

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:
U.S. Helsinki Commission**

“Doing More: Assessing Ukraine’s Defensive Needs”

Committee Members Present:

**Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN), Co-Chairman;
Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), Ranking Member**

Committee Staff Present:

**Michael Cecire, Senior Policy Advisor, Commission on Security and
Cooperation in Europe**

Participants:

**General (Ret.) Wesley Clark, Senior Fellow, UCLA Burkle Center, and
Founder, Renew America Together;**

**Stacie Pettyjohn, Senior Fellow, Center for a New American Security;
Matthew Kroenig, Professor of Government, Georgetown University, and
Deputy Director, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security Director,
Scowcroft Strategy Initiative at the Atlantic Council**

**The Briefing Was Held From 10:32 a.m. To 11:27 a.m. via videoconference,
Michael Cecire, Senior Policy Advisor, Commission on Security and
Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

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CECIRE: (In progress) – salient test of the European security architecture, which happens to be directly related to our mandate, as well as the human rights implications and U.S. national security more broadly. We thank you for joining us this morning. You're all welcome.

We gather today at a time of great peril and sorrow. The armies of the Russian Federation have plunged into the democratic country of Ukraine, raining destruction across that once flourishing land, and threatening its very existence. Having assembled enormous war machines of nearly 200,000 troops, and vast quantities of armor and heavy weaponry, few countries on Earth could have been expected to be able to withstand such an onslaught. However, four weeks into the Kremlin's neocolonial campaign, Ukraine and its courageous people are still standing.

Despite every material military advantage, Russian forces have been stymied by Ukraine's defenders. The Ukrainians air force and air defenses, widely expected to have been destroyed in the war's early days, continue to bring down Russian fighters and helicopters. Ukrainian special forces have launched daring raids beyond enemy lines, crippling supply trains and destroying advancing armor and military equipment. Ukrainian regular troops and territorial defenders, some of whom were grocers, and farmers, and computer programmers just weeks ago, battle for every inch of their homeland. And Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has rallied the world with his bravery and honor in the face of the Kremlin's wonton destruction.

Frustrated by the Ukrainian people's dogged resistance, Russian forces have increasingly targeted Ukrainian civilians themselves. The blasted hulks of Kharkiv's once-handsome boulevards the shattered and starving innocents in Mariupol, fleeing families murdered in their cars, a bombed-out maternity hospital, a blasted drama theater where innocents took refuge marked "children" for every Russian pilot to see.

We see in Ukraine a familiar and awful strategy that is a trademark of the Russian way of war. In Chechnya, in Georgia, in Syria – entire villages wiped out, great cities reduced to rubble, and schools, hospitals, shelters, and homes deliberately and systematically targeted. Earlier this week in an address to Congress, President Zelensky thanked the United States and the world for the help Ukraine has received but challenged us all to do more. He repeated calls for a no-fly zone to close the skies over Ukraine, but also for more advanced air defenses, tactical aviation, and new and compounding sanctions.

This brings us to our event today. How can we do more? While the prospects for a U.S. or NATO-enforced no-fly zone were initially dismissed, the idea has gained fresh traction in Congress and around the world as Russian military atrocities have become increasingly impossible to ignore and the ensuing humanitarian catastrophe has deepened, with a near-term specter of far worse to come. And at least three former NATO supreme allied commanders of Europe, including one of our distinguished guests today, have come out in support of some kind of a no-fly zone. The arguments for one aren't triumphalist or made lightly, but respond to the growing boldness of Russian aggression, the strategic imperative for preserving Ukrainian sovereignty, and the scale of the atrocities that Russian forces are persecuting with gross abandon.

At the same time, its best proponents do not downplay the risks. Enforcing a no-fly zone would be an act of war – in the defense of an aggressed sovereign country, to be sure, but a sharp escalation, nonetheless. Such scenarios could contribute to an escalation spiral, dead American servicemen, and may not even sufficiently help Ukraine win. Meanwhile, some say it could cross a line with the Kremlin that makes the specter of Russian use of weapons of mass destruction all the likelier.

Doing more also goes beyond no-fly zones, too. Medium- and long-range air defense systems, fresh batches of unmanned combat aerial vehicles and their munitions, offensive platforms to help Ukraine regain their homeland, and even food and fuel. What can we spare? What can we do? What is desirable and what is possible? To that end, I'm so pleased to be joined by a truly world-class panel of experts to discuss Ukraine's critical needs during this critical time. However, before I introduce our guests, I want to offer the floor to our House co-chairman, Representative Steve Cohen, who I believe may have joined us today.

Chairman Cohen.

COHEN: Yes, I – thank you. Thank you. I think I'm there. I don't have my camera set up. If I pull myself back, I'll be OK. I want to thank the panelists for all being with us. General Clark I've known since Memphis days and over at AutoZone Park, where he was my choice for president of the United States. He'd have made a good one. Thank you for being with us, and for your service to our country.

I've been following all this very closely. And I have no military background at all, so I look forward to your remarks. But I would like to note this, from this perspective. I have supported the idea of giving Ukraine the Polish airplanes. Now, that's got to get Poland into it, how you do it and where they come from and all that stuff. And I understand the no-fly zone would end up a third world war and all that too far.

And I understand the military arguments, oh, it's better to have these kind of drones or these kind of anti-aircraft weapons, and it's much better, and the planes are big, and they could be hit, and they could be – Zelensky wants them. Obviously, the Ukrainian army wants them. And the Ukrainian army has proven to be pretty damn good at knowing what they could do with their equipment. They've still got planes. And they fly them, and they do whatever they can do with them, and they want more planes.

My question to y'all, particularly General Clark, is why not them have the planes if there's a way to facilitate it? If it's not through Poland, it's through Slovakia, or it's through Romania, or whoever has those planes. They think that they're beneficial. Give them to them. They are being killed every single day. And I'm sure if they had those planes, they would knock out some of those tanks, they can make them – in an offensive way and in a defensive way they might be able to fight some of the planes coming in. I don't know about the plane-to-plane warfare. But could you address the harm that could happen? I don't think that's going to get us into World War II, if we facilitate the planes. With that, thank you for being with us and I look forward to learning from you.

CECIRE: Thank you, Co-Chairman.

And now I'd like to quickly introduce our guests. Our first guest hardly needs any introduction at all, General Wesley Clark, who is among the most decorated and respected military leaders in the history of the United States. He's currently a senior fellow at the UCLA Burke Center for International Relations, and a founder of Renew America Together. General Clark retired as a four-star general after 38 years in the U.S. Army, having served his last assignment as commander of U.S. Southern Command, and then as commander of U.S.-European Command and supreme allied commander Europe.

He graduated first in his class at West Point and completed degrees in philosophy, politics, and economics at Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. General Clark also played an influential role in the Dayton peace process in Bosnia, where he helped write and negotiate significant portions of the 1995 Dayton peace agreement. In his final assignment as supreme allied commander Europe, he led NATO forces to victory in Operation Allied Force, a 78-day air campaign backed by a ground invasion, planning and a diplomatic process, which saved 1.5 million Albanians from ethnic cleansing. He's also an old friend to the Helsinki Commission, having testified before a Commission hearing in June 2000 on Bosnia's future under the Dayton agreement.

General Clark, the floor is yours.

CLARK: Good morning. Thank you very much, Congressman, for those kind words. Michael, thanks very much for the opportunity to testify here. It's an honor for me to be in front of you. Can you hear me and see me OK?

CECIRE: Yes, sir.

CLARK: OK. I'm in an automobile. I apologize. It's not the right setting, but it is what it is.

First of all, to address the congressman's concerns about the aircraft. The no-fly zone is a strawman. It's put up there to avoid serious discussion about how to use air power. There's nothing wrong with giving – in my view – with transferring those aircraft into Ukraine. Now, there are some people who say they won't make a difference. Some people say they're not flyable. Some people say they're not in good condition. All that may be true, but the Ukrainians have about 50 combat aircraft, they're using them very carefully, they're up against some 200 Russian sorties a day.

They need help. And if they want those aircraft and they say they'll help, I'm all in favor of getting them in there. That's just my personal military opinion based on 25 years, 27 years of experience working with Russians, starting with my first experience in the post-Cold War-era I was the – I led the first U.S.-Russian joint military staff talks in 1994 in Moscow. So I had close contact with them during the time I was NATO commander, before that on the Joint Staff, and I've followed it very closely since. Those aircraft, in my view, should be transferred.

As far as doing more, I was in favor of not declaring a no-fly zone necessarily. But put the onus on the Russians. That is, Ukrainian airspace, if they invite us in, why shouldn't we go in? If the Russians want to confront NATO, that's their problem, not our problem. But we've somehow accepted this line of argument that it would be our problem if we did something. So we're, on the one hand, defending a rules-based international order, but on the other hand not following our own legal construct. This is an independent state that's been invaded. OK, well, that's the recommendation I would have given had I been in uniform. I'm sure people have given it. It hasn't been accepted. But that's my personal view and I'll stand by it.

In terms of a humanitarian airlift, maybe something like this could be done. During the Berlin crisis of 1948, we flew aircraft into Berlin with humanitarian supplies. They were not shot down. We need to perhaps do the same thing for now. We have to mark those aircraft, paint the wings white or something like this, using deconfliction line with Moscow to tell them they're coming. I'd like to do it with U.N. approval. I don't know why the U.N. can't approve it. If we can't get a Security Council resolution, go on a general assembly resolution. Even a vote that's already been taken. It doesn't have to be only the United States. We could form a coalition of the willing.

We might have to accompany this with ground convoys. Actually, the Russians are past masters of this. They did this in 2014/2015 with these columns of 200-300 white-painted trucks that they insisted were humanitarian aid, bringing into the Donbas region, when we know that very well they weren't. But we would be bringing in humanitarian aid. I think you've got to do both, because you've got to have an airfield you can land, and you've got to be able to distribute the humanitarian aid. You can't do it without some protections. So you've got to go in with at least U.N. Chapter 6 self-defense authority. Maybe Chapter 6-plus, as we used it in Bosnia before we put the NATO force in, so that you'll have some people in there with weapons. They can protect themselves if attacked. They have the right to self-defense. They won't do aggressive operations.

Could you get a league nation? Yes. I think Ireland could do this. I also think Australia could do this. And if we were to assign some airlift to them, paint their wings white, yes, we could fly that in in C-130s, or something like this. Could you do something like this? Yes. Why would you do something like this? For humanitarian relief, but also because it breaks the tempo of escalation which is underway. There's only two outcomes that's possible, and both are bad right now. One outcome is the Ukrainians are quickly defeated. Three, four weeks from now, no food, we see Kyiv treated like Mariupol, a civilization is destroyed, there's 10 million refugees at this point, and the bombs are falling on Lviv as well. And there's brave talk about an insurrection and treating Ukraine like Afghanistan. It won't hold.

Or the other, that the Ukrainians are given the assistance they need, they push the Russians back, and Putin is frustrated and decides his best course is to escalate. He's already doing this. He's got a contract with Bashar Assad to bring 40,000 Syrians in. They're experts in the use of chemical weapons. His intelligence people are scouring Africa to bring African troops in. To be truthful, some of these people really are only coming into Belarus so they can try to

escape and get, you know, sanctuary in Europe. But some of them will fight. And especially the Syrian troops, it's a very dangerous escalation.

At some point he's going to strike into NATO territory with his missiles because we're going to continue to provide assistance. There's a fallacy here, that somehow NATO inaction will translate into Putin's refusal to escalate. This is a logical fallacy. Putin will escalate as necessary to obtain his objectives. So I'm trying to find a third course of action between Ukrainian defense and Russian escalation, which is to provide the firebreak of a humanitarian rescue mission assigned into various locations that puts a firebreak into the fighting that could lead to a ceasefire, that could lead eventually to, coupled with the sanctions, a Russian pullback and withdrawal.

One thing I learned from my experience in the Balkans, from Richard Holbrooke, he said: You got to stop the killing. If you stop the killing, let the diplomats argue. That's their job. They like it. But stop the killing. In this case, this is a humanitarian travesty. And I find myself in this odd position as a former NATO commander and a strong supporter of the rules-based international orders, and then watching every day on CNN and hearing from friends in Ukraine that we can't defend the rules-based order because Putin is threatening us with a nuclear weapon.

If that's the case, what's to stop any other tyrant with a nuclear weapon from threatening us and doing what they wish? So we have to find our way through this. And I believe that using the United Nations as best possible, or a coalition of the willing, or even the Helsinki Commission, and bringing in league nations who are non-NATO, and establishing humanitarian corridors is an important firebreak in this.

I want to just conclude by saying one thing, and especially to our – to Co-Chairman Cohen. I've watched Vladimir Putin at work for over 20 years. I do business, been often in Ukraine, went there right after Maidan. This is a long-term plan conceived by Vladimir Putin. I hear a lot of wishful thinking about negotiations and so forth. This is no mistake on Putin's part. And the latest speech, which some are saying, oh, shows Putin's in trouble, that doesn't show Putin's in trouble. What that shows is he's doubling down. He's doing now a purge the way Stalin did the purge of 1938 to prepare the home front for World War II. That's what this is about.

And so we've got serious problems ahead with Vladimir Putin. There should be no wishful thinking that this is going to go away. We'll stabilize Ukraine, and then we can turn our focus back to China. This is not that kind of a problem. But I do think it's very important that we do everything we can to assist the people of Ukraine. And through humanitarian efforts if we can put a firebreak in, if we can slow down the pace of the battle, maybe there's a chance of heading off what looks to be an awful conflict looming in the near future. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Congressman.

COHEN: Thank you. If I could interject here just one second, General, we had a hearing yesterday with three chairs of the Foreign Relations Committees of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and they all said exactly what you're saying, we're nowhere near any kind of a peace agreement. Sometimes the news, CNN, they're getting closer, they're closer, they're this – horse

manure. And when you see that Russian boat, ship, going through the Japanese straits with all that weaponry, that takes a long time to get there. They're not sending that with the idea that they're getting close to the end of this thing. Putin's a hard head. He wants to – he wants – because of Vednekov (ph) being put in house arrest, because of the Russian Orthodox Church not having Kyiv, because of him and Peter the Great. He's not going to stop until he's destroyed that country and killed Zelensky.

CLARK: Yes, you're – I believe that too. And I believe that he won't stop there. He wants the Balkans back, he wants the Baltics back, he wants his part of Europe back. Every time I met with the Russian generals after the fall of the Berlin Wall and so forth they always said: You're in our part of Europe. These are our countries. You're coming in here. When are you NATO ships going to be in our port of Riga? I said, it's not your port. But of course, they don't believe that. So this is not just Putin. He's speaking on behalf of a large group of the Russian power ministries. And this is a well-conceived, long-term plan.

He thinks he's found a hole in the U.S. strategy of deterrence. That is to say that we believed deterrence could stop conflict. He believes he can use nuclear weapons to stop our intervention when he attacks. This is a hole, a logical policy hole. And somehow we have to think this through on the fly, because the same problem will affect us if we're talking about China and Taiwan, or even South Korea and North Korea now that North Korea is building an ICBM to strike us. And certainly, the same with Iran.

So we have to recognize the full dimension of the challenges that are facing us. This is not going to go away with Ukraine. Yes, he wants to crush it, but it's far deeper problem than that. He wants to overturn the 75-years of post-World War II international structure, including, of course, the Helsinki Commission, and have it his way. His way is the 19th century way of autocrats cutting up the world into their spheres of influence and then launching wars to expand their spheres of influence.

And that is the historic Russian way, and that's what Vladimir Putin represents. And it's no fluke. And it's not rant from a deranged mind. And it's not something that's going to be easily dissuaded. This is what he's been building for most of his 20 years in office, I would say. So I think we've got a real deep challenge here.

COHEN: Let me ask one more question, then I'm going to go on mute for a long time. His hypersonic weapons, missiles, how – do we have any ability to stop them, intercept them? Or is that a threat that's significant to our security?

CLARK: It is significant to our security, because right now we don't have a means of intercepting them. And, you know, we've worked our Patriot system to do a hit to kill intercept. And it calculates ballistic trajectories. And these weapons are coming in not as fast as an ICBM would come in. An ICBM comes in two to three times faster than a hypersonic. But the hypersonic is coming in on its own trajectory, and it's maneuverable as it comes in. So it could well avoid a hit-to-kill Patriot PAC-3 enhanced warhead. This is a challenge.

But it's a conventional challenge. A nuclear weapon's still a nuclear weapon. And if nuclear weapons – if it goes to nuclear weapons, those hypersonics are no different than any other nuclear weapon. Nuclear weapons get through, nuclear weapons will kill. So Vladimir Putin thinks he has some kind of a strategic advantage over us. Now, Congressman, and I would – let me just put this in context. In 1962, the reason the Bay of Pigs didn't go well for Khrushchev was because he realized, and the Russians realized at the time, that the U.S. had strategic nuclear superiority. We had escalation dominance potential over anything that happened in Cuba. He knew it. He pulled back. And he was eventually overthrown.

Today we don't have strategic nuclear superiority. We are at basically minimum assured deterrence. And we don't have the hypersonics. We don't have the tactical nuclear weapons that Russia has. But we do have a deterrent force. And I believe that deterrence is sufficient. But you cannot handle the challenge of Putin's interpretation of deterrence without paying special attention to the risks involved. And this is where we're wrestling with the problem. We know there are risks. The question is, how do we deal with those risks? And these risks are profound. Putin is stressing the system. But if we don't deal with the risks here, the risk will be much more difficult in defending NATO or defending Taiwan.

COHEN: Thank you, sir.

CLARK: Thank you, sir.

CECIRE: Thank you, General Clark.

I'd like to quickly recognize our House ranking member, Joe Wilson, who's joined us as well. The floor is yours, sir.

WILSON: Thank you very much.

And, General Clark, thank you so much for your input and insight. And I want you to be aware how bipartisan really things are today with the leadership of Co-Chair Steve Cohen and others, that we do recognize and are taking every step. And what you said is really disturbing. Indeed, this is a plan that Putin announced in 2007. But what you said is also a death sentence for the Republic of Georgia, a death sentence immediately for the Republic of Moldova. So that makes it so much more important that Republicans and Democrats work together to help the people of Ukraine succeed. And we can.

And then every effort – I want to back up, Congressman Cohen, to destabilize Russia itself, because the Russian people I've met are not authoritarians. And then I want to put into context too, General, I believe that we're in a worldwide war between authoritarians and democracies. And a way to express this, and I have to give credit to Senator Lindsey Graham. When you say that, it goes over people's heads. But it's a conflict between rule of law and rule by gun. And you hit it on the head. You mentioned the CCP and Taiwan. We also see truly Iran with their proxies, the Houthis, to go after our allies, Saudi Arabia and UAE. And we're not standing with them like we should.

And we should understand, Iran is perfectly clear as they chant in the parliament death to Israel, death to America. That's what they mean. And I'm really concerned that over and over we see efforts being made, like the Iran deal, that are insane – that Russia would be negotiating on the part of the United States. To me, it's suicidal for Israel and America. But, hey, thank you for your insight and I really look forward to a continued bipartisan effort to protect the people of Ukraine first, and then America, obviously, next.

CECIRE: Thank you, Mr. Wilson.

I want to introduce our second distinguished guest, Dr. Stacie Pettyjohn, who is a senior fellow and director of the Defense Program at the Center for a New American Security. At CNAS, Dr. Pettyjohn focuses on defense strategy, posture, force planning, force presentation, security cooperation, and wargaming. Prior to joining CNAS, Dr. Pettyjohn spent over 10 years at the RAND Corporation as a political scientist. Between 2019 and 2021, she was the director of the Strategy and Doctrine Program in Project Air Force. From 2014 to 2020, she served as the co-director of the Center for Gaming. Previously she was a research fellow at the Brookings Institution, a peace scholar at the United States Institute of Peace, and a TAPIR fellow at the RAND Corporation. Thank you so much for joining us. Dr. Pettyjohn. The floor is yours.

PETTYJOHN: Thanks for the opportunity to be here today. As Russia's brutal attacks on Ukraine are escalating and become more indiscriminate, there's a natural impulse to want to do something to help and protect the innocent Ukrainians. But some of the most prominent options that are being debated, including Ukrainian President Zelensky's humanitarian no-fly zone, or General Clark's humanitarian corridors, are likely to be either escalatory, ineffective, or both. Instead, the United States and NATO should focus on getting useful military tools into the hands of the Ukrainians that they can immediately employ to change the balance on the battlefield.

So there are three main arguments that I would make against a no-fly zone, or a humanitarian corridor. And I'll treat the two similarly, though there are some differences. The first one is the risk of escalation. And I know Dr. Kroenig's going to talk about the nuclear risk so I'm only going to briefly touch upon this, but President Putin explicitly warned that he would consider using nuclear weapons if a country intervened on the side of Ukraine in this war, or if they attacked Russia. A no-fly zone or humanitarian corridor is likely to lead us to cross both of those redlines. And while one might believe that this is simply bluster on the part of Russia, I think it's very reckless to call this bluff given the terrible consequences of nuclear use.

Moreover, a no-fly zone or humanitarian corridors would certainly result in direct American-Russian combat at the conventional level, which the United States and NATO should certainly seek to avoid. So when you look at the terms that are being used right now, no-fly zone, humanitarian corridor, they sound rather innocuous and defensive. But in reality, they require combat operations that entail shooting down any violators of the no-fly zone – Russian fighter jets, drones, helicopters that might encroach upon the defended airspace. They also would require neutralizing, suppressing, or destroying Russia's ground-based air defenses.

And Russia has an extensive network of air defenses that are accompanying its invasion force in Ukraine. It also has a number of long-range surface-to-air missiles located in Belarus and Russia. And if the United States does not obtain air superiority for beginning – before beginning its operations, it's going to have to assume tremendous risk that those Russian forces don't turn on and actually shoot down any of the American aircraft that would be patrolling the skies. And so this is one part of the escalatory risk. We've seen in the past with no-fly zones over Bosnia that American aircraft have been shot down, an F-16 by a Bosnian Serb surface-to-air missile, and one that's older than the ones that Russia has now.

The second argument against a no-fly zone is that it's not going to significantly improve the plight of the Ukrainians and would likely lead to more expansive American combat operations. So when you look at the different examples of no-fly zones over Iraq, over Bosnia, over Libya, they haven't stayed limited because they haven't worked. They haven't protected civilians. Some of the worst atrocities in Bosnia occurred after a no-fly zone had been established. And in the end, all of these conflicts ended up escalating to large air campaigns and more extensive combat operations because that was the only way of truly protecting the people on the ground. And I believe that is true today in Ukraine, and something that we want to avoid.

Russian aircraft have not posed the greatest threat to the Ukrainians. They've been used rather in a limited fashion and pretty ineffectively because of Ukraine's air defenses, which have been quite effective at keeping them at bay. So I think this is a situation where an imprecision in terms sometimes creates problems. We say bombardment, but that often means a lot of different things coming from different sources. That can be artillery on the ground, rockets on the ground, it can be surface-to-surface missiles which are also ground-based, ballistic, or cruise missiles. And then it can be actual aircraft dropping bombs. The last one has occurred the least frequently, and a no-fly zone wouldn't be able to address the ground-based threats unless it was expanded into just attacking Russian ground forces.

Finally, the last reason that I think a no-fly zone should be avoided, or humanitarian corridors, is that it would be really challenging, and it might not actually be successful. The United States and NATO have the best air forces in the world. I believe that. I've seen it. I know it to be true. But air defenses have proven to be very challenging to find, especially mobile ones that are layered and networked the way that Russia's are. In the air war against Kosovo that General Clark led, the Air Force never actually achieved air superiority, according to a RAND study. And the challenge that they would face today in Ukraine over Russia is much greater.

You'd need to have aircraft in the air at all times with 24/7 combat air patrols to be able to respond quickly to any threats that are detected. That's going to require several rings of fighter jets, and also intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft, combat and control aircraft, and tankers to support them. So there are going to be a lot of assets that need to be devoted to it. And then simply, it's difficult to find ground-based air defenses. They're small, and if they don't emit – which is what happened in Kosovo – they could remain a threat and continue to shoot down American or NATO aircraft that were patrolling the skies.

Given all these challenges with the no-fly zone, a better option is arming the courageous Ukrainians who are fighting back. But it's really important that we send the right capabilities

that they can effectively employ immediately. We don't really have time to waste training them. And that these systems are survivable and sustainable. So we talked briefly about the older MiGs that Poland had offered. I don't see that as a bad option, but I don't see it as the best option either. I don't view it as hugely escalatory, though those systems are ones that are more vulnerable to Russian attacks because they're larger. And they're old aircraft, so sustaining them is going to be difficult and challenging. They require runways and, I think, the Polish MiGs have been upgraded in a way that makes them dissimilar to the ones that the Ukrainian Air Force already operates.

So instead of manned aircraft, I think a better option is a layered system of mobile short-, medium-, and long-range air defenses. We've been sending a ton of short-range air defenses, the man-portable systems like Stingers, which is great. They've been effective at shooting down Russian aircraft. But that's only because the threat of the longer-range systems remain. Russian air forces are having to fly lower, which puts them within range of the MANPADs that are actually causing a lot of the damage. So we need to make sure that Ukraine's layered air defense network remains intact and, ideally, try to find it some Russian-made systems that can reinforce it.

To complement that, the international community should continue to provide precision standoff weapons that can attrit Russian forces from range, such as guided anti-tank weapons, like the Javelin, and precision strike capabilities like drones. So the Turkish-made drones have been very effective. The United States just provided Switchblade. These are all great assets that when coupled with the air defenses have proven to be very effective on other battlefields, like in Armenia and Azerbaijan and Libya. In addition, the U.S. had previously provided the Ukrainians with counterbattery radars, which could be really helpful in targeting these drones. And they should make sure that they have spare parts and potentially consider providing additional ones to them.

So my bottom line is the international community should help Ukraine, but not by following the post-Cold War playbook of implementing a no-fly zone. This course of action has only been tried against much less capable adversaries and, by itself, has not proven to be an effective way of protecting vulnerable populations. Against Russia, a no-fly zone would be even more difficult to implement and may not succeed. It is, however, guaranteed to be escalatory and to lead to direct American or NATO combat with Russia. And it raises the potential for limited, or even more extensive than that, nuclear use, which is something that I never want to see in my lifetime.

Instead of pursuing a no-fly zone, the international community should focus on providing Ukraine with weapons that they can immediately use and sustain, including short-, medium-, and long-range air defenses, counterbattery radars, drones, and precision-guided munitions. Thank you and look forward to your questions.

CECIRE: Thank you, Dr. Pettyjohn.

Our third distinguished guest is Dr. Matthew Kroenig, who is director of the Scowcroft Strategy Initiative at the Atlantic Council and a professor of government at Georgetown

University. At the Atlantic Council, Dr. Kroenig leads the Scowcroft Center's Global Strategy Unit and supports the director in managing a bipartisan team of over 40 resident staff and an extensive network of nonresident experts. His research focuses on U.S. national security policy, great power competition with China and Russia, and strategic deterrence and weapons nonproliferation. Dr. Kroenig has served in several positions in the U.S. Department of Defense and the intelligence community in multiple administrations, including in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the CIA's Strategic Assessment Group. Thank you for your participation and the floor is yours.

KROENIG: Great. Well, thank you very much for the introduction and for the invitation to be here today. Thank you to the co-chairman and the congressman for the opportunity. I was asked today to focus specifically on the risk of nuclear escalation. Nuclear strategy has been one of my main areas of focus over the past two decades. And I'm going to explain today that I think there is a real risk that Putin could use nuclear weapons in the war in Ukraine, but at the same time explain that I think the Biden administration and NATO can dial up their support, their military support to Ukraine, without increasing the risk of nuclear war. So that might sound contradictory, so let me explain.

First, I think it's important to understand that Putin doesn't want a nuclear war either. Getting into a nuclear war, getting into a NATO-Russia war doesn't serve Putin's interests. He wants to avoid that. And we have seen him in past crises back down when it looked like things were escalating. So we have to remember that this is two-sided. It's not only the West that's afraid of escalation, it's also Putin. So that does mean that we can dial up military assistance without greatly increasing the risk of nuclear escalation. I think it's unlikely that if we provide some of these military capabilities we've talked about – the MiGs the chairman asked about, the more advanced air defenses that have been mentioned, anti-ship missiles is a possibility that people have mentioned – it's hard for me to see how that turns into a direct NATO-Russia war, or results in nuclear escalation.

When it comes to no-fly zones or humanitarian corridors, I think I might split the difference between Dr. Pettyjohn and General Clark. I do think a no-fly zone does run a real risk of escalation. Doing that right would mean shooting down Russian planes. That would mean direct NATO-Russia war. But I think something like a humanitarian corridor could work, supported by ground convoys. And as an example, we have the example in 2008 when George Bush sent Air Force planes and a Navy warship to Georgia on a humanitarian mission as Putin was invading. And Putin stopped short of Tbilisi. And some well-placed experts think that that was key, was the United States saying, get out of the way, we're coming, that caused Putin to stop short.

So I think something similar could work here, if we sent in a humanitarian mission into the Western part of Ukraine and declared this a humanitarian zone. I think it would have the benefit of providing humanitarian relief. I think it would have the strategic benefit of carving out a western zone in Ukraine that – to prevent Putin from taking over the entire country. And then I do think that Putin would order his military forces to stay clear of that area because, again, I don't think Putin wants to turn this into a direct Russia-NATO war. So that's the first point. I do think we can dial up assistance without increasing the risk.

Second point, I do think there's a real risk of nuclear use. And this is because I do think that Putin is already employing his so-called escalate to deescalate doctrine. And at its essence, this doctrine is essentially to use Russian nuclear weapons to offset the conventional and economic advantages of NATO and the United States. So we've already seen him make nuclear threats, both in 2014 and this crisis, essentially saying: Stay away or else things could escalate to nuclear catastrophe. But then the next part of the strategy is, depending on the circumstances, to follow-through with limited nuclear strikes. And depending on how the war develops, I think that is a possibility.

For example, if Ukraine succeeds in winning this war with Western support, pushing Russian forces out of the country, and Putin looks set to suffer an embarrassing military defeat, he's wondering about his control at home, even the future of his life, I think to Putin using a nuclear weapon, trying to force Ukraine and the West to back down and sue for peace on terms favorable to Moscow would seem more attractive than simply accepting defeat. So I think there's a risk.

And a third point, if that's correct it means that the current strategy, the current administration strategy also runs the risk of nuclear war. If providing Javelins and Stingers helps Ukraine to win this war, Putin's facing a devastating defeat, he might find nuclear escalation attractive. So I think there's nothing magic between a line between Javelins and MiGs, where Javelins are not escalatory and MiGs – and MiGs are.

So then a fourth point, how do we deter Putin from using nuclear weapons? And it's a very difficult challenge. You know, the more straightforward way to do this would be to draw a kind of redline and say that if Putin uses nuclear weapons or uses chemical weapons the United States or NATO – and NATO would get involved in this war. That we're planning to stay out, but if Putin used nuclear weapons this would be a game-changer for us. But I don't know that that's credible, and I don't know that the Biden administration would want to set or follow-through on that redline. It does seem like President Biden is determined to stay out of the conflict, and I don't know that that changes even if Putin uses nuclear weapons.

So given that, I think the best option may be if Putin uses nuclear weapons to essentially follow-through on our same – the same strategy. Maybe dial it up a little bit, but provide support to the Ukrainians, sanctions, reinforce NATO's eastern flank, and continue to fight through and win the conflict. Because – final point, concluding point – avoiding escalation can't be our foremost objective in this conflict. If that's our foremost objective, we essentially tell Putin: Threaten nuclear weapons and you can do anything you want. Instead, our objective is to help the Ukrainians defend themselves, to defend NATO, defend the rules-based system. And doing that does require running some risks of escalation. So thank you very much. Look forward to your questions.

CECIRE: Thank you, Dr. Kroenig, for providing your perspective. And thank you to Dr. Pettyjohn and General Clark for their interesting and forthcoming analyses.

Before we move to the off-record portion of the event, I wanted to offer our Commission leadership, Co-Chairman Cohen and Ranking Member Wilson, the opportunity to make a closing statement or ask a public question of our guests.

COHEN: Mr. Wilson, if you would indulge me. Of course, I have your nice pictures here. Thank you, thank you, thank you, again. From the recent journey.

Ms. Pettyjohn and Mr. Kroenig if you could explain to me, or tell me – I mean, I understand that the reasons why people say that the Polish planes might not be effective – they're big, they'd be shot down, that they – other anti-aircraft platforms are better, and all. Why does Zelensky and obviously his military continue to want them? If they want them and they've made that their second desire beyond the no-fly, which is a no-go, why would they want them if they are not as effective as these other deterrent weapon systems, and if they are so vulnerable to being shot down, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera?

PETTYJOHN: I would just – guessing, I don't know what they're thinking – but I think they're looking for any and all help that they can receive. And they – and Ukraine, right, you know, for very good reasons, is seeking to draw in other countries as much as it can, because it knows it won't – it needs to offset its weakness against Russia. So this is one way to do so. I don't think the MiGs are particularly escalatory. It's more that they're not going to do much, and the fact that they put Ukrainian pilots at risk when unmanned systems don't, and the fact that I don't think they'll be flying for very long because of sustainment challenges. But I'm not terribly opposed to that idea.

KROENIG: Chairman, I think my instincts on this are similar to yours and General Clark. I think that if the Ukrainians want them, we should find a way to get them there. We know we can look back to previous debates. At the beginning of this war there were experts writing that we shouldn't provide the Ukrainians really any arms, because they didn't really stand a chance, it wouldn't be effective. And I think the Ukrainians have surprised us. So if they want these capabilities, I think we should find a way to get them there. Maybe they'll surprise us. And I do think we can do it without greatly increasing the risk of escalation with Russia.

COHEN: Thank each of you, appreciate it. You know, just to – I don't think I've gone beyond – maybe going beyond, but some of our top military folks told us early on that Russia would take Kyiv in 24 to 48 hours. So they weren't so aware of what Ukraine could do.

CECIRE: Ranking Member Wilson.

WILSON: To conclude, for everyone, I hope you see, indeed, how bipartisan – hey, Putin has done something that I didn't think could be done, and that is to have Joe Wilson and Steve Cohen like this, OK? But this symbolic. And then, hey, it's so inspiring to me to see NATO, no division, a change of policy by Germany. I mean, they were worse than equivocating when this began, all right? You remember they were not going to let Estonia provide Javelin missiles to even cross German territory, OK? And some of us still remember when it was East and West Germany. They should understand that maybe strength – peace through strength works, and it does bring down walls.

And then to see the European Union – I’m the co-chair of the EU Caucus. And again another – I don’t want to ruin his reputation – but Democrat I work with, Brendan Burn (sic; Boyle). We’re the co-chairs of the EU Caucus. We were delighted to find out, General Clark, that they actually are providing military equipment to Ukraine. Both of us did not know the EU had military equipment. But it’s very significant that you have the 21 countries of NATO, 27 countries of EU. And then, again, the solidarity that we need to keep within the United States.

And so – and in particular, Dr. Kroenig, you look too young to have been 20 years studying nuclear catastrophe. But sadly, your day has come. We are so close. And just everything that should be done. And then, Dr. Pettyjohn, I agree about the no-fly zone. But everything that could possibly be done to provide equipment. And all we hear is excuses. We have our allies Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, with the S-300 systems. And they’re reluctant to move them into Ukraine because there’s no backfill. Well, hey, that’s insane. We should be providing immediate backfill. We’re not using all of our missile defense systems. And then we’ve seen the success to protect the people of Israel, thank God, with the Iron Dome Patriot missile systems. These all should be provided.

And then on another angle that, as a 31-year military veteran myself, to actually see – and I’ve been to Russia a number of times. I actually thought Russia was going to be a modern country. I’ve met so many people from St. Petersburg to Novosibirsk, Moscow of course, and Chelyabinsk, Tomsk, Omsk. I’ve really – and the people of Russia simply have just got to understand that they’re going to become international pariahs. And that – and that murder is being conducted in their name when this one person, Putin, as identified by the very brave newscaster that we may never hear from again.

But suddenly I’ve been trying to do, on psychological warfare, is that I’ve got legislation provided that would provide for any military troop who defects that they would be given immediate refugee status to the United States. And if they bring over equipment from the Russian side to provide to the Ukrainians, that they could receive up to \$100,000. This is a really good return on a \$10 million tank. And so I’m really hoping to get that message out. And then – I introduced that last week, and then I was really grateful President Zelensky said that he wants Russian troops to surrender. We, I think, think alike.

And then this week it occurred to me, or even late last week, wait a minute, we have Russian diplomats today, particularly younger ones, who are around the world. And now they’re going to be vilified everywhere they go and humiliated. And they know the truth. And so I’ve introduced legislation that Russian diplomats have the ability to receive refugee status immediately to come to America. And then it’s somewhat of a back-handed slap, but I was in Kyiv in December with Congressman Ruben Gallego. A Democrat, can you believe I was there with him? And he did a CNN interview which then a member of the Russian Duma called on him to be kidnapped and brought to Moscow for trial.

And so a back-handed compliment to that member of the Duma. I have proposed that members of the Duma could receive refugee status and come to the United States. But we need to – the people of Russia have just got to get the information and message. And then, hey, it is

being received. This week – I know we’re talking about people who are very knowledgeable – the thought of the – of Putin saying that we need to be self-cleansing. Hey, we’ve heard that before. It was called Stalinist purges. And immediately the head, apparently, of the national guard was detained. His name has not been eliminated, so he’s not a non-person yet but, hey, we need to be appealing to the Russian people.

Hey, I was even grateful to see that a hero of all of ours, Arnold Schwarzenegger, formerly of Vienna, currently of California, he did a video to the Russian people. And of course, Zelensky himself did a plea to the people of Russia. And then, hey, how more effective than having Ukrainian grandmothers coming up to the Russian troops and telling them they need to go home, and then if you don’t go home here I’ve got some sunflowers seeds for you to put in your pockets so that when you’re killed and buried the national flower of Ukraine can come to life.

And just over and over again, anyway that, as a member of Congress working with Co-Chairman Cohen, this is a remarkable opportunity for everybody to work together, for the EU, for the – I have zero faith in the U.N., but with – it’s exciting to see NATO come to life. Hey, Germany’s now going to have 2 percent of their – meet that goal, which is so beneficial. And so just again however we can be working together, I look forward to working with Co-Chairman Cohen. Thank you.

CECIRE: Thank you, Co-Chairman Cohen and Ranking Member Wilson, for your comments and wisdom.

So this now concludes the public portion of our event. We thank everyone here for their participation. Congressional staff and U.S. government personnel, please hold as we transition to the closed session.

[Whereupon, at 11:27 a.m., the briefing ended.]