukrainian resistance today leaves no doubt about the existence of Ukrainian nation, making it undeniable to the international community. Ukraine has proudly earned its place on the mental maps of the world, a place it did not have before.

On the other hand, the focus on sovereignty imposed on Ukraine by the Russian war risks trapping Ukraine within the narrow category of a nation state and national identity. We see signs of that today in Ukraine in the elevated prominence of all national symbols, in references to a, a mythical past, and in the legitimization of all historical struggles for the Ukrainian nation despite their dark sides.

The very recent reburial of Andriy Melnyk, you've certainly have heard about that, one of the main mid-20th century nationalist leader with a very, yeah, the, the past that we know collaboration with Nazi Germany, and also the naming of a military unit after the Ukrainian nationalist armed group are the symptoms from my point of view of this narrowing of the historical horizon

The memory of mid-20th century nationalist movements have been the subject of numerous debates actually in Ukraine since its independence. On the one hand, these groups were seen as fighters for the liberation of Ukraine, violently repressed by the Soviet Union because of their hostility to Moscow. On the other hand, members of these same movements perpetrated violence against Poles and Jews and collaborated with the Nazis. Not all of them, but many of them.

Many societies have complex memories to deal with. In France, we are still struggling with the memory of the violence perpetrated by our soldiers during the Algerian War. My colleague and office neighbor Raphael Branche, is working on this on this topic. However, in Ukraine, the current war makes this reckoning with the past very difficult.

Contemporary Ukraine is not rehabilitating the Nazi regime, nor is it antisemitic or anti-Polish. However, the current Ukrainian resistance to Russian aggression gives renewed legitimacy to all historical struggles against Moscow. The confrontation with Russia became the core of the country's national identity.

Yet, I have to add a positive note. Encouraging news is that other historical perspectives have been developed in Ukraine, one centered on the global history of Ukraine. These are not limited to a narrow national framework, but instead encompass the incredible experiences of the diverse peoples who li- have lived on the territory of contemporary Ukraine.

Instead of a conclusion, I would like to turn once again to Slava, the Soviet officer turned Ukrainian songwriter and activist. In the last pictures, a couple of weeks ago, Slava shared on social networks he was wearing a T-shirt that read, "I am Ukrainian." I want him to be able to have the full complexity of his extraordinary destiny recognized.

His Soviet childhood in the industrial Donbas, his years of service in the Soviet Army, his past doubts and ignorance, his struggle for survival, his decision to embrace the destiny of Ukraine, and his sister's choice also to embrace Russia. Their story, like so many others, is precisely what makes up the social fabric of transformation within these Russian and Ukrainian societies at war. Thank you very much.

HILL: It's always important to have water. Thank you so much Anna. That was certainly from my perspective fabulous, and I'm sure that everybody else will agree as well. It was incredibly thoughtful, thought-provoking and you know, frankly inspiring. And the framing that you chose to begin with, Slava, obviously a name that has a lot of evocation even in our sayings today about Slava Ukraini and thinking about the meaning of that name in the Ukrainian and the Russian context. I mean, people's names sometimes also bear all of that complexity of their heritage. But I thought that was a wonderful way of bringing us back around.

And we can... I, you know, looking out here in the audience today, I can see a lot of people with all their own rich experiences and thoughts about all of this, this is one we will bring you in due course. But I'm also just delighted and honored to be the moderator for what, what I think is going to be a wonderful discussion with Ambassador Tefft. And as Suzanne noted at the very beginning Ambassador Tefft has had his own remarkable career and experiences and his own observations as somebody with a long experience, not just in Soviet era Soviet Union, but also in the post-Soviet context and also here in America as well, as someone who's seen many changes.

So Ambassador Tefft, thank you so much for joining us, and we all look forward to hear your thoughts on Anna's wonderful presentation.

TEFFT: Thank you very much, Fiona. And thanks all of you for being here today. I'm glad to be here to have been invited. Most of all, thanks to Professor Colin Lebedev for a really excellent lecture.

I mean that quite sincerely. I really found it very timely and stimulating and it took me back. Admittedly, my time in both Kyiv and in Moscow was before the launch of the major war in 2022. But I have to tell you, I found myself struck many times that some of the points you were making were actually true or emerging during my times.

I mean, and I was in Ukraine from 20-- late 2009 to 2013, and then after a year after I retired I was recalled to duty to come to Moscow from 2014 to 2017. And I found a lot of, I guess, the roots of some of these points that you made. So what I've done is made some notes and picked up on a few of the points you wanted perhaps go through some of those as a means of introduction to the broader discussion that Fiona talked about.

Certainly, the war has sharpened the differences between Russian and Ukrainian society. It's brought out new perspectives there. But I, as, as I said, I recall many of these contrasts emerging, and I'll give you a few examples as I go through. First and foremost in Ukraine is, of course, civil society.

I mean, it's just absolutely critical. And the period when I served in Moscow was when Viktor Yanukovich was the, was elected president. And what you saw then was just this enormous emergence of a real civil society. It was just one of the most rewarding things that

anyone could have imagined. And you could see this develop in the years leading up to the, the Maidan, the Revolution of Dignity. Let me keep my notes here. And what was striking is, I think you implied, was a willingness by so many parts of the civil society to challenge the Yanukovich government, to challenge the existing system.

People were disgusted, you know, all walks of life. They were disgusted with the corruption of Yanukovich, but even more broadly, with the whole kind of post-Soviet history of Ukraine. The, they were disgusted with political leaders in general, and they wanted change. And the EU, membership in the EU or associate membership as it turned out to be, was actually their way of trying to find a way to change this because they thought bringing Europe more directly inside of Ukraine would help them achieve the goals they wanted for their society.

Young people in particular were a part of this, and I traveled as much as I could when I was in Ukraine. I went to most of the major cities, and everywhere I went, I spoke at universities. My last visit to Donetsk was in May of 2013, not long before I left, and I spoke at four different universities or youth groups at that time. In every single one of them I got questions that would not have sounded unusual today in Ukraine at different universities. I assume many of those kids are long gone from Donetsk but I don't know for sure.

One of my favorite NGOs in Ukraine at this time, and in some ways kind of an example for me, was OPORA. OPORA is the group that, led by some really fearless young people, which monitored elections there, and they always called a spade a spade. They went right up against Yanukovich and the many people, not only on national elections, but on regional and city elections.

It wasn't thus a surprise to me when the Revolution of Dignity took place. Nobody could have predicted what triggered it and when it happened, but the seed ground had already been cultivated or started to be cultivated. In Moscow, by contrast, in 2015 and 2016 when I was ambassador the officers in my political section were writing cables to Washington trying to analyze the complex public reaction to the war that Putin started in 2014, and we got into a lot of the issues that you very brilliantly described.

We found apathy, we found fatalism, we found lots of cynicism but we also found this widely held belief that they were unable to do anything to achieve any significant change. And so you just went along. The, the, as you, as you phrased it, the coexistence between loyalty and discontent was ever-present.

The image I have in my mind's eye of this is really, a little Georgian restaurant across the river from where we lived in Moscow, not far from the Ukraina Hotel, and my wife and I would go there for a quiet dinner, but it was actually fascinating 'cause I could kind of get away. And I'm sure many of the people who were there recognized me from TV as the enemy of the people, as I was sometimes described.

But we were able sometimes to talk to people, and the groups in there most often there were some young people, but there were all... There were a lot of professional couples with little kids, and it was really kind of a family restaurant in that sense. And I had this sense over and over again when we went there of these two professionals with their kids trying to make a better life but not get engaged in the political to and fro that existed.

You could tell sometimes in, by overhearing conversations, political discussions, people were not happy, but they weren't gonna jeopardize their, I guess, careers. But probably the most important, they weren't gonna jeopardize the lives of their kids as they went forward, and that was really a driving factor. We usually found these Russian families when we were talking to them, and they had to be careful, of course, even in those days. The repression

wasn't as bad as it is now. But we found them both not happy with what was going on, but not willing to rock the boat.

I thought your comments, I thought your comments about strong creative innovation at the heart of Ukraine's art of adaptation was really well, well taken. I agree with you that the resilience or the word resilience as most of us understand it, doesn't really cover the reality of what Ukraine has achieved.

When I was in Ukraine, I would occasionally go out to visit the Kyiv Polytechnic University, which was named after Igor Sikorsky, the, of course, the founder or the inventor of the helicopter. The rector at that time was a man named Mykhailo Zgurovskyi. He was really a brilliant man. He was the head of the university from 1992 until 2024.

He was a brilliant organizer. He ran his institution with skill and real foresight. He recruited the best and brightest from all over Ukraine. He educated them well and ensured that many of these students went to the US and European institutions or businesses for further training. He placed many students in Silicon Valley firms, and I'm thinking similar types of situations in Europe.

Today, whenever I read about some new innovation in Ukraine, whether it's on the battlefield or in civilian life, I think of Rector Zgurovskyi and his students. Native ability, intellectual brilliance, but also a drive and a determination that clearly has served Ukraine well. It is, as Professor Colin Lebedev have said, a bottom-up process of adaptation, and they're really aggressive in trying to do that.

I thought your discussion of the deconstructed brotherhood was also quite well done. The diverging sense of national identities has really only been exacerbated since 2022. But here again, I find some roots back even in my days in Moscow. I arrived on September 5th, 2014, the day the first Minsk Agreement was signed.

And from the start, the emerging contrasts during my tenure, three years in Moscow really came through quite clearly. I'd retired, as I mentioned before, in 2013 from the foreign service after I'd completed my time in Kyiv, and I worked for the RAND Corporation for a year before being recalled to go back to Moscow. I made my initial calls in Moscow in the fall of 2014, and I was struck over and over again... this is people in government, but people outside of government, in civil society, in, in universities. I was struck over and over again by the lack of any appreciation how, of how Ukraine had changed in the years since the end of the Soviet Union.

At first, I wondered whether I was just getting the propaganda line designed for the ears of an American ambassador, but my staff told me that was genuinely what people believed. Even Russians who had access to Western media and should have had a sophisticated appreciation of Ukrainian society didn't. Most Russians in and out of government thought that Ukrainians, especially all the Russian speakers in Ukraine, wanted to be a part of Russia. You know, it's Putin's line, and it's just not true.

I can give you lots of examples. I'm sure you know that as well. The Russians applauded the annexation of Crimea. It was genuinely popular, even with people who were critical of Putin and a lot of the things he did as the president. They thought it was really only a matter of time before the Donbas would come under Russian control.

I told my interlocutors that their view of Ukraine was not the reality that I had found during my service there. I'd been there traveling around Ukraine. I'd been in Donetsk and Luhansk and Kherson shortly before I left and as well as Kharkiv and and Dnipro. And I, as I, I mentioned

that when I'd go to the universities, and I'd say, "You know, this isn't the kind of reality that people there describe for what I was doing."

The vast majority of the people in Ukraine, even in the east, they wanted to be part of Ukraine. Even in Crimea, my experience in polls back in that period when I was in Ukraine showed a popular desire to remain an autonomous oblast of Ukraine, not an independent country or associated with Russia. And usually, the Russians would counter my arguments with by falling back on the old tropes about Bandera and the nationalist movements with ties with the Nazis, the kind of thing we still hear today.

Over and over again, Russians in and out of government contended that the U.S. and Europe were not just providing assistance-- sorry, I'm almost done-- not only providing assistance to civil society, but we were actually calling the shots. We were giving directions to Ukrainians, particularly during the Revolution of Dignity. Putin, of course, was famous for making this point public a lot of the time. Just as in the revolutionary movements in East Central Europe in the late '80s and '90s, the Russians simply could not comprehend or want to comprehend that genuine popular movements for change could come from below.

The contrast was stunning. So I think your... the line in your speech, in your lecture is so true. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian population has struggled to understand what the experience of others is and to realize how much the identity of their neighbors is not only post-Soviet, but also linked to other cultural and political areas, and certainly Ukraine is the best example of that.

Russia, in my... in contrast, seemed in so many ways not to emerge with a post-Soviet identity. My time as a, as deputy ambassador, as DCM in Moscow in the late '90s, coincided with Yeltsin's attempt to bring some measure of greater democracy and freedom to Russia. By the time I returned as ambassador 15 years later, that had all been swept aside and Putin's government was hard at work resurrecting the Russian Empire. The collision with a Ukraine determined to be a part of Europe and enjoy the benefits of European freedoms was stark, and at that time seeming to me inevitable. I'll stop. Fiona.

HILL: Thank you so much, John. That's I mean, a great, I think, start to a conversation that I'd at least have liked to have for the next, you know, five or so minutes before we bring in the audience.

And I'm sure that many people are also reflecting on the parallels of your descriptions of Russia and Ukraine with many other countries and difficult points in which, you know, they find themselves. And, you know, I think that the depth of your understanding of how much Ukraine has changed and Ambassador Tefft's comments on, you know, the inability that he also observed in Russia and in Moscow of kind of seeing that change in Ukraine and being able to fully appreciate it, has also spilled over, frankly, into the way that everyone outside of this conflict thinks that it ought to be resolved.

And you touched upon that at the very end about, you know, is it really, you know, the case that if you look at it through this prism of a colonial war or post-colonial war that you know, the, the country that has been attacked and invaded Ukraine should be forced to give up a piece of itself. I immediately thought, of course, of Ireland.

You know, I'm from the UK originally, and I mean, I think that would be the Irish saying, "Well, hang on a second." You know, after our uprising, you know, in 19, you know, 16 and onwards in fact, that solution was found in terms of Northern Ireland being separated off because Northern Ireland's very like the Donbas in many respects, and that comparison's been made quite frequently, Belfast being very similar to Donetsk. You know, some of it was created as a major industrial hub and had very close ties with, you know, the the rest of the

empire. Remember, Britain is still an empire in many respects, even if it, you know, may not present itself as one today. And that partition, you know, has obviously persisted, and there's been efforts to overcome it, but we still have it, you know, more than 100 years on.

And I just kind of wonder, you know, if you can unpack a little bit further, not just that thoughts about, and Ambassador Tefft as well, about the way that we've approached thinking about this conflict from the outside. But also, I think you put a very important emphasis on the way that people who live within a weak state or a state that has always been traditionally weak and has not been centralized.

I mean, Ukraine is described in many different ways, and you've touched upon many of it as well. A colony, you know, more recently. The Cossack state that people think of as one of been described as freebooters or people who've tried to escape, you know, the clutches of the empire. It's always been the periphery, the contested area, the area where people have tried to do their own thing, the frontier in a, you know, way that many Americans and others would recognize as well.

More recently, it's also been thought of as a crowdsourced state. That's kind of come out in the literature of everybody pitching in during the wars, you've said. Another colleague the other day described it to me as a startup state, and yet, you know, it's been a, a recognized state for more than 30 years. It's not really a startup, you know, at this point, but that's the kind of approach that's been taken.

But I think you-- as you've brought up brilliantly, that the idea of Ukrainians is we-- you know, the state can fail and the state will, like, screw up. It's-- the state is different from the country, and it's different from the place, it's different from the identity, it's different from my home. While here in, you know, America and Russia and other places, and France, we tend to think the state and the country are one and the same, and the place and the state are one and the same. And you have presidents that, you know, you have a hierarchical power vertical that kind of goes down in many respects, even though the reality is very different.

So, I mean, how do you think that difference, that fundamental, really important difference within Ukraine, the way Ukrainians think about the state and them and their role in it has made you know, our approach from the outside more complicated in dealing with this conflict? And Ambassador Tefft, you have thoughts on this as well, I'm sure.

Thank you, Anna, again.

COLIN LEBEDEV: Thank you very much. Thank you, ambassador, for your remarks also. Yes, we find them... I think it's a, it's good news for me that your experience from the years before the, the armed conflict are in line with what I described, because this point on the historical, history that was already there to shape contemporary evolutions is important from my point of view.

Yes, I think we have been ignorant of many things with regards to Ukraine because most of our countries adopted the Russian view on its peripheries, and it's still very much the case. I guess what we have today is that Ukraine reappeared on the world map, on the in the perceptions of as, as an entity in the perceptions of, of people or, and analysts in other countries.

But let's think, for example, about Belarus. I actually I've been working in Belarus for a couple of years for the French, for the French embassy and it was striking to me how actually different from Russia Belarusian society was, despite the parallel where there were, with, between two authoritarian regimes. But when we-- if I ask people in this audience, well, maybe not in this audience, but in the general audience about how is Belarus different from

Russia not much people would be able to answer this question, right? We consider because we, not because-- well, partly because we're not interested in Belarus, and this is a, a problem that we have, of course, in academia and in, in scholarship, in, in general. But also because I think we still see some of these countries from the point of view of Russia that wants us to see them as similar to Russia.

Russia wanted us to see Ukraine as similar to itself. Russia was perceiving itself, Ukraine as similar, and this is why the anticipation of the, the reaction of the Ukraine society was so bad actually in Russia, since you can see, if you consider that this society is your society, that they react exactly the same way that you would react, well, you cannot anticipate the difference.

So I think what we need to do with with the help of Ukrainians, but also by ourselves, is to de-center our view on these post-Soviet countries, each one of them. Consider them not only as the periphery of Russia, but of, as a center of a different geographical, cultural political area. And I think it would be yeah, it would be very helpful actually in anticipating some revolutions in these countries.

To get back, Fiona, to your remark about this the state and the weak, the weak state, sure, I think what is interesting here is two things. The first is that we usually consider that the strength of the state is a precondition of its ability to defend itself and to resist an armed occupation. We usually, yes, this is how we shape our anticipation of reaction. And I remember very well these first days of Feb-- well, last days of February, first days of March 2022 when everybody was expecting Ukraine to fail, not only because its army was not as strong as Russia's army, not only because Russia was perceived as powerful, but also because, well, people knew that it would not-- it was not as strong at this was as, as, as Russia was expected expected to be.

And actually, the resources that weakness gives society is a wonderful lesson from from Ukraine, and also, I would say, a wonderful lesson for our societies. And coming from France, you know, in France, people always complain. And people always complain about, well, the deficiencies of their state.

The state is unable to do this, and the state is unable to do that, and if we are attacked, we will not be able to respond. Actually ignoring the resources that are here dormant inside the societies. So what we have to think about is the way in which a society activates its resources or not.

And the or not is very important here because actually what we see from the point of view of Russia, well, inside Russia, is that the state has been using its military, political, economical resources, but was absolutely, and still is absolutely unable to activate the resources inside the society.

And maybe is afraid and this was one of my points, to activate the resources inside the inside Russian society that it could not control. Ukrainians did not have the choice, the, the Ukrainian state did not have the choice. If the state did not allow Ukrainians, for example, to engage in armed battalions that were created and, well, not exactly outside, outside the the regular armed forces, but let's say autonomous from the the Ukrainian armed forces, it was not, if it was not allowed by the state in 2014 the resistance would have been impossible.

If the initiative was not allowed today, the resistance would be very difficult. If the state-- I always do, I do a lot of interviews with people who are in between civilian and military activities. For example, people who would work on these defense technologies, drones, but not only drones. Ukrainians say that drones is already yesterday. We're into something else. For us it's, for some of us it's still tomorrow, but for them it's already yesterday. But all, you

know, not only military technologies, but for example strategies of military training medical supplies and medical procedures. You have a lot of actors in today's Ukraine who are working on this from the civil, the civil society, and make it possible by interacting on a permanent basis with the military units, for example. You have these civilians going into the military units because they have something to test, and they need to hear from soldiers what is needed, what does work, what does not work.

I think in regular, like in armed forces of a strong state It would be not that easy just to get into a military user. You need to give them an equipment and tell, "Okay, let's test it for for you. And if it's okay, this is an alpha version, I will give you the beta version after that." Ukraine does not have a choice but to allow this because this is the condition of its of the innovation. And at the same time, well, it creates an absolutely different model of interaction between state institutions, military institutions, and the society. And what actually we see emerging in Ukraine is a very interesting model of citizenship.

When we think about citizenship in our countries, it's often to stress on, you know, like voting, the electoral rights, maybe participation in the NGOs, but it still remains very limited. Ukrainians actually re-question what being a citizen of a society means. And from their point of view, for example, in this war their role as citizens of their society is to find a correct way to be involved in defense activities. Which is not necessarily just, you know, going into the armed forces or or supporting the armed forces by giving money, but many other creative ways which is definitely an asset for for Ukraine and for the Ukrainian armed forces, but it's also a challenge.

It's also a challenge because the citizens who have an, a very active perception of what their place in their state is, are also well, very, let's say they they consider that they have their word to say on many things, and the conduct of the war is a, is too important a topic to be left to the politicians and the armed forces.

So it's also a, it's also a challenge, and I think in the conditions of the war that we experience right now it's important to look at Ukraine and see what we can learn from them in terms of participation of civilians in the conduct of the armed conflict.

HILL: I think this is a absolutely brilliant point, and I just wanna make a quick remark and then ask Ambassador Tefft if he wants to make an observation on, you know, exactly why we're failing to, you know, find the right formula to actually address this.

I think you've actually laid it out completely 'cause we have one, you know, sort of thinking about the proper role of the state and politicians or not politicians sometimes in, you know, the the addressing of these issues, and something else that has emerged really quite remarkably. And it isn't unique in Ukraine, although it seems unique in this context because it's something that Finland, you know, developed. I know it probably wouldn't be particularly popular to say at times, but it's the Israeli view of how society, you know, has to be involved in the state. It's increasingly the case in the Baltic states, in places like Latvia. Poland has taken on this whole issue now.

And to be frank, it was the, also the case in the United Kingdom. I was involved in the Strategic Defense Review of the UK last year and was really worried that the UK had lost this sense of societal participation that it actually had in spades in World War I, and again in World War II, and again during the Cold War, where, in fact, there were so many volunteer associations that were so heavily involved in mobilizing the society that, you know, it was also a case of nobody was relying on the state. Now everything was on the state.

And frankly, in many respects, Europeans, in the context of NATO, have done exactly the same with the United States, whether we like to admit it or not in terms of relying on the

United States to always provide the goods, the leadership. And the United States has played that kind of role of the strong state in many respects without you know, Europeans acting as they should have done like, more like Ukrainians in, you know, a context of extreme situations.

But Ambassador Tefft, if you'd like to make some comments, and then I would like people to start thinking about a question, please rather than, you know, what I've just done, which is a massive intervention instead of a question.

TEFFT: Thanks. Yeah. I'd just make one, one point which Anna kind of reminded me of. One of the, I hesitate to use the word silver lining to this horrible war, has been the reversal of press and media coverage of Russia and Ukraine, at least in the United States.

When I was ambassador in Georgia in 2008 when Russia invaded, it drove the Georgians crazy that all the accounts that Americans were getting of the war were usually filtered through Moscow because there were no Western correspondents, certainly at the beginning of the war and during the crisis. As time went by, some of the bigger media outlets came in with journalists and got a little bit more balance.

Well, that dominance of Russian media in terms of feeding stories to people in our country about what happens, and they do it in a very sophisticated and sly way, you know, giving journalists select special briefings and things like that. Now we have a situation, and have had during the war, where the Western journalists, most of them are out and won't go back because they don't wanna be in the same situation as Mr. Gershovich and others. And we have lots of coverage in Ukraine. New York Times has a regular correspondent there. Others go in. So Americans have a much better, I think, sense of Ukraine now than they ever did before, and probably less coverage of kind of the granularity in, in, in Moscow, which isn't necessarily good because it would be nice to have more. And perhaps in France and other European countries, people are able to do that.

But what it's led to, I think, is a... You have this kind of, "Oh my God," reaction when Russia invades in 2022 and the Ukrainians stop them. Not only, at least from what I read in the newspapers, I was out of government by this point, the intelligence community was surprised. Most observers were surprised that the Ukrainians were able to do this, and I know it was a near-run thing. I've read some of the accounts in the paper. But I think it surprised everybody. And a lot of Americans that I talk to are really surprised how good the Ukrainians are with drones, and I thought your comment about you know, the, the drones are just an old issue now. We're working on other things now self-propelled vehicles and weapons and all of the rest of it.

You know, we need to take greater cognizance of that, and I think they're starting to do that now, but we're behind when it comes to that, fighting that kind of warfare. My own sense is that I think Americans, Congress, and others are understanding the nature of the war and the nature of these two societies better.

Now, some may disagree with me on that. Without getting into politics here, I'll just say I think the president still hasn't come to that point or some of his people haven't. But I think, The overwhelming number of people, and one of the votes this morning in the Senate in the early hours to, to give eight billion dollars to the Ukrainians, I think is testimony to that, that fact.

Now, whether we get to the point at some point here, whether President Putin would even be willing to entertain President Zelenskyy's offer of meeting in a neutral site to talk about stopping the war and talking about a solution, I don't know. But I think slowly but surely we're getting a better and broader understanding of the, what the realities are here.

And I say that not just for people in this town, but I come from the Midwest and I talk to people out in Kansas and Wisconsin, admittedly people who care about foreign affairs and the world that we live in. But people are understanding, I think, what I would consider the realities.

HILL: No, well, thank you very much. I'd like to just, I'm afraid I've only got time. Oh, actually I'm getting told I've only got time for one, not two. Okay, I'm gonna make it two. Sorry. I mean, I'll make quick questions. So if two people can quickly compose themselves, the gentleman at the back and the lady here first of all, and then we'll come back to Anna and John.

Thank you. Yeah.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Thank you very much. Yeah, you can hear me. [speaks in French] Sorry. Thank you very much for your presentation. You know, I have a question. I think Francophone academia kind of avoids the question of the common responsibility of Russians, but today you alluded to it. And also, I remember I read your book, "Jamais frères" and you also kind of allude to the common responsibility of Russians in this war. Would you say that right now is the time to say that, you know, this invisibility of Russians to avoid the war, is it really a common responsibility of all Russians? So this is my question.

Also, I had a question concerning Ksenia Fedorova and all, all the debacle that is happening in France right now. And could you address that the fifth column, Russian fifth column actually exists in France right now, even after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine? Thank you.

HILL: Thanks. You might have almost taken the second question away, I think. I'm sorry to the the other people who wanted to... Yeah, I want to listen to the question and try to do it very quickly.

That's why I, I apolog-- can we do that? Yeah. Thank you. And then 'cause unfortunately we do have to wrap up at eleven thirty. Yeah, thank you.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Thanks very much. I'm Amy Stambach, visiting scholar at American University and at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Just a quick question. This idea of colonization and territory, it seems to be contingent upon something larger. The Northern Ireland case is one, but think of the entire colonial territories of Africa, which did, you know, were ceded were returned or were not taken. So I just wonder what is the sort of meta issue to that to that issue about territory and colonization. Thank you.

HILL: Thank you. So Anna, over to you.

COLIN LEBEDEV: I'll try to be as brief as possible on these great questions. Unfortunately, the question of responsibility is not ours to answer as academics, right? What is our... What I try to do in my research is to unpack the mechanisms and understand the reactions, the, in, what are they based on and what can we can anticipate for, for the future. But definitely the path is very long actually for Russians to understand they what they actually doing and what is their part of responsibility in this war. You do have this discussion, though, in the in the intellectual circles outside Russia, but mostly let's say the, the topic is too painful for the Russians to address so far. And when somebody stresses out their responsibility collective and individual in, in, in what happened, well, it's a really painful painful topic.

The question about Ksenia further, I think nobody's not aware -- everybody's not aware about what we're talking about. We have a, a journalist, a Russian journalist actually, head of a journalist, a person presenting herself as a journalist who was the head of Russia Today TV channel in France, closed by the French authorities and now working on, in another

French, French media and let's say, yeah, transmitting a vision of an analysis that is very much shaped by the Russian official position.

I think if... Thank you for your question. We need to address the vulnerability of our media, not only to Russian discourse, it's still there, but actually the kind of vulnerability that is a little bit different. We need what... And this is what you said, ambassador. We need news from Russia. We need a coverage of Russia. We need understanding and unpacking. And unfortunately, due to conditions like the access to, of journalists to, to the country and access of scholars to the country, we cannot do that anymore. So we have to find other ways because if we don't, this space is actually occupied by people who are there to promote the Russian discourse because there is a, there's an interest of the public. I think it's the case in the United States probably, but it's very important in France.

And yes, of course. I think this this issue of how do we get actually the problematic of a colonial war in the strategic debate has not been addressed at all actually. We we have talked a lot about territories, Donbas territories negotiations, but not that much about the nature of the war except for telling that it was a, it was an armed aggression, which is... which doesn't tell us anything actually. And comparison should be should be there with this, these different cases. So, yeah I would definitely follow you on the, the need to to also integrate this in our reflection.

HILL: Well, thank you very much. I mean, you've obviously given us so much food for thought out of this, so many questions.

I'm sorry that we couldn't get to all of them. But I would commend all of you to Anna Colin Lebedev work. It's not all in French but there's all, remember there are some great translation devices these days. And for those of us who like to practice our French, which I include myself in please, you know, do turn to her work for further enlightenment.

We will also be publishing on our website the full version of her speech. And as you can see, I've been writing and reflecting on it. I've read it three times now, including on the Metro this morning because it's so good, and it's given me plenty of pause for thought myself on my own work.

And she's really extraordinarily good at sharpening definitions and at giving us new conceptual frameworks. And Ambassador Teff, thank you so much for joining us. I mean, we're all so grateful, and thank you for your service to United States diplomacy for a few decades at least. I don't want to, you know, say exact-- I know it's a long time. But and we've been extraordinarily grateful that you've come back many times to serve even when you had ostensibly tried to leave the scene, you know, to go back to the Midwest and to some of the other places that you have great affection for.

This has been a great discussion, and thank you so much, and I hope that you'll join us again for the 22nd Aron Lecture. And so thank you so much to our colleagues from the French Foreign Ministry and from the embassy to continuing. I do hope we're going into the 22nd year. Yes. And you know, we look forward to the next iteration. But, Anne, thank you so much again. Thank you.

Speaker 8: Thank you.