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QI Panel:

Two Years On: What is the Path Forward in Ukraine?

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Kelley Beaucar Vlahos

Good morning. Welcome. My name is Kelley Vlahos and I am a senior advisor at the Quincy Institute and editorial director of our online magazine Responsible Statecraft. I am very honored today to be moderating this important panel event commemorating the two year marker of the Russian invasion and ensuing war and Ukraine. We are very lucky to have with us here Quincies senior experts on Russia and grand strategy Anatol Lieven, and George Beebe to talk in part about their new brief, the diplomatic path to secure Ukraine and Catholic University's top scholar on modern US Russia relations, Michael Kimmage will help flesh out and press them both on key assertions and their brand new paper. Moreover, our scholars will talk about the existing points of tension in the debate over the Ukraine war today. Is Russia winning. Is it an ongoing threat to Ukraine's neighbors? Are the two sides ready to talk has the West discouraged talks and therefore encouraged Kyiv to fight a war it ultimately can't win? Most importantly, what will Europe's security landscape look like after the war? How will Russia fit into that matrix? Is it ready to negotiate and who ultimately will decide where all the pieces fit? The experts here with me now have nearly a century of combined experience in government, academia, research and writing on Russia, Ukraine, and the geopolitics undergirding this critical subject, which is not only vexing the world, but polarizing it as well. They might not agree on the issues before us today or all of them, but they lend wisdom and insights not only into the existing situational dynamics past and present, but on how this world will end. This promises, I believe, to be a stimulating conversation that might be more illuminating in the end that you might have even anticipated.

With that teaser let me introduce our panelist a little bit more formally. Michael Kimmage, Michael is a professor of history and department chair at the Catholic University of America and senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. From 2014 to 2017, he served on the Secretary's policy planning staff at the US Department of State, where he held the Russia Ukraine portfolio. He publishes widely on internal affairs, international affairs, rather us Russia relations, and American diplomatic history. He has a new book coming out this month on the anniversary of the war February 24th, which is just in a few more days, called The Origins of the War in Ukraine and the New Global Instability. You can find out more about the book and preorder that via the Oxford University Press website. Next we have George Beebe. George is director of the grand strategy program here at the Quincy Institute. He spent more than two decades in government as an intelligence analyst, diplomat and policy adviser, including as director of the CIA's Russia analysis division, and as a staff advisor on Russia matters to Vice President Dick Cheney. His book The Russia Trap: How Our Shadow War with Russia Could Spiral Into Nuclear Catastrophe was published in 2019 and warned how the US and Russia

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could stumble into a dangerous military confrontation. And last but not least, Anatol Lieven is director of the Eurasia program here at the Quincy Institute for Responsible statecraft. He was formerly a professor at Georgetown University in Qatar, and the war Studies Department of King's College London, from 1985 to 1998. Leave and worked as a journalist in South Asia, the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and covered the wars in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and the southern Caucasus. Lieven is the author of several books including Chechnya, Tombstone of Russian Power, and Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry. So there's a lot of firepower on this panel, and I'm so glad that you've joined us we have a huge audience. I'm really excited. And as always, I encourage our audience members, if you have a question for our panelists, which we will try to get to each and every question as much as we can please put it down in the q&a at the at the bottom of your screen. So without further ado, I'd like to get on with the conversation. I'd like to make it conversation all as, as well. So, panelists, if if you have a two finger you want to follow up on a question, please feel free. I will recognize you I want to have a as much back and forth as we can possibly accommodate today.

So Anatol, I'd like to start with you. And I'd like to address your papers. Specifically, you and George have pointed out in your paper, the proponents of sustaining a long war between Ukraine and Russia appear to assume not only that Ukraine can sustain its fight on the battlefield, but that it can survive and even thrive as a society. While it remains at war. Many advocates of a quote unquote long war approach optimistically portray a quote fortress Ukraine, able to develop beyond the poverty and corruption that has long plagued the country, as well as join the European Union, and to share and broader European prosperity all while Russian missiles rained down and bitter battles rage along the eastern border, and quote, then you say, unfortunately, this optimistic vision is at odds with several aspects of Ukraine's reality. And it's all, can you talk a little bit about recent events on the ground, and including the fall of the eastern city of Avdiivka, and how this reality is underscoring the divergence. And these two narratives, these two competing narratives, and how you do not see as detailed in your paper a clear way through for Ukraine, other than at the negotiating table?

Anatol Lieven 7:06

Well, the fundamental reality is that Russia has more than four times Ukraine's population, especially since so many Ukrainians fled the country. And even before the war it had 14 times Ukraine's GDP, and the Russian economy has now been largely reconfigured. For the now, it is to put it mildly, very unusual in the circumstances, for a country, so outnumbered to be able to sustain itself in now, of course, at the started where Ukraine was able to do so because Russia did not mobilize, and the Russians also made a series of extraordinary, stupid mistakes. But that just ceased to be the case. Ukraine has also, of course, the state itself, with a very large amounts of Western military and economic aid, it is, in fact, wholly dependent to say by now. Well, two things one, as unfortunately, we now see, this aid cannot be guaranteed, in the long, how much one might wish this were true. I mean, if you look at what's happening in the US Congress, if you look at public opinion polls in Europe, nobody can credibly make this this promise for years and years to come. And we have to sustain Ukraine for years and years to come If this war continues. The other point is that, although we have given them and give

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Ukraine weapons, we have not been able to give them as yet, nearly enough munitions shelves to sustain their sight. Russia is firing vastly greater ammunition on the battlefield than Ukraine. But above all, what we cannot do, unless we send our own troops to Ukraine, which every Western government has promised not to do. We cannot give Ukraine more troops, more soldiers to use those weapons. And so many reports from the battlefield by Western journalist ones who by the way, are completely supportive of Ukraine. Quoting Ukrainian soldiers are have now in recent weeks and months, referred constantly to the fact that Ukraine just does not have enough soldiers. And also, as we've seen attempts, as advocated, notably by the now dismissed Ukrainian military chief General solutioning, greatly to tighten Ukrainian conscription. These attempts have met huge resistance in Ukrainian society and the Ukrainian parliament. So all of these factors really to me indicates that time is not on Ukraine side. And time may, in fact, on the battlefield be much shorter than is widely realized. That at least is George and I's assessment of the,, of the military balance.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 10:24

George, did you want to add to that before I go on to Michael?

George Beebe 10:29

Well, I would simply underscore that the fall of the city of Avdiivka, this just this past weekend, really is indicative, I think of a changing correlation on the battlefield. Now prior to that, I think one could reasonably make the argument that the battle lines had stabilized there was a stalemate, the Russians had not really gained a lot over the past year, I thought that that picture on the map was misleading than in fact that Russia made considerable progress in exhausting Ukraine's manpower in draining the west of the supplies needed to keep Ukraine fighting, and that eventually that would be manifested on the battlefield. Well, I think we're now starting to see that manifested on the battlefield. This is a significant Russian victory. And the challenge that Ukraine is going to be facing is not to make sure that the momentum does not built on the Russian side that the fall of FDF good does not lead to even more losses down the road, which not only have a material effect on the Ukrainian side in this war, but perhaps even more importantly, a psychological effect that that undermines morale, its ability to continue sending fighters into the battle.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 11:54

So Michael at the end of January, which was not very long ago, Victoria Nuland and James O'Brien, the Acting Deputy Secretary of State and Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, respectfully traveled to Kiev. Upon their departure, Nuland said, "I leave Kiev tonight more encouraged about the unity and the result about 2024 and its absolute strategic importance for Ukraine. I also leave more confident that, she continued, as Ukraine strength is his defenses, Mr. Putin is going to be in for some nice surprises on the battlefield, and Ukraine will make some very strong success. Meanwhile, at a talk at the German Marshall Fund recently, O'Brien expressed his optimism about the future for Ukraine, saying 'We believe Ukraine will be stronger by the end of 2024, and in a better position to determine its future.' So

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these are two top officials representing the United States government and Ukraine and in Europe, what do you make about their comments? Can there be some truth to the Ukrainian army turning things around? And quote unquote, surprising Russians? If not, is this constructive talk, even if it's for political consumption, and to keep up the spirits of the Ukrainian people? And I guess, how do you square that with the assessment that George and Anatol have made in their paper, and just now here in their talk?

Michael Kimmage 13:24

So first of all, thank you for the invitation from Quincy Institute to appear at this event. And thanks very much to Anatole and George for their stimulating, and I think very timely paper doing what I think difficult to do, in a sense to offer suggestions and proposals, you know, as opposed to just a pure assessment of the situation, or recommendations that the status quo be continued? Is, is a challenge. And it's it's a service to all of us, we're trying to think about this war. So first and foremost, thanks to George and, Anatole, for, for guiding the conversation in in this way. Not to go back to Kelly to your question. I mean, I think the State Department, if you look at the different areas of American government of the American government State Department tends to be on the most. How does one put in sort of optimistic side in terms of its rhetoric, and for the first year of the war, that didn't accord so badly with reality, but in more recent months, it looks out of sync? You know, I think the Pentagon and the White House are often a bit different. And you've heard some more silver notes from those quarters in in recent months. But, you know, the State Department is most likely to get ahead of its skis in terms of these predictions for for 2024. And that's for many of the reasons that Anatole and George just described a number of maybe short to medium term advantages that Russia has and the enormous challenge that Ukraine faces in prosecuting a war against an adversary like a like Russia.

So, you know, granting that what George and Anatol said a moment ago is persuasive, and, and very ominous in terms of what it bodes, I will offer two qualifications at the moment, and we can revisit them later if Georgia and Anatol wish, and one is the naval side of the war, which is a very, very surprising series of developments, because Ukraine's Navy was putting it politely modest in 2022. And it remains modest. But you've seen some pretty substantial Ukrainian victories over the last couple of months in the Black Sea that's enabled Ukraine to export more of its grain than it was able to a year ago. And in some respects, this is not just a headache for Russia, it's been something of a strategic setback that Crimea is becoming less and less of a viable military asset for Russia. Right. And so that goes, you know, that's not going to turn the war and Ukraine's favor, this is not a war that's going to be won on the Black Sea. It's, it's it's a territorial war, in most of its respects, but that does tell the narrative in a somewhat different direction. And that points up some of the forms of aid that Ukraine is receiving. And I think whether the US stays on board or not, is likely to recede from it received from its from its European partners. The second point, and I think this is maybe more of a philosophical debate about what the war is, and how any side is going to prevail. I think the Russian challenge, you know, I think this is what Georgian Anatole gave us a very eloquent description of the Ukrainian challenges, but Russia has challenges too. And the Russian challenge, I think, could be stated

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as follows that after two years of war with all the advantages that Russia has, which George outlines larger population, larger economy, larger military, Russia occupies about 17% of Ukrainian territory, Russia has taken the city of Mariupol that's the kind of biggest urban victory that Russia has had, although the city is, is devastated, but Russia has not been able to hold them and they took care of someone and you know, sort of held it for a while, but then lost it but you know, sort of Kiev, Kharkiv, which is just a few dozen miles from the Russian border. And not to mention Odessa, Lviv, these are all, I think substantially out of reach for Russia, and urban warfare is unbelievably costly. So I don't see how Russia wins the war unless they can get the cities because without having the cities, you can't really change the political calculus of the war. None of that points to Ukrainian victory. But none of it points to stalemate, either. But I think that's a hurdle that unless Russia would massively mobilize or Ukrainian air defenses would, you know, sort of suddenly disintegrate, that Russia is very far from achieving? So that makes me a little bit less prone or a lot less prone to think of, you know, sort of concessions or negotiations? Because I think Ukraine has that, to his credit at the present moment, and will I think, for the duration of 2024, you know, be in possession of the cities that are currently possesses.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 17:53

Thanks, Michael. I'm going to go quickly to a viewer question because it follows up on Anna talks. First answer and it's addressed to Anatol from Joseph Bosco. He says you correctly note the disparity between Russian and Ukrainian economic and military power, especially in the troop imbalance. But if Western will were strengthened, wouldn't the addition of Western economic and military resources to Ukraine side of the ledger result and a situational change, if not dramatically? And so I'm, I'm curious to what you say if if the Congress decides to unleash more aid, billions of new dollars, in fact, would it not help Ukraine? Would it infuse the resources it needs? Or is it too late?

Anatol Lieven 18:51

I don't think it's too late. And obviously, by the way, you know, George and I support continued aid to Ukraine. We just argue that it must be linked to a negotiating strategy. The question is, Can any aid that the the the West can actually get sustain Ukraine in the long run, given this this imbalance? And if not, and if this Western aid cannot be guaranteed in the long run, then why not negotiate now, if Ukraine is likely to be in a worse position, a weaker position to negotiate a year or two years down the line? By the way, I agree with Michael and I've written this myself about, you know, urban warfare being a tremendous obstacle to the to the Russians. But that would not stop them from still taking considerable additional territory. And in the end? You know, it is, if you look at the history of the First World War, to which this war has often been compared. In the end, yes, you have the stalemate on the Western Front, but in the end, one or other army did break on the issue of Ukraine's Yes, I mean, genuine and striking successes against the Russian Black Sea Fleet. That's quite true. But as Michael said, this does not change the territorial situation on the ground. But I think as with the losses that Russia has suffered, and the setbacks it suffered over the past two years, it does two things. One is that it could incline

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Russia to a compromise peace. Now, obviously not to accept defeat in Ukraine, that's a completely different issue. But to give up, which, by the way, it may already have done the much more extensive ambitions with which Putin began the war.

But I think the other thing to be said about these Russian setbacks and very grave setbacks during the war, and the huge casualties that Russia has suffered, is that it renders the idea of a deliberate, premeditated Russian attack on NATO, frankly, absolutely ridiculous. Yes, I mean, Russia has achieved significant victories at that moment at Kharkiv and Avdiivka. But these took months, months to capture to small cities and 10s of 1000s of casualties. And yeah, I mean, if there's if Russia does not have the ability to capture Kafka the idea of, of deliberate Russian invasion of Poland becomes, frankly, absurd. So on that school, you know, we can you know, I think, afford perhaps to moderate some of the more hysterical language about the Russian threat to the west. And just as Russian setbacks could incline Russia to seek compromise peace, certainly should encourage us to have the confidence to seek to compromise peace.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 22:29

Okay, George, I'm going to go back to you and to the paper. In in your new brief, you say,

“Given Russia’s growing military advantages since that time, Moscow would almost certainly drive a harder bargain today, particularly as it relates to caps on Ukrainian military holdings. But the fundamental bargain — Ukrainian neutrality and a multilateral arms control regime in return for Ukrainian independence and a path toward economic prosperity — remains the most promising means of addressing all sides’ key interests and incentivizing mutual compliance with terms of a settlement.

Although Ukraine’s position in the war is eroding over time, both Ukraine and the West still retain leverage in attempting to advance their interests. The threat of deeper American military involvement in Ukraine — either by intervening more directly in the fighting or by providing more advanced weapons to Kyiv — is something that Moscow clearly wants to preclude. Making clear to the Kremlin that Washington might have no alternative to such involvement absent a settlement would serve as a powerful incentive for Russian compromise. In parallel, the prospect of gradually easing Western sanctions in return for progress in forging and implementing a settlement would add a sweetener for a deal.”

So can you talk a little bit about how we would get to this place? And more importantly, why now, would Russia want to engage seeing that, as you say, it is in a better patient position on the battlefield today than it has been in the last two years?

George Beebe 24:17

Well, thanks Kelley, what I would answer to that is that I think Michael has actually done a good job of laying out what kind of incentives the Russians might have for trying to find a compromise

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settlement. I think he accurately points out that capturing urban areas is extraordinarily difficult, very bloody, would be very costly in terms of men and munitions for the residents to do that, if they felt they could achieve an acceptable outcome at the negotiating table that would obviate their need for expending that kind of blood and treasure. That's something I think they would be interested in. I think there are other centers beyond those battlefield realities that also might push the Russians toward trying to find some sort of compromise settlement. Their situation vis a vis the West in Europe is not a good one. And they are headed toward a situation where Europe is in long term military confrontation, if not actively at war with Russia, on their ability to mitigate the dangers of escalation into direct warfare with NATO is not good right now, absent some sort of understanding over Ukraine and geopolitically, and the broader world chessboard, so to speak. What this invasion has done is its greatly deepened Russia's dependence on China. And although Russia is willing to live with that situation in the short term, in the long term, the prospect of a permanent Junior partnership to China is not one that's particularly attractive to Russia. So these are all incentives to try to find some sort of understanding with the West that accommodates Russia security concerns, gives it the kind of role in the world that I think they're seeking.

Now, one obstacle to that is that the Russians right now, deeply doubt that the United States and West are actually willing to engage with Russia, in that kind of discussion. In fact, I think there is something bordering on a conviction in the Kremlin that the United States simply will not engage in discussions on this terms. The question we have to ask ourselves is, what could the United States do to chip away at that perception in Moscow that we're simply not willing to engage on any kind of discussion other than the terms of Russian capitulation? Which they won't do? But but if we were hypothetically, to say, look, we're willing to talk about these issues, we do need to find a way to mitigate the dangers of direct Russian NATO conflict in Europe, we do need to find a way of securing Ukraine securing Western interests and addressing Russia's security concerns. Let's talk about how we do that. What kind of impact might that have on Russian perceptions? Would it in fact, open up possibilities for a negotiation that could stabilize this situation? It's not something we've tried, you know, we have not really engaged with Russia on those terms. Now, the Russians right now say they're willing to talk. Why are they willing to talk, in part because they think they're winning? They think they have an advantage right now. They have more cards in their hand, therefore, they're in a position where they can talk. Are they willing to talk about compromise? Not yet, I don't think they doubt we're willing to engage on those terms. But getting them to the table, I think is probably less of a problem under the current circumstances than it was when they were at a disadvantage on the battlefield.

The real question is, is the United States confident enough? To engage with the Russians out of these circumstances? Why should we do that? I think because as Anatol has pointed out, our leverage is going to diminish over time. You have to try to look into the future here. As difficult as that is as unknowable as the future really is, and make some some calculated bets. And right now, I think that Ukraine is going to be worse off six months a year from now than they are right now. Meaning that negotiation with Russia will be more difficult than than it would be now. So time is not on our side, the sooner we're able to engage with the Russians. And yes, I agree

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with Anatole on this. We're taking cards out of our hands in negotiations. If we stop aid to Ukraine, we're going to have to be in a mode of aiding and fighting on the one hand and talking at the same time.

Anatol Lieven 29:44

If I could just add, Biden officials, administration officials have said often that the US goal is just to strengthen Ukraine at the eventual negotiating table, which implies at some stage negotiations. Well, if we are correct, and actually Ukraine's hand at the negotiating table is now actually weakened, that does strongly suggest that, you know, the earlier we start talking that the better.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 30:21

So, Michael, I'd like to throw this back to you, because what George says sounds very practical and pragmatic to my ear. But there is a lot of skepticism whether you see this in the world of the commentariat, or even in our QA here, q&a here of whether Russia can be trusted, whether it wants to talk, you wrote back in November with your co author Liana Fix that any hope for negotiations right now could benefit that could benefit Ukraine is naive. Russia is not becoming more malleable or more amenable to compromise. In fact, the Kremlin's aspirations to reshape the whole international order through violent conflict may be more ambitious now than they were a year ago. So can you talk give us a little bit of what a little pushback are some contrasts of what George is setting out like, can you give us some portal flesh out a little bit of the skepticism here that we're that that I feel we need to necessarily air out on this issue of compromise?

Michael Kimmage 31:31

So you know, I'll raise three points for Anatol and George's consideration and for the consideration of our viewing audience. One, which is maybe more of a practical guide, but is is real enough, which is the stated positions of the Ukrainian state and its supporters that have up to now, which are very far from what Anatole and George would like to see them be. I know that they disagree with a lot of things that leadership in the US and elsewhere has, has said, but what do you do about these stated positions, which lead in the direction of course, there's a certain amount of muddle and confusion, but leave in the direction of Ukraine's complete territorial integrity and sovereignty, its membership in NATO, its membership in the European Union, war crimes tribunals that try those, you know, sort of Russian officers or politicians who are responsible, and then in some cases, reparations. Now, again, there might be reason to disagree with all those policy positions in the abstract, but they are there and wouldn't necessarily have to be retracted if one were to proceed along negotiations of the kind that George and Anatol proposed. So you know, that's not unusual in the history of negotiations, that positions move in that, you know, positions that are very hard at the beginning of war become different and softer. But that, to me is one consideration that, I think is, is important, more important. I mean, that, you know, negotiation is always fungible. So that I think could be done. This, I think is maybe more of an intractable intractable problem.

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I think when you look at this problem set from Ukrainian vantage point, it would be very hard to sign on to neutrality. For Ukraine, there's, of course, domestic politics, and that, in wartime, and since 2014, has been more of a pro Western kind, and then pro Russian. And, you know, I think there were in the past constituencies that favorite neutrality for Ukraine, I think they vanished with the war. And it's hard for me to imagine Ukraine, really being able to accept that they've faced, you know, war from Russia for the last 10 or so years were of a very brutal kind, in the last two years, and they would need and here's where the problem becomes kind of devilish and circular. They would need something like an Article Five commitment on the part of the US for neutrality to make sense. But in Article Five commitment from the US is the opposite of of neutrality. So how does Ukraine negotiate that if they make themselves neutral? Don't they make themselves vulnerable? And if they make themselves vulnerable? How could they sort of end the war on those terms,

And then Kelley, you know, sort of used a word that I was going to use for my, for my third point, and this is unknowable. And here, I would say that Anatol and Georgia are completely right, the US should be exploring all of Russia's positions, probably in covert private forums, where there isn't the public glare, and nobody in Washington, including the three of us should be able to say with total confidence, Russia wants this or Russia doesn't want that, you know, this should be looked into. And that's in part what diplomacy is about. And maybe we would all be surprised by a Russian willingness to compromise and find practical solutions. But I'm not sensing that at all. From what I gather of the Russian conversation in and around the Kremlin. It does feel to me that Russia entered the war with very big and rather radical ambitions. These get augmented in the fall of 2022 when Russia claims that four provinces of Ukraine are in fact Russian territory and then Russian collusion. Russia doesn't control these territories, but it lays claim to them. And I think that that set of ambitions is very much, is very much still in effect. So again, I could be wrong about that point, I agree that we should be, you know, sort of creative and an open minded, and yet the evidence of Putin's own statements and of how the Russian government frames the conflict and the aspirations that they claim to have for Ukraine and for the region, to me all points in the direction of further war, and further Russian attempts either to partition the country to eviscerate the government and give and do the kinds of things they hope to do at the beginning of the war. If that's true, you know, I think the prospects for negotiations are severely severely curtailed.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 35:48

Michael, what do you make of Putin's more recent comments where he says Russia is open to talk? I think he made these comments during the Tucker Carlson interview. I mean, is this is this some gaslighting going on? Or, I mean, does he mean it is is a signal for Washington?

Michael Kimmage 36:10

Well, not entirely. I mean, I think going back to 2014, when the US, you know, as one of its responses to the annexation of Crimea, proposed the diplomatic isolation of Russia. And then

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this is you have sort of sanctions and that effort to isolate Russia kicking it out of the G8, at the beginning of the 2022 War, that effort at isolating Russia has been much more forthright, from 2022, to the, to the present. And, you know, the climate here is certainly not one that favors any kind of contact, not to mention, negotiations and serious discussions, even contact with Russians is often problematic at this point. So that's more of, I think, a Western problem than a Russian problem to that degree, I think Putin can kind of sincerely claim that the door is open, and they'll sit down. And it's not, you know, a matter of squeamishness on the part of Russians to talk with, you know, European or US counterparts. But gaslighting there's, there's some element of that what Putin is doing is inserting himself into the electoral process here, and he's reading the tea leaves, and he sees that there are corners of the Republican Party that would be interested in other approaches than what the White House has, has pursued. This is a matter of domestic politics. And of course, you know, if you say this to an American journalist, to a degree for an American audience with Tucker Carlson, what you're trying to suggest is that there's a reasonable solution there, Biden's not taking it. So let's augment the fortunes of those politicians who might be a bit different not to mention Putin speaking to Russians themselves, and putting himself forward as a statesman and a diplomat and a man of peace, which has its own domestic purposes within Russia, so not entirely gaslighting, but definitely not something that I would take at face value

George Beebe 37:50

Yeah, I think Michael has raised some excellent points. He himself says we've sort of rhetorically painted ourselves into a corner on this, and we have to find some elegant way out of it. But he acknowledges that there are those ways you can fudge some of these things when when you need to. So I'm not going to get into that exactly. How do we fudge some of these things? Let's just agree that we can do that. The question about neutrality is an interesting one, because, you know, Michael has framed this entirely in terms of what can Ukraine accept, which is an interesting way of framing this, because, you know, to, if you want to join a club, you know, they're the members of the club are the ones that decide whether you get in, and they have the ability to say, sorry, we're not going to do it. And the applicant, of course, has to live with that. Whether whether the applicant likes it or not, is a different question now. So, you know, I think NATO and the United States are entirely within their rights to say it is not in the interest of the Alliance to admit Ukraine, as a member state in NATO at this time. Now, what does Ukraine do in response to that? Ukraine still has very urgent, very real security needs that have to be addressed. But what that does is it says, what it forces us to contend with a different question.

How can we address Ukraine's quite real security needs through some other mechanism than a military alliance, either multilateral through NATO or bilateral through the United States or Germany or Britain, etc, etc. And I don't think we've given very much thought to how we can work creatively to address Ukraine security needs through some other mechanism. NATO membership is not the only way toward that. And I do think when you look at, for example, the kinds of mechanisms that we use during the Cold War to try to mitigate the dangers of escalation of NATO Warsaw Pact confrontation, for example, their ideas there that worked fairly well during that time, that can be adapted to the circumstances we're facing today. Are they you

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know, rock solid guarantees that there's not going to be a war? No, but seldom does life offer, you know, that kind of guarantee. These are steps that could mitigate the dangers of another invasion by Russia that would not have advanced warning, things that would incentivize Russia to act in its own interests, and in so doing, assure that Ukraine is not subject to repeat invasions. So we need to do more to explore those. I think there are possibilities there that we're going to have to go down because the alternative is going to be much worse for Ukraine yet.

Anatol Lieven 41:16

May I just add a couple of things. Number one may remember that in the first month of the war, when President Zelensky made his peace proposal done, we'll get into why why that failed. But he said publicly that before the Russian invasion, he had gone to all the major NATO capitals and asked the governments, can you guarantee that within five years Ukraine will be a member of NATO? And he said, they all said no. And Solinsky himself then said, Well, at that point, why not a treaty of neutrality with, of course, full guarantees. But the second thing to point to be made there is if one thing has become totally evident as a result of this war, it is that Western countries will not go to war, will not send their troops to defend Ukraine, said that again, and again, and again. And opinion polls show that Western public's completely back that stats will at that point, the idea of of NATO membership, or an article five guarantee or anything like an Article Five guarantee is simply empty, if we will not actually fight for Ukraine. But just two other points very briefly, I mean, one is when it comes to, you know, what Ukraine wants, because Michael is entirely correct in his portrayal of the Ukrainian official positions. But, you know, in other circumstances elsewhere in the world, and that has not stopped us the West, for Americans from advocating our own solutions to conflict. We also, of course, do have the moral, right, and even duty to our own citizens to do so since in the end, they are paying for this, to put forward our proposals for an end to the conflict, because I entirely agree with Michael, I don't think the Ukrainian government can I mean, especially given our political divisions are increasing, I don't think the Ukrainian government can itself do the talks. That's why we have to do.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 43:47

So I have a quick question. A little bit off script here, in relation to the neutrality question. What do the recent security packs that EU, Ukraine has signed bilaterally with the UK, France, and I think Germany might have put a new one on the table, does that complicate future negotiations over neutrality or not? And I don't know who might want to answer that.

George Beebe 44:24

Well, as far as I know, none of these agreements arrangements obligate any of these countries to go to war on Ukraine's behalf in the event that it's attacked. These are long term security assurances, pledges to provide capabilities, weapons, etc, etc. And, to my mind, this actually helps What is it helps, I think it helps create more political room for maneuver and inside Ukraine. It helps to them Be assured that they're not going to be abandoned and future time of

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need. But it does not tie Ukraine, specifically to an alliance, either bilateral or multilateral. To me, it's more of a confidence building measure on the part of Ukraine. And that confidence, I think, can facilitate some sort of future compromise, which I think will inevitably be required with the Russians.

Anatol Lieven 45:32

May I just add one thing that I forgotten in response to something that Michael said, when it comes to deterring Russia, from future aggression against Ukraine, perhaps something in the region of 500,000 casualties, Russian casualties, the effective destruction, complete destruction of the army with which Russia began this war and the crippling of the Black Sea Fleet, and the fact that the limited number of times that Russia has been able to take have been with a couple of exceptions completely destroyed the process and have to be rebuilt by Russia at enormous expense. I mean, if that isn't a deterrent to future aggression, what is?

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 46:32

Michael, were you putting up a two finger?

Michael Kimmage 46:33

I didn't have two fingers. You know, I'll skirt Anatol, your point, if it turns just for the time being to be slightly different from George, in answer to your question, Kelley, I think that what complicates the picture is possible EU membership for Ukraine, because there is a security component to belonging to the European Union. I don't think that Moscow was quaking in its boots about an EU army, you know, sort of anywhere in its vicinity. So I don't know if this is a huge sticking point. But I think to the to the degree to which it's possible or probable that Ukraine becomes an EU member. It's no longer a neutral country. And I do think in the Russian reading of things, it's not that the EU is such a, it's such a menace, but the EU serves as a kind of bridge to NATO. And that takes us back to the association agreement and the Eastern Partnership program into the whole beginning of this nightmare in 2009, and then 2013, 2014. So I think the EU makes the story, probably more complicated than these bilateral pacts do for prospects of neutrality.

George Beebe 47:36

Just a two finger on that. The Russian position on the EU is an interesting one and one that I think maybe in motion back in the months after this invasion, when Russia and Ukraine were in fact talking about the terms of a settlement. One of the things the Russians agreed to have we can believe reports on this was an acceptance of EU membership for Ukraine. And I think since that time, Russian diplomats have rather consistently said we don't have a problem with that now. Why not? Is the interesting question because back in 2014, of course, that was a period when the Russians viewed the prospect of accession to the EU, as links to eventual NATO membership for Ukraine and something that they thought would cross a red line. If we sever that

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kind of relationship, if we are willing to agree to a situation in which Ukraine will not join the NATO alliance with Russian attitudes towards EU membership change. I think we have reason to think that they might. I don't think the Russians aren't quaking in their boots about EU military capability. In fact, I don't think they would quake in their boots about NATO military capability. Were the Europeans, a much more prominent player within the Alliance. Right now the Russians look at NATO as the US and they are definitely quaking in their boots about US military capability. So I think we have some room here for maneuver and discussion with the Russians on this issue. It's one that we need to explore.

Anatol Lieven 49:29

A key difference of course between NATO and the European Union is that it is much easier to getting into NATO. If you look at some of the a questionable members of NATO during the Cold War, like Turkey, for example, the the military dictatorship in Greece. Accession to the European Union is a very long, very complex process and by the way, you know as we are now seeing will meet tremendous resistance from for socio economic forces in Europe, notably, of course, France. So this will take a very long time now, in the long term, the Russians could hope for two things, I suppose as far as EU membership is concerned. One is that it simply won't happen, as it hasn't happened to Turkey, because it means the opposition within the EU will simply be insuperable. The other possibility, which I think the Russians are looking at, quite closely, is that the possible certainly in the case of France, by now one major mistake, probably victory of new radical populist forces in Western Europe will fundamentally transform the political scene within the European Union. And that revives the Russian hopes of being able to in future to do some form of a deal with France, Germany, which would in many ways from Russia's point of view, if that did happen, diffuse hostile to the European Union. So the the Russians have, you know, if they're prepared to be patient have something to pay for.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 51:21

So I'm just going to shift a little bit, and asked a question that seems to come up perennially. And that is the Russia the existential threat of Russia to to NATO and the rest of Europe. And as recently as last weekend at the Munich Security Conference, Zelensky, President Zelensky has been insistent that Russia will fortify and be able to attack other European countries within five years if the West is not replenished weapons and continue aid to the war. This claim has not been dispelled by world leaders, including Biden, who up until recently has also warned that not giving aid might result in Putin rampaging to other capitals, and also, possibly a US direct U.S. conflict or involvement in the war involving US troops. And I think that Senator Schumer said something similar within the last couple of weeks, after nearly two years of war, do you think the Russians have the willingness and capability for such gambits today? Let's just air that question out for our our viewership, which, as I said, this question comes up quite a bit.

Michael Kimmage 52:54

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So I'll give you two answers to the question a short one and a little bit longer one? I mean, I think the short answer is that this doesn't really make any sense. I mean, I think Anatol has outlined why this is the case that Russia has struggled in so many ways with its war in Ukraine, that the prospect of it moving on to, you know, sort of broader bigger horizons outside of Ukraine makes little sense, I don't really see the Russian motivation for doing this wants to hold territory in Poland or the Baltic Republics or, you know, to act on the on the on the, the needs of Russian speakers or ethnic Russians. I mean, it's it's, it's it's not even rhetoric that you can really find maybe the Baltic Republics are a little bit ambiguous in that regard, but not, but not very, and, you know, the time that there would be to prepare for something like this for NATO would also make it much, much harder for Russia to do so no real incentive, you know, no, no capability. And, you know, lots of ways in which NATO could make this extremely difficult for, for Russia. So, you know, as a political talking point, you can see that it has its utility as a strategic assessment. I think it's, it's, you know, sort of borderline crazy.

On the other hand, if Russia is successful in Ukraine, much more successful than it's been and if Ukraine sort of cracks or, or topples, which is not impossible and I think that that's if I understand correctly, George and Anatol sort of why you wrote your piece to begin with, because your assessment is a rather dark one for the future, if things aren't done differently, I don't think it's that Russia then marches on NATO territory, I think is that Russia pursues a strategy of divide and conquer that there'll be a lot of fear in Europe and different European countries are going to register that fear differently. So the Slovaks and the Hungarians of Europe might say, well, let's kind of deal with Russia, to the side of NATO, and you know, sort of sue for peace in a sense, before the war even happens, and then you would have high degrees of anxiety in Poland, the Baltic republics and other places where they might look for military actions outside of the of the NATO rubric, and that could really be disastrous for NATO and could lose its cohesion while still being a functioning institution. And in that sense, the stakes of this war are quite high for NATO, but not via direct, you know, sort of flat, flat out conventional conflict between Russia and NATO, but because of some of the after effects or ripple effects that fear could have within NATO, how you contend with that, how you deal with that as a sort of separate question, but in that sense, I do see NATO as how would one put it on the line? Maybe that's melodramatic, but NATO is involved very much in the outcome of this work and put it to that degree. George?

George Beebe 55:33

Well, I think Michael and I are entirely in agreement. Russia does not does not pose a realistic threat to invade NATO or a NATO country. But do they pose a threat to Western coherence and unity? Absolutely. Yes, they do. Now, what do we do about that? That's a different question. And I would argue that the West needs to get its own act together. It needs to focus on its own strength, and resilience and prosperity and confidence, as it does, it will be less susceptible to this kind of threat from the Russians. And I think Michael has obviously done an awful lot of study of George Kennan in the post World War Two period, this is exactly the point that can make. The Marshall Plan was meant to repair the west from within who address fear, who address your the moral component, the emotional component of all of this, and in so doing

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create internal resilience and strength that would make it much less likely that the Soviet threat could really do damage inside Europe. And I think that's fundamentally all the circumstances are different today. Fundamentally, that's how we have to approach this today. There's not a military solution to this problem that Michael has outlined.

Anatol Lieven 57:10

Yeah. So I alluded to the the advantages that Russia could derive from the rise of La Pen in France, Alternative for Deutschland, the Swedish Democrats, but Russia has not created those movements. These movements are rising as internal problems, economic, social, with immigration, identity, all these things. And if we cannot manage those problems, then you know that that's what's going to overwhelm us, not Russia. But I think the other thing to point to be made is that NATO, your our countries were not created to serve NATO, NATO was created by our countries to defend us against a Soviet attack. If there isn't going to be a Soviet attack, then, you know, we shouldn't simply shape our futures by the need, you know, to maintain the unity of NATO. I think NATO should continue. But it isn't a goal in itself, it is a servant of our national interest.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 58:18

Oh, I'm in just to push back a little bit. I think we're all in agreement here that Russia is likely not to rampage across borders, even if it does win this war. But the question remains, why don't we have world leaders? Who can who persist and upholding this mythology as a justification for continuing the war, prolonging the war? So I mentioned Biden, I mentioned Senator Schumer I mentioned Zeleinsky I believe, Jen Stoltenberg is probably made a number of arguments about why NATO should be concerned about Russia's willingness or intent to expand the war. So it seems to me that there isn't an additional question here about whether or not there is an interest by these world leaders to sit down and negotiate if they're still persisting, that this is a more existential fight that that NATO and the West are facing.

Anatol Lieven 59:31

I just wanted to say, these world leaders are world leaders like the World Series is a World Series by world leaders that helps American politicians and European hangers off of duty. There's a knock on the Indians think, let alone the Chinese, whatever or the Brazilians or in the West talking to itself. The second thing is, you know, George and I both support, want a measurable European rearmament. The problem is that the this given all the budget constraints in Europe economic situation gave me public support for that it's very difficult, and so what leaders are doing is they are following Senator Vandenberg famous advice to scare the hell out of them. The problem is that if you look, if you go back to the Cold War, the strategy of scaring the hell out of them led to a situation of public paranoia and hysteria, which in many ways has haunted us ever since. So in some ways, I mean, the goal is laudable, Europe, Europe does need to re-arm, I mean, it has in many ways shamefully neglected its own defenses. It's just that

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I do think that stirring up, you know, and essentially paranoid and largely baseless, as Michael said, in analytical terms, a fear of direct Russian attack is the right way to do it.

Michael Kimmage 1:01:11

I think, if wants to be empathetic at all, to this line of argument, it would be in the following terms mean, I think I agree with Anatole, this is a way of mobilizing public opinion for policy positions that have little to do with a Russian invasion of NATO and everything to do with supporting Ukraine. So that's, you know, politics in a way politics as usual politics of the early Cold War. And maybe that's the beginning of the end of the story. But if one has to be empathetic to this line of argument at all, I think it goes to the fact that Russia has been profoundly underestimated at almost every turn for the last 15 or so years. So annexation of Crimea is anticipated by nobody, you know, Russian incursion into the Donbass, you know, also comes as a kind of surprise, the election meddling in 2016, you know, sort of comes out of the blue comes out of nowhere, the Russian move into Syria, is also a surprise. But of course, the most important example of this, especially for Europeans is 2022, unthinkable to have a major war in Europe, Russia is never going to do it. The German, you know, sort of spy chief is in in key of the morning of the of the war, you know, asking the question of whether it's going to is going to happen. And you know, I think there's that I don't know, trauma or that psychological dynamic behind this w. So systematically underestimated 100 Russia is going to do so let's now go to a very high estimation of what Russia might do. And I think it's, you know, to be understood to a degree in that in that context, as well.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 1:02:38

I'm being I'm being given the hook here in terms of wrapping the event up, but I'm going to take the moderator's prerogative and ask one more lightning round question, because questioner asked it in the q&a, and I've been ignoring those poor people in the in the queue. But this is I'm, I'm curious about this one. And this is from Donald Smith, in the q&a. How much does the upcoming US presidential election? How much impact is that having on Washington's willingness to sit down and talk or not? Are you concerned, as observers of US, Russia, Ukraine, that the election itself is going to impose some sort of timeline on when the Biden administration wants to sit down? Or talk or will it prolong the war? And I will go to Michael first.

Michael Kimmage 1:03:34

I don't think that it is going to have too much of an effect. You know, I don't know how self confident the Biden team is about Biden getting reelected. That's that's very, very hard for me to, to judge, but if they're competent at their jobs, and I think they are, they shouldn't allow domestic political timelines of this kind to get too much in the way of their of their basic aspirations. And in a way, you know, given how many differences there are between Team, Team Biden and Team Trump. I'm not sure how a Biden team can really plan that much for the thereafter I think what they're planning to do is win the election and to sort of carry on the basic set of policies as they've been carried forward for the last two years. So maybe it's a boring answer to your

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question, Kelly, but I don't think that it's I don't think it's the crux of things. And I also think it really should not be the crux of things. I don't think you want foreign policy, sort of senior level foreign policy people to be making too many calculations about what the electorate might do some months in the future.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 1:04:33

Right, but if if Ukraine is if the fall of Ukraine might be imminent, if they don't get the aid, and Russia's in a much better place on the battlefield, will Biden want to see that sooner or later? And I guess that's I guess that's drilling down on that question a bit, George.

George Beebe 1:04:51

Well, I agree with Michael that domestic political electoral considerations should not drive us policy here, but I do think they are a significant factor in nonetheless, seems to me that the White House wants to put this war on hold until after November. They don't want that news on the battlefield, they'd like to see the situation sort of frozen in place. And they're they're sort of crossing their fingers that they can make it through this period without catastrophic news coming out of Ukraine. Congress is not playing along with that. Right now, the House of Representatives, is at this point, not willing to provide the kind of aid to Ukraine, that would facilitate that Biden strategy. And as a result, I think we could wind up in the worst of all worlds, we could be in a situation where the Biden ministration has failed to put, you know, the Ukrainian war on hold, we have to deal with the catastrophe sooner rather than later in the context of a very consequential presidential election, which, you know, tends not to facilitate calm, rational, sane approaches to things. So I'm very concerned about this interesting intersection of domestic politics and foreign policy in this case.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 1:06:12

Anatol quickly.

Anatol Lieven 1:06:14

In one sentence, we have to hope that the Biden administration is right, but I wouldn't bet on it.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos

Well, thank you very much. Sorry to go over a few minutes. But I feel like this is this could go on for another hour. I had other questions. And I'm sorry, that we didn't get to the questions of in the q&a. But I strongly, strongly recommend that our viewing audience read the new brief, by Anatol and George, The Diplomatic Path to Secure Ukraine, which we can you can find very easily on the Quincy Institute website. And Michael's new book, please check that out The Origins of the War in Ukraine and the New Global Instability by Oxford University Press. And please keep

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checking back with the Quincy Institute website on our events page for future events and book talks. And, and thank you so much for joining us today.