

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

“Diverse Voices Reporting From Ukraine”

**Committee Members Present:
Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN), Co-Chairman**

**Committee Staff Present:
Bakhti Nishanov, Senior Policy Advisor, Commission on Security and
Cooperation in Europe**

**Participants:
Oz Katerji, Freelance Conflict Journalist;
Asami Terajima, Journalist, Kyiv Independent;
Olga Tokariuk, Independent Journalist Based in Ukraine and Non-Resident
Fellow, CEPA**

**The Briefing Was Held From 10:02 a.m. To 11:37 a.m. via videoconference,
Bakhti Nishanov, Senior Policy Advisor, Commission on Security and
Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

Date: Wednesday, April 20, 2022

NISHANOV: (In progress.) Before we kick this off and before I offer some – (audio break).

COHEN: Thank you very much and good morning. My thoughts are probably as organized as my attire is this morning, so I'm not going to really speak much except to thank the Helsinki Commission for putting together this panel. I'm very, very involved and interested, and I think the world is, in what's going on in Ukraine, and I want to learn from each of the – our panelists about how we are getting information. And I just look forward to listening and understanding and getting a better appreciation for the difficult task that you have and the important work that you do. Thank you.

NISHANOV: Thank you so much, Congressman. Really appreciate your participation. And we will have a Q&A session where I know you always have very good questions, and we are looking forward to your participation.

As I mentioned, you know, even today as I was – it just dawned on me that as I was saying good morning, wishing good morning to everyone it's with a full realization that people in Ukraine have not had a good morning in two months now. And it is, of course, because of this completely unjustified murderous war that Russia is waging against Ukraine.

This war is tragic and infuriating, but this war is also insidious. And I want to make it clear, any war is insidious, but this one especially so because it is based on the narratives that deny the existence of the Ukrainian people, of the Ukrainian nationality and identity, and the utterly nonsensical claims of fighting Nazis in Ukraine. The horrors that we've seen and Ukrainians have lived, frankly, whether the Bucha massacre, the siege of Mariupol, the shelling of civilian homes, abuse of children and women, are in name of these completely false and ludicrous narratives that the Russian propaganda has been spreading.

I want to make it clear: No far-right party made the parliamentary threshold in the last election in Ukraine. Ukraine has a Jewish president and had a Jewish prime minister as recently as a few years ago. It is also home to multiple ethnic and religious minorities, including the Crimean Tatars who have been staunch supporters of the Ukrainian nationhood. So, no – and frankly, it's just – it's painful to be even talking about it or repeating this – Ukraine is no Nazi haven. And despite this, this insidious narrative is strong – even, frankly, among the audiences who have access to unbiased information.

So we thought we'd bring together a set of diverse voices covering Ukraine to highlight the unity of their narratives about what's truly happening in Ukraine. In many ways, today's briefing is unique. All we want to do, we want to spotlight the voices, let them tell their stories, and for us to listen, learn, and hopefully act. This is the important element. Acting and not just listening is very important.

So in some ways my job today is very easy because we have this remarkable, outstanding panel, people I have been following and listening to and learning from for years now. But at the same time, it's an incredibly difficult briefing because of the reason why we have gathered here

in the first place. I do wish, frankly, it wasn't happening because we are doing this and it's the war and it's the horror and massacres that are unfolding in Ukraine.

So, with that, let me introduce our panel. So we have three panelists today – witnesses today.

Oz Katerji is a British-Lebanese freelance conflict journalist currently reporting in Kyiv. He's spent more than 13 years covering the Middle East and international conflicts with a focus on human rights and open-source investigative techniques.

We also have Asami Terajima. Asami is a staff writer at the Kyiv Independent. She worked as a business reporter for the Kyiv Post until November 2021. She was originally from Japan, but she moved to Kyiv at a young age and lived in the capital ever since. She is currently working towards her MBA.

Olga Tokariuk is an independent journalist and a non-resident fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis. She is based in Ukraine. Olga has vast experience working with Ukrainian national media. Her reports were published by Time, The Washington Post, The Daily Beast, NPR, you name it.

And this is an incredible honor for us to be hosting this panel of witnesses, and I think without further ado I would like to kick it off. And, first, if everybody's fine, I would like to start with Oz because he, I think, brings a really unique perspective. Oz, we're here to learn from you and to listen to what you are seeing on the ground in Ukraine. But I also would like to ask you, since you've been focused on the Russian war in Syria, on the horrors that Russia has been - has been, you know, committing in Syria, if you could just also talk a little bit about some of the similarities of the narratives or strategies that you have seen in Syria and Ukraine to really drive home the point that what Russia's doing in Ukraine is not some one-off things. This is a systematic effort to eliminate people. So, with that, Oz, I'm going to kick it off to you, and please jump in.

KATERJI: Sure. Thanks for having me. Thanks to the Helsinki Commission for organizing this.

I'd also like to personally thank Representative Cohen. The letter that he sent recently to the White House about restricting travel for British lawyers that have been involved in some quite horrific cases of basically intimidating journalists from reporting the truth on Russian dark money in London and around the world, and how Putin's network of oligarchs, you know, advance his power and his foreign policy interests around the world. These lawyers have been acting, you know, with impunity for a long time now, and there's no method currently to hold them accountable. And it's really important that the Helsinki Commission has taken it upon itself to make these steps to hold British citizens – British lawyers who have been acting as the legal wing of Putin's Kremlin – Putin's kleptocratic, thuggish oligarchy – to hold them to account for their – for their role in this, because they do have a role in this and the role is multifaceted. There's the legal intimidation. There's the vast amounts of money that have been spent on media – Russia Today, Sputnik, and various, you know, fringe organizations on the far

left and the far right that have had dark money pumped towards them to put out Russian propaganda. We have Russian propaganda being, you know, broadcast to the American public on right-wing talk shows. It's not just limited to Russian-sponsored television networks, but the long arm of this stuff is clear to see and has been clear to see for many years now.

On to your question about the – speaking about the war in Syria, for me the war in Ukraine was not a surprise. I wasn't shocked that it was happening and I believed the intelligence assessments. I'm a British-Lebanese journalist. I focused my entire career on the Middle East. But obviously, in 2014 what happened in Crimea, what happened in the Donbas, these became really important. And I recognized – not just myself; many of my colleagues recognized that what was happening in Syria and what was happening in Ukraine was part and parcel of the same geopolitical situation, and that is the solidification behind a fascist dictatorship in Russia.

You know, Putin consolidated power. Russia is now a militarist, totalitarian dictatorship, a revanchist dictatorship with territorial goals. This is something that we considered not a – not a possibility for a great power or a superpower in the post-World War II liberal order. It's happened now. We were told throughout history growing up, or at least my generation were, that no liberal democracy is going to be invaded by a, you know, nuclear-armed dictatorship, and such stuff is hysterical alarmism. But anyone who is focusing on Russia's actions in the – in the field of conflict can see the writing on the wall here. It didn't just start in Syria. You had Georgia. You had Chechnya. These were the practice runs, Syria was the opening shot, and Ukraine is the continuation of Putin's war of expansion into Europe. And it won't stop at Ukraine's borders unless it – Putin won't stop unless he's stopped.

So let me – let me bring it straight back to Syria. The one thing that we saw Russia's involvement in Syria, they didn't supply the manpower to Syria. That was supplied by Iran's various militias after the Assad regime spent all its manpower and most of – you know, huge swaths of the army defected and joined the Free Syrian Army – formed the Free Syrian Army. So Assad was struggling for manpower and he required – he required Iran to provide that manpower for him. That still wasn't enough, and in 2015 Putin had to intervene militarily in Syria. Now, again, they didn't provide huge amounts of manpower. What they did provide is military firepower and lots of it. That firepower was concentrated specifically targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure. This was widespread. It's systematic. It's documented. It's been proved by multiple U.N. human rights investigations – not that they are worth much in and of themselves, especially considering Russia's U.N. Security Council veto, which is something I will move on to later.

But just to name a few of the atrocities committed, one of the most glaring ones was the aid convoy that was supposed to head into Aleppo. Russia was besieging Aleppo and they, after weeks of bargaining with the U.N. and over the Security Council, they agreed to let in a humanitarian aid convoy into the – into besieged Aleppo. What did Russia do? It bombed the convoy. It followed the convoy live on Russian state television, it cut the feed of the convoy, and then it bombed it for two hours. And then it blamed the terrorists.

Russia systematically targets civilians, civilian infrastructure, hospitals, schools, bread lines, then it denies that it committed these atrocities, and then it blames the atrocities on the people that are living in the areas that they've bombed. This is their doctrine. This is how they operate. This is their modus operandi. It's been consistent for years. Anyone who's tracked anything in Syria will tell you that the Russians bomb something, lie about it, and then blame the victims. And they did that with a conscious effort to defeat every single pocket of resistance against the Assad regime, their client/vassal state in Syria, to the point of they would besiege and they would starve and they would bombard. That was the tactic: besiege, starve, bombard.

And once they besieged the area, they didn't just – well, you couldn't say it was indiscriminate bombardment. Yes, the bombardment was indiscriminate, but they did discriminate. They weren't bombing frontlines; they were bombing hospitals. We know because every time a field hospital was opened and those locations were handed to the United Nations for protection, the Russians would ask the United Nations for those locations for protection and then they would bomb those locations. This happened repeatedly, systematically, to the point that NGOs – including Médecins Sans Frontières – had to stop providing the locations, the coordinates to the United Nations because that meant they were going to get bombed by Russia. It's as – it's as black and white as I'm explaining it to you. There's no ambiguity. There's no nuance in what was happening here. And we knew every step of the way that this was happening. We knew it was happening.

I'm going to be critical of the U.S. government here. Successive administrations – Democrat and Republican – decided that allying with Russia in Syria was a goal to achieve a counterterrorism/war on terror goal in Syria. So they allied with Russia, effectively, while Russia was bombarding systematically civilians. Russia suffered no significant sanctions for its behavior in Syria. It suffered no accountability for bombing aid convoys, for bombing hospitals, nothing. Not a single thing happened to Vladimir Putin and his regime. That was everything he needed to know, that he could act with total impunity.

When it came to chemical weapons, yes, they were used by the regime, but they were launched from airbases where the Russians were, and then the Russians provided the diplomatic cover. So in Syria, they provided the firepower and the diplomatic cover while Iran provided the troops.

This gave us two things with the war in Ukraine. One, it taught Putin that he could act with total impunity when it came to war crimes and targeting civilians – that no one, not a single soul, not a single government, was going to act to stop him – not one. The second thing it taught him was that war is easy and that all you have to do is besiege a civilian population, bombard it, starve it, target its critical infrastructure, and you will break the will to fight of the population. That's where he strategically miscalculated, because he wasn't supplying the manpower required to do that. Iran was sending in human wave attacks, tens of thousands of troops from poor backgrounds in Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan. Recruiting – forcibly recruiting teenagers to be human wave attacks, to basically – so the Syrian rebels run out of ammo. That's the point of these human wave attacks. They wore the Syrians down through Iranian manpower and Russian heavy bombardment.

So it's not difficult to see Putin looking at Ukraine and thinking: There isn't a single person in the world that's going to stop me if I bomb a Ukrainian hospital tomorrow. And he was right there, because no one has – no one has lifted a finger to stop him personally, no one. But what he didn't understand was that the manpower losses would be significant, and that Ukrainians would fight to defend their territory. It wasn't so much spoken about, about Syrian rebels who didn't have a proper army, who didn't have international military support, who didn't have diplomatic cover, they didn't have any of this. They still managed to hold back the regime and its forces in towns like Ghouta. For five years they managed to hold out under siege, bombardment, starvation.

So Putin really, really underestimated what he was actually doing in Syria. And he tried to apply that same doctrine to Ukraine. And he has. He's been bombing hospitals. He's been bombing schools. He's been bombing bread lines. He's been bombing Holocaust memorial centers. This is what he's been doing. He's been committing crimes against humanity – systematic crimes against humanity – and war crimes. He has been doing so with his own justifications that he said very proudly in his speeches addressing the nation, that he's doing it because he doesn't believe that Ukraine exists. He doesn't believe that Ukrainian national identity exists.

In fact, he believes that any expression of Ukrainian national identity is equivalent to Nazism. That's why they're talking about Nazism. It's not because of the, you know, 3,000-4,000 members of the Azov Battalion. It's because he believes that the Ukrainian national identity, any national identity that doesn't want to be subordinate to Russia, to Putin, to the Kremlin, is Nazism. And that's why he has focused his propaganda on this lie, this absurd, disgusting lie that Ukrainian people are all Nazis, it's a Nazi state.

I can tell you myself, the things that I've witnessed, Muslims, Jews, gays, lesbians, transgender people, all members of the territorial defense fighting alongside each other in the defense of their nation. That's not a Nazi state. That's not a pure ethnonationalism at play here. And I met immigrants, a Libyan who moved here six years ago after fighting Gadhafi, sought refuge and asylum here in the Ukraine. Now he's decided, a Muslim Libyan, has decided to join the territorial defense here. Again, this isn't a Neo-Nazi. It's not someone who believes the pure Aryan race.

There are people like that that exist in Ukraine, a small percentage of them. There are people like that that exist in the United States of America. There are very many of them that tried to storm the Capitol on the 6th of January. We should not be surprised or shocked by the existence of far-right elements. What we should be judging is, as you said, Bakhti, what political power do they have in this country? None. They have no power. This country's led by a Jewish president. It's very clear that Russian propaganda is trying to insinuate, imply that it's fighting terrorists, Nazis, to dehumanize the Ukrainian people in order to justify its systematic war crimes and crimes against humanity against them.

The question that I would like to pose to the Helsinki Commission is at what point does the intent to destroy Ukraine as a nation, the intent to destroy Ukrainian national identity, systematic war crimes and crimes against humanity – at what point does that reach the threshold

for genocide? The intent is there. It's absolutely there. From Putin's own words, from Putin's propagandists. The intent is there. The question is, what does this definition, if it's proved internationally, what does it even mean? What are we willing to do to end the war in Ukraine?

I'm still yet to find out, other than weapons deliveries, what the plan is if Ukrainian defenses collapse. What's the plan for, you know, if Russian troops end up on the Polish border? At what point are we just going not going to stop reacting to things and start preempting things, because anyone who covered the war in Syria and saw the war crimes there, and saw the impunity that Putin got away with there could see the writing on the wall. This wasn't going to end in Syria. It's not going to end in Ukraine. And it goes further than that.

I'm a British citizen. So in my lifetime I've seen Litvinenko poisoned with a radioactive substance. And we've seen the attempted assassination of the Skripals with a chemical nerve agent, both on the streets of Britain. A radioactive and chemical weapons substance used by the Putin regime on the streets of Britain. This is not a regime that respects international norms. It's a fascist regime that uses international norms to exploit them in order to advance its goals strategically, politically, geographically.

And I suppose my time here – you've seen the reports. You don't need me to reinforce them. But I've stood over the graves, the mass graves, in Bucha. I've seen these civilians executed and lying in the streets – seen them with my own eyes. We know what Russia – I've heard the testimonies with my own ears of what Russian troops did to Ukrainian civilians. This is not a mystery. There's no ambiguity here. We know what happened. We know what happened. And my job now is to tell you, from my experience, that this isn't going to end here unless it's stopped.

And I'm not a politician. I'm not the kind of person who can tell you all of the ways that the United States government can employ to stop this tyrannical, fascist dictatorship from slaughtering its way through Europe. But it needs to act. And the president of Ukraine isn't constantly talking about the need for further weaponry and further reinforcements if he didn't need them, and if he didn't think the situation wasn't grave. Right now Russia's regrouping its strength and attacking the east.

But no one should be under any doubts. Putin won't stop in the Donbas. He might declare a temporary victory, but he will come for Kyiv again. If nothing changes in the international world order, Putin has already been given impunity for decades now. And there has to be a line drawn in the sand. Right now, Ukraine is fighting for the entirety of the free world, the entirety of the liberal world order falls on the shoulders of Ukraine, which fights alone against a much stronger foe, which has decided that it wants to target a civilian population in order to destroy Ukrainian nationhood. Ukraine needs military aid, and it needs it now. Thank you.

NISHANOV: Oz, thank you so much for this powerful and morally clear statement and, frankly, advocacy. We all are watching with horror what is going on but I think one thing that you said, it's black and white. This is not a situation where we have to go and reassess and reassess again and see what is going on. People are dying. Innocent people are dying. And the

time to act, now. And I think the most important thing that you said is not to be in this constant reactive mode. We're constantly reacting, and what you're saying is we need to be acting. We need to put them in a situation where they are reacting.

KATERJI: I want to go further. I want to say that the future of liberal democracy – the future of liberal democracy, it's dependent on what happens here in Ukraine. And if that worries you, if that terrifies you, then it should do. Because if you're not afraid, you haven't been paying attention to what's just happened since February 24. The writing is clearly on the wall. Liberal democracy is at threat. Totalitarian regimes – Russia's not the only one – are circling the wagons now, because they believe that liberal democracy can be destroyed, it can collapse. And we don't want to wake up in a world where that's the case. And it's imperative that liberal democratic nations learn how to respond to this and respond to this fast. It's imperative.

NISHANOV: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Asami, may I turn to you? You have a fascinating life story. Your personal story, I think, is really, really interesting and fascinating. If you could, as a – again, because we're highlighting sort of diverse voices that are covering the war in Ukraine. Can you speak a little bit about what you are seeing as a minority in Ukraine? What are you seeing on the ground? And what is it that you say to someone – somebody who, I mean, sometimes is a well-meaning person, that says, well, actually, there is an issue with the Nazis or far-right movement? As a minority Ukrainian – I don't know if you are a Ukrainian national – but who's lived there for a long time, what is it that you see? What are you seeing on the ground?

TERAJIMA: Ukraine is the most freedom-loving country that I've never lived in, that I've ever visited. Ever since the first days that I came here, Ukrainian people have treated me as one of their own. And Ukraine has been my home ever since, you know, when I moved here at the age of 10. So all the – all the screams about Nazism, this is crazy to me because it's just not true. And right now since February 24th the lives of Ukrainians and the lives of everyone living in Ukraine have completely changed. And we are right now every single day, as the war continues, more Ukrainian civilians are dying, and more cities are being destroyed, and the list of cities that are under siege just grows.

And Russia is only intensifying these indiscriminate attacks against civilians, targeting civilians, and civilian infrastructure. It is destroying hospitals, orphanages, schools, and just anything that they see. Because Ukraine's – compared to what we had in 2014, Ukraine's military is significantly stronger. And this has frustrated Russia. And Russia has therefore, because it hasn't been able to achieve its goal that it thought it was going to achieve in a very short time, it shifted its focus to civilian targets. And now we have the war – the battle of Donbas has begun on April 18th. And we know that hundreds of civilians are still there in the region.

And we also know what's happening in the city of Mariupol in southern Ukraine, where there is an estimated 100,000 people still stuck in the city. Every single day, civilians are trying to evacuate but Russia continues to shell people who are just simply trying to evacuate. And now we know that the last – reportedly, the last remaining Ukrainian defenders are now in

Azovstal steel plant trying to hold out Russian forces. But they are significantly outnumbered. And we also know that in this steel plant there is more than 1,000 civilians – children, women, and elderly – who are still there hanging onto hope that they could live and see the outside world.

We still don't know the number of civilians who have been killed. And we also have a lot of people who have lost their homes, lost their cities, and have had to flee from what – you know, where they grew up. I've talked – for my reporting, I've been focusing on humanitarian stories, talking to the locals in various parts of Ukraine, starting from Donbas to Kharkiv where – you know, it's the second-largest city in Ukraine with a population of 1.4 million people. And yet, every single day Russia continues to shell, even to intensify shelling, in this Kharkiv city.

And I've been talking to the survivors of Mariupol, and a woman who survived the bombed drama theater in Mariupol. And from everyone that I talked to have shared with me these heartbreaking stories, because behind every headline is a tragic humanitarian story that is yet to be uncovered. And this is what I'm focusing on right now, to talk to as many locals as possible because, yes, they have been through a lot. Many of them have lost their relatives, have lost their homes.

And yet, they try to rebuild their lives in some way because, from what I learned from living over twelve years in Ukraine, is that Ukrainian people are the most brave – the bravest people that I've ever met. And even in such difficulty, people are not panicking. People are trying to stay calm as much as possible because at the end of the day panic does not yield results and everyone knows that staying united is the best way to move forward.

NISHANOV: Sorry, this has been incredible. Literally every sentence that you said could be a motivational poster, to be perfectly honest. I think the most freedom loving people, it's – I've known Ukraine for a long time. I have friends, former colleagues. And it's – I 100 percent agree with your assessment. Most freedom loving, fun loving, outgoing people out there. And it's just tragic and painful to see what is going on. I think to the point that you mentioned about rebuilding, I think sometimes I see these posts about, you know, a town or a village cleaning up, you know, two days after a bombing. And it's just incredible.

And I think this sense of pride in who they are and what they represent is just incredible. It just gives me, frankly, you know, just thinking about it, talking about it just gives me the goosebumps, just the incredible – you know, the spirit of the nation, and the fact that, you know, somebody tries to deny this, that it doesn't exist, to me is the most asinine and insidious thing out there. So this has been incredible. I think – I'm sure we're going to have a lot of questions for you and Oz.

And I would like – Olga, I would like to turn to you, if possible. You have an incredible voice. And I think you've been reaching out and you've reached to people, and people that I know were absolutely – that who could not place a map – Ukraine on a map, are, you know, talking about you, frankly. And I think, you know, that's one of the things that you have been doing consistently and strongly.

One thing that I would like to ask, and I know if you don't want to talk about it that's perfectly fine, but what was it like to wake up on the morning of, on the 24th? What did it feel like? How did it – what were people saying? What was the mood? I mean, we saw people mobilized very quickly. But if you could just talk about it a little bit, and then discuss whatever else you're seeing on the ground. Again, we're here to listen to all of you. Thank you.

TOKARIUK: Thank you, Bakhti. And thank you to, you know, other speakers, my colleagues who were speaking before me. I really appreciate what you said, and I agree with what has been said. And I want to thank you also, Asami, for your words that Ukrainians are the most freedom-loving people. You know, I've been living in Ukraine, like, all of my life. I had a brief period of study abroad in Italy. And I made a conscious decision after graduating, despite the opportunities that I had to stay abroad to continue, you know, do an academic career or any other career, to return to Ukraine and to contribute to the development of this country. That was back in 2013.

And, you know, the irony was that several months after I returned to Ukraine with this conscious decision to work here as a journalist the protest at Maidan Square began, the revolution of dignity. That was actually my second revolution, you know. In thirty-seven years of my life, I participated and I witnessed two revolutions in Ukraine. One was the Orange Revolution in 2004. I was still a journalism student back then. And, you know, I was in the square distributing leaflets to the people who were camping there for weeks in freezing temperatures.

People from all over Ukraine, who protested against an attempt to rig the election, wanted to have a free election, who are caring, you know, about democratic process, who wanted to, you know, return this right and give back this right, and get back the right to have a free and fair election and to have the leaders that they want to have, and they voted for. Not that, you know, someone was decided on top here in Kyiv, or maybe even in Moscow. So that was my first revolution.

And the second was in 2013 and 2014, the revolution of dignity when, again, Ukrainians protested against the decision of the government to reverse the course of its rapprochement with the European Union. Then pro-Russian President Yanukovich decided that he would not sign an association agreement with the EU, and people protested against that because they saw the future of Ukraine in a family of free and democratic nations. And that protest ended in bloodshed when 100 protesters were shot in central square of Kyiv. I was, you know, during those months – this revolution lasted for several months – I was there almost daily reporting from there, writing, also, like, tweeting and talking to people and, you know, just witnessing this historical event.

Of course, me and no one, I think, in Ukraine at that point thought that the war is possible, that Russia would respond to this, Ukrainians desire to be – you know, a free and democratic country, to be a part of the Western world, with a military action. Russia annexed Crimea. Russia launched its special forces into Donbas to foment an uprising there. And also Russian citizens and Russian agents were participating in – you know, in seizing of the governmental offices in Donetsk and Luhansk regions back in 2014.

And since there, for eight years, Russia has been financing, supplying, the military forces fighting against the Ukrainian armed forces in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. And since February 2014 of this year, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Well, you know, I think maybe I was not – I was one of probably few people around me here in Ukraine who believed that Russia could launch this full-scale invasion. Most of my contacts, even journalists, were really – they were refusing somehow to believe that all those warnings that, you know, we were receiving from the U.S. or from the U.K. and from other Western countries' intelligence, they were true.

So most people still, you know – I don't know. Like, it's difficult to explain why there was this sort of denial. Of course, the Ukrainian government also tried to downplay the risk. But even people who were very well informed, you know, who – as I said, my colleagues, journalists who are receiving – like, reading the news and reading all these warnings from the Western intelligence and they have no reason, actually, to doubt, you know, the authenticity of this data, they still, somehow, refused to believe that the full-scale invasion and a full-scale war is possible. And I think it was because, you know, we are just like you. We lived in a country that was, you know, free and democratic. It was the country where we went to the elections every several years where we elected our representatives.

Ukraine is the country that had the freedom of speech, you know, that was functioning media, diverse media scene. Ukraine has a strong civil society with a lot of NGOs who kept the government accountable and reacted to any attempt to, you know, somehow concentrate the power or adopt some law that people didn't agree with. So we had this feeling, like, we are part of the free world.

Of course, there was still a lot of problems with the corruption, with other things, but we are fighting with that and we are faring pretty well. Like, we are in our own house and we are sorting out our problems because, in fact, despite the war that Russia launched back in 2014 on Donbas, Ukraine has been making remarkable progress in different areas since then.

Since in the last eight years, you know, Ukraine has seen steady economic growth, despite the pandemic. The IT sector, in particular, was booming in Ukraine and many IT professionals emerged in these years who were working with various international companies, and a lot of Ukrainian IT startups also made their way onto the global scene.

So, you know, a lot of people in Ukraine, they had this international exposure. They were working with colleagues in other countries, especially as the pandemic made online work something, like, normal and ordinary. And that's why, I think, for millions of my compatriots here it didn't even occur that this, like, normality that we had and the fact that, you know, the country is developing, that it's a free and democratic country just like any Western country, that it could be somehow put in danger.

Of course, we heard all the, you know, rhetoric coming from the Kremlin. We've heard Russian propaganda announcing their plans to attack Ukraine. But most people in Ukraine just shrugged it off. You know, they thought, well, they are just making a fuss, you know, for some

domestic – for the domestic audience for – to consolidate the – you know, the grab on power that Putin had.

And I think this was, of course, something that, for many, it was a surprise. But as I said, I was an exception probably because several days before Russia launched the full-scale invasion I, actually, you know, told my husband that we should take our kid and we have to go to our relatives in western Ukraine. I don't know, like, how it happened and I felt very guilty initially because no one around me was making a similar move. You know, people were just staying put, going to work, and even, like, those people I told about my decision and I actually encouraged them to consider doing the same.

But I felt guilty and I felt a bit, like, silly because I was, like, maybe I'm overreacting. Maybe I'm overestimating it, you know, this threat. But I thought, OK, let's just – we will just do this, kind of go on a vacation to western Ukraine and we'll see what happens because, as I said, we have, like, relatives here.

And on the morning of February 24th, I woke up. It was still dark outside. So I think it was, like, 6:00 a.m. or 7:00 a.m., still pretty early, and the first thing I did was grabbing my phone as I did on previous mornings, and then, yeah, I saw the news on the Interfax News Agency website that Russia started attacking from multiple directions. Like, I woke up my husband and I told him, like, it's started. The war has started.

And then after, like, I think, 10 minutes, we were all – like, the relatives and us and everyone who live(s) in the same house in front of the TV and, you know, watching the latest news. And in the next hours, we were on our – on the phones with our relatives and friends in Kyiv telling them, come here. We have a place for you. Take your children.

So and even now, like, in the house where we are staying here in western Ukraine we are hosting internally-displaced people from Kyiv and other Ukrainian regions because this part of the country, western Ukraine, has become a hub for millions of Ukrainians who are fleeing from other parts of the country.

So, you know, to cut the long story short, I just wanted – like, the message that I wanted to convey here today is that I'm in relative safety now. My family is in relative safety here in western Ukraine. But, in fact, no part of Ukraine is safe.

Russia is launching missile strikes, missile attacks, on the western part of the country where millions of people fled hoping that it would be safe for just a couple of days before Russia attacked Lviv, a major city in western Ukraine, killing seven people and injuring more than a dozen, including children. No part of Ukraine is safe.

Of course, we are watching very closely with huge anxiety what is happening, you know, in Kharkiv, in Mariupol, in Donbas, elsewhere. We are very happy that Ukraine armed forces managed to liberate the northern part of the country, that they kicked Russians out from Kyiv region, from Chernihiv region, from Sumy region, and, actually, we've all seen what they did

there – the horrific human rights violations, war crimes, execution of civilians, massive rape, looting, torture.

Just today, I talked to a person from Chernihiv region whose brother is missing after being taken by Russian soldiers back on March 4th. So for a month and a half he hasn't heard anything from his brother, and the brother was only taken by Russians because they suspected that he was passing some information to the Ukrainian armed forces. However, like, his brother says that he hasn't done anything like that. So they, basically, took people for no reason and their relatives didn't know what happened to them.

Another person who was taken with him was found murdered – killed – on the position of where Russian troops were staying. You know, all these stories are emerging every day and we know that these things are continuing in those territories that are currently under Russian occupation in the south of Ukraine, in the east of Ukraine.

There are reports of kidnappings, disappearances, and forced deportations. Half a million of Ukrainians have been forcibly deported to Russia against their own will, and these people are taking their documents from them, are taking their IDs. They cannot return to Ukraine. They're being sent to remote areas of Russia. So a massive scale of human rights abuses and repression that is going on in the occupied territories.

And if Russia is not stopped, if Russia is allowed to grab more of Ukraine's territory, this is going to happen everywhere. I know that if Russia wins in Ukraine, if it's allowed to win in Ukraine, I will not be able to stay in this country. My life will be in danger. I'm not sure if I'll be able to survive, but I will – even if I will, I will have to flee.

I will have to go away, and so many of my – not just journalists but, you know, many Ukrainians, not only activists, not only those who are fighting, you know, contributing to the development of Ukraine working in NGOs, working in human rights organizations and the civil society organizations, journalists, they all definitely are the first targets of the Russians.

But even, you know, ordinary – millions of Ukrainians who just hold the Ukrainian flag in their house, who speak Ukrainian language, who know the words of the Ukrainian national anthem, they will become targets as well.

You know, Russia will just perpetrate the genocide of a massive scale. I just want all of you to be conscious of this, that, you know, Russia will not stop in Donbas. It will not stop somewhere. No one in Ukraine is safe and can be safe unless there is a defeat of Russia and Russia is defeated and Ukraine wins this war. We are not saying in Ukraine when this war ends. We are saying when Ukraine wins. And this should be also the desire and the goal, I think, of the whole free world to make everything possible so that Ukraine wins this war.

Thank you.

NISHANOV: Olga, thank you so much. I know it's hard for you to be talking about it. This is – for all of you this is personal. This is not just a story that you're covering. You're

living it and I think, for us, as much as we all, frankly, wake up in the morning and read the news and the horrors that we see, that they're painful, and anxiety that you're talking about, I think, is among everyone. But it's nothing compared to what you are doing and what you are living through. I cannot even imagine.

So thank you all for your strength and thank you all for continuing doing what you're doing, despite all of the – I don't want to call them challenges. I mean, a challenge is when you, you know, you have a difficulty. This is just a calamity. You are living through a calamity and, despite that, that you are continuing to do what you do is just incredible.

I think one thing that you've pointed out, and I think this is really important, is Ukraine has changed its government. People in Ukraine changed its government twice. When the Ukrainians are not happy they will go do it, and I don't know how, frankly, stupid you have to be to assume that you can, you know, do something, that you can just do something to people like that. People in Ukraine are freedom loving. They know what they want and it's incredible.

Ukraine is an inspiration to all of us and Ukraine is an inspiration, above all, from what I'm seeing, to Ukrainians because even people, you know – again, I know Ukrainians from all sides of – walks of life and, you know, people who used to argue with each other, fight with each other, disagree with each other from different parties, everybody has come together. The unity is inspiring and I think this is incredible.

Just one note to everyone who is listening to this. We have – if you have questions, please – we have a chat box. It is – it would be to your right corner. So please type in your question and I will ask our panelists this question.

While you're thinking about your questions, Congressman Cohen, you've listened to this. I was wondering if you might want to offer any thoughts.

COHEN: Well, thank you very much. I thank each of the three panelists for their testimony, for their courage. I think we all, in America, not all of us – there's some of us that are out there, the crazies in our caucus and our Congress – not our caucus, but in our Congress. But almost – I'd say 95 percent of the American Congress is supportive and most of the American public. I see some Twitter messages sometimes from either Russiaphiles or Russian agents that make you wonder. But, regardless, I appreciate it.

Oz, you, in particular, I appreciated your testimony. I agree with everything you said. One of the privileges I have as co-chairman of the Helsinki Commission is to meet with some outstanding human beings who inspire me, one of whom is Bill Browder, who came and spent about an hour with me last week before he testified before our committee.

Another is Khodorkovsky, who spent about an hour with a couple of members of the Commission and myself, and they were pretty much together on the idea that you expressed that Putin is a mafia boss, he's a bully, and he can only be stopped with power, that he – Macron's talking to him every other day, which I don't think he's doing now. He's having to defend himself with Le Pen. But that Putin doesn't care, and he could call him up and say we're not

going to go in and do anything doesn't help. He's only going to – there need to be red lines drawn. And one of the parties suggested we should have a red line in Odesa and say, if you cross this line and attack Odesa we're going to take out your ships in the Black Sea, and then he's inevitably going to cross that red line and then you got to take out his ships in the Black Sea. And the Ukrainians showed you could do it with Neptunes. We can do with Harpoons. It could be done easy enough or it could be done with air flights. I don't think we should be concerned about that, particularly.

The other was a red line in Kharkiv, and if he attacks Kharkiv you send in airpower to destroy the air bases from which the planes came from or the sites where the missiles came from. But you have to have red lines, you have to stand up, and you have to stop him. That's the only way he will ever communicate any kind of peace treaty. He is a liar. Nothing he says can be believed and, you know, much of what we see today reminds us of Syria. Indeed, Syria was, maybe, the canary, a very loud canary, that we should have listened to. Same for Georgia. Same thing for Chechnya. We've seen it.

America, in many ways, is fortunate this war is occurring. I hate to say it. It sounds – but we're having an inevitable war with Russia. The Ukrainian troops are not NATO troops, not American troops, and all we need to do is supply them with weaponry. I can understand the concern about a no-fly zone but I can – never have understood publicly talking about the Polish MiGs and the questions of whether they should be turned over in Poland or whether they should be turned over on our base in Germany. We should have found a way to do it, and, apparently, we're finding a way to get our military equipment into Ukraine to help the Ukrainian military, now this, quote/unquote, we talk about the \$800 million package and then the next \$800 million package, which contains X, Y, and Z. No airplanes, I don't believe, but who knows what'll end up happening? I don't see how they get it in to the Ukrainians, particularly in eastern Ukraine. We've waited too long, and I wonder if any, the three of you all – do you all have any idea about or seen any convoys of equipment?

Oz, please, tell me about it. Teach me.

KATERJI: Yeah. So from my understanding from my contacts in Ukraine, I understand that there have been steady supply of shipments of weaponry traveling from Poland into Ukraine and that not one, not one, of those convoys has been targeted by Russian fire in the entire duration of the war.

I understand that – Reuters confirmed this – that Turkish Bayraktar TB-2 drones, that further of those have been delivered by the Turkish supplier and they traveled in through Poland, through the west of the country. So as far as I understand it, the Turks, the Eastern Europeans, are proving that there can be supply lines of heavy weaponry, game-changing weaponry, heading into the country from the west, from Poland, and that those convoys can be protected from Russian strikes.

Our partners in Europe and – are proving that it can be done and, really, America needs to –

COHEN: We need to –

KATERJI: – show the – show the courage of its convictions. Currently, it lacks the courage of its convictions. If America wants Ukraine to win this war, you know, it needs ammunition. Ukraine needs ammunition. It needs materiel. It needs tanks. It needs fighter jets. It needs the kinds of things that will strike fear into the hearts of a(n) already much stronger army. That's what will make the difference here.

Ukrainians have already got the manpower and the will to fight in a way that's terrified the Russians but they don't have the equipment they need, and the one thing that we're not talking enough about is that while the equipment is very good, the list of equipment, it's being sent slowly and that equipment only lasts a week and a half, two weeks, in the war here.

You know, there needs to be more, much more, and it might be unpalatable for people to hear talk of weaponry being sent to an active conflict. But this is democracy versus totalitarianism. It's light versus darkness. We have no choice but to support the Ukrainian people in this to the point of victory, and anything less than that will be a disaster for the entire European project.

COHEN: I totally agree with you, and I suggest – you know, I've been disappointed. And I hate to say this. I'm a Democrat. I'm an American, all those things. But I've been disappointed with the response from Jump Street, our intelligence and our Defense Department and we've – so many people want to stand up and go, oh, our Defense Department and our administration and our intelligence, you know, salute.

They were wrong from Jump Street. They said that it would be 24 to 48 hours and Kyiv would fall, and then two to three weeks later they said it'll be 10 days to two weeks and Kyiv will fall. Intelligence was wrong. Defense was wrong. State Department was wrong.

When one of our members suggested we should send in better weaponry – better air defense weaponry – early on, the response from State, kind of under their breath but it was audible and clear to me, was, we don't want to risk sending that weaponry because they will fall so quickly to the Russians the Russians will have our weaponry and they will have our knowledge of the technology of the weaponry and they will have the weaponry. Because of that, they don't have it. They didn't have it and they don't have it because our intelligence was wrong.

They could not understand a determined and motivated group that would fight for liberty and for their country and for their identities as the Ukrainians have. They couldn't see that, for some reason.

I have to say I said this early on. We were in Lithuania before the war broke out, and it might have broken out. We were there, give or take, when it broke out. We might have been in Vienna. But I told a Lithuanian press assembly that we might be underestimating what Ukraine can do because a motivated group can do so much more.

And I have to admit, I was thinking a little bit in my own perspective as a sports fan, and I know how a team that's underappreciated and not as strong as the other team can be fired up to beat the stronger team and to play at home and to have the home court advantage and they can do miraculous things, and I thought the same thing could happen here and it did happen here. But we've been wrong.

Oz, you say we're getting the equipment in and I'm sure we are. But are we getting it to the east? How do you get it into the east when one side is Russia and the other sides are Russian troops now cutting – trying to cut Ukrainian troops off? How do you get into Donetsk and Luhansk? How are the weaponry getting in there, do you think?

KATERJI: So those areas still are encircled. The front lines are still available. But, obviously, trying to get weapons like that into Mariupol would be, you know, not feasible. But, you know, we're at a critical junction now in time where these frontlines are still accessible. Are we going to wait two weeks before, you know, maybe, you know, a hundred thousand Russian – Ukrainian troops are surrounded due to a Russian offensive?

We don't want to wait for that point to happen. So it really is – we are at a critical junction of this war. Ukraine can win with support. It's about getting that support there now. Not tomorrow, not the day after. Now.

COHEN: Well, thank you. I appreciate that and I hope we can get it in. It seems like the administration is waking up somewhat to this current announcement. They're going to send in this additional 800 million (dollars) and they're going to do it quickly, as quickly as they can. But we've been slow and this – the administration has been slow and I blame intelligence, Defense, State, the whole crowd, and they're starting to wake up a bit.

We're lucky that the Ukrainians are there to fight the Russians. All we need to do is give them the weapons. We need to get them the tanks. We need to get them the Howitzers. We need to find a way to get them the airplanes they can fly, and if not, we need to teach them how to fly the airplanes or maybe send an aide to go in with them in the airplane. We don't know who in the hell that guy is when something happens. But we need to get support there.

Mariupol – those are such courageous men and women and it's just – it's a disaster waiting to happen, and they're fighting and I don't think there's much we can do at this point.

Oz, you remind me a lot of my dear departed friend, Christopher Hitchens, not just your accent but your knowledge, your clear message about what needs to happen, and good versus evil and light versus dark. Christopher spoke that way as well and he was one of my dear friends. I don't know. Do you think –

KATERJI: I'm friends with his son, so I just wanted to –

COHEN: Oh, excellent. Do you know the Cockburn family or do you know of the Cockburn family?

KATERJI: As in Patrick Cockburn, yeah. I'll have to be honest with you. Particularly given his testimony to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee in the U.K., his position on the Assad regime is one of the worst of any mainstream reporter working in the Middle East today. I'm not a fan of Patrick Cockburn's work. I think he's very sympathetic towards the Assad dictatorship.

COHEN: Well, I appreciate your candor. I know Patrick through Christopher. Patrick had a much more severe case of polio than I had, but I had polio and I have post-polio so I have problems occasionally. But Patrick has unbelievable problems to surmount. Even getting up is difficult for him.

His brother, Andrew, is coming to visit in Memphis for the next four days. He's coming in tonight and we're going to spend a lot of time together. I didn't know Alexander. But they're great family and they – of course, Andrew is more sympathetic and knowledgeable about military weaponry and there's a lot we'll discuss in the next three or four days.

But thank you very much.

And, Olga, I can't imagine. This is your country now and, Asami, it's yours, too, and to have to give up your country has got to be just – the possibility of having to leave is awful. I mean, a lot of what we have is our memories, our possessions, store in them, memories, our friends, sites that we think of and remember events at and they are parts of our lives. And to have to leave that, which so many Ukrainians have, is – it's awful. It's giving up much of their life. It's almost – there are many deaths. They are little deaths, and Putin doesn't care.

I have been a strong vocal critic of Donald Trump and I think a lot of what we're seeing today is because of Donald Trump. I think we didn't stand up with Ukraine when Trump was president. Instead, we tried to use them as a way to get Hunter Biden dirt or something that they thought was dirt and, we didn't care about Ukraine and we treated them as a political opportunity, at least Trump did.

And the Republicans, not all but most, did not impeach him for that because there was surety that his actions – and they were cowards – to what is really a totalitarian, dictating, grifting, lying MF who was president of the United States, and he's no different than Putin and Orbán and them.

Oz, you're on.

KATERJI: I'd really – I'd like to echo your sentiments. I completely agree. But speaking as a Brit, so I don't have any partisan affiliations here – well, I mean, I endorsed Hillary Clinton for president in 2016. Not that my endorsement as a British journalist makes much difference.

But I want to say that I think it would be unfair to let the Obama administration off the hook, including Biden, for the way that they treated and reacted to the invasion of Donbas and

Crimea in 2014. That happened under Obama's watch, and I feel like if the diplomatic response had been stronger that we would be in a better position than we are today.

And it's not about – it's not about assigning blame. It's about learning where the mistakes were made and trying to stop them from happening in the future.

COHEN: Well, you're right, Oz, and I was with a former Obama cabinet official the other day and he said to me that Obama often said to him what we did was not necessarily what we aimed to do and it wasn't perfect but it was better, and it's all – doing better is good.

Better is good. But when you settle for better you're letting problems fester and they're going to come back on you in the future, and we had a lot of that then. That was not a perfect administration either. It was better, and the fact is they didn't win – they didn't have a Senate after a while. They had a Senate for a couple of terms and we lost the House. There's only so much you can do. Biden beat Trump, and I don't know if another candidate would have beaten Trump. Maybe they would have. But simply by stopping Trump from having another term makes Biden a great president, a great figure. Maybe not a great president but a great figure.

I'm concerned about 2022 and losing the House and losing the Senate, and I'm concerned about 2024 if that happens. I talk to Michael Cohen occasionally, Trump's former consigliere. He doesn't think Trump will run because he couldn't stand the idea of being defeated.

But if he sets up and gets the secretary of states elected that agree with him and they change the rules in the states, which they've done, on how they determine who's the electors at the Electoral College, he won't have to worry about losing because he'll steal it, just like he tried to do on January 6th.

We had a coup d'état. It failed, and the Republicans in our Congress are not willing to admit it or stand up to it because some of them are complicit, and there's a lot going on that's very scary in our country and I'm concerned about our Congress. I'm concerned about our future and where we'll be. But we need to stand strong and I think we're going to get Ukraine help. Hopefully, it's going to be sufficient and we stop the Russians because they're going to go back into Estonia.

I was in Estonia not long ago, a year or so, and they talked about how the Russians came in. The Russians sent Russians into Estonia, and there's a large part of the eastern edge of Estonia that's Russian occupied, and we drove through there and the people were walking around and there was, like, Russian style architectural, if you call it architecture – it's almost an oxymoron, Russian architecture but – that functionality, and all the buildings looked like that and the people were walking around. They looked like what you saw in movies of Russia from other days.

They will move people in to try to take over, and they have tried to kill Ukrainians. They're happy when Ukrainians evacuate. They want them to leave the country and not to come back and they want to kill them if they're there, and they will send Russians. They will move them into Ukraine to take over and make it a Russian state.

So it's scary, and they will go to Estonia. I was in Lithuania. They've moved their troops in Belarus right to the edge of the border of Lithuania. They've taken over the old Soviet forts, and they will come into Lithuania and then we'll have to have – we'll have to have a ground war and a war. But it'll happen, and it's better to fight it in Ukraine and to fight it with our troops, et cetera, in Estonia and Lithuania, which would happen, and Poland and wherever. This is the crucial moment in the fight for democracy and the fight for the West. So thank you, all.

NISHANOV: Thank you, Congressman Cohen. Thank you, Co-Chair. You've always been – you've always provided clear guidance on what the priorities when it comes to Ukraine should be, and we appreciate your leadership on all of these and, frankly, not being afraid to be critical of this administration. We appreciate everything that you've done.

I have a couple of questions for our witnesses. Asami, maybe – I think, since you mentioned you were talking to the – to people who've been through the horrors of the Russian invasion, how do you interview people with sensitivity and professionalism, people who have suffered incredible trauma, right? People who you're talking to, they've lived through just horrors, how do you interview them? And are people willing to be interviewed to share their stories with you? What are – how is that working?

TERAJIMA: So I think it really depends on how you approach them because, as I reported, the most important thing is for me to make the interviewee feel comfortable telling their story because if she or he is not comfortable talking about it, then I would rather – you know, they need space.

So, I think – so, first, I would ask for permission and try to make them feel as comfortable as possible, and many of the people that I've been talking to they were, you know, openly talking about what they've been through and they've even, like, you know, invited me to their houses and showed all the destructions that the Russian occupiers have left because they want people to know. They want the world to know what happened to their towns, what happened to their people.

And I think that, in a way, it was also therapeutic for them because many have – because many of them after, like, having the interview they smile. They begin to smile and talk to me, like, about other things and ask me questions about why I'm here in Ukraine and what I'm doing here and just, you know, we became friends at the end of the interview.

So, as a reporter, this is the most important thing for me is to build a personal connection with the people that I'm talking to and to feel – to make them feel as comfortable as possible and to make sure that we're documenting as many Russian war crimes as possible because we need the world to witness everything that they're doing here and we need to make sure that Russia is paying for all the Ukrainian blood that is spilled on our land.

And I wanted to add to the previous conversation, even though the challenges are significant and every single day we, in Ukraine, it's a very difficult moment for all of us and

every day we wake up to news about, you know, what happened in, let's say, eastern Ukraine, or the other day I woke up reading about the missile attacks that hit Lviv, the western city, where, you know, there's at least 350,000 people who are evacuated – who have been evacuated from eastern Ukraine.

So there's lots of people living there, thinking that it will be safe, and all of a sudden they are hit with a missile strike. So nowhere in Ukraine is safe, as Olga said. But the morale remains high and what – according to a survey that was – according to a survey released about three weeks ago, over 90 percent of the people in Ukraine believe that Ukraine will win.

But we all know that there's uncertainty about what will happen and we know that difficult months are ahead, if not, maybe even a year or even more. We don't know how long this lasts, and every single day that this war continues more civilians are dying. More towns and more cities are being under siege and being destroyed and more families are being disrupted and more children are dying because this war only – also affects children and the future generations of Ukraine.

Right now what we need is ammunition, as you said, and also we need fighter jets as soon as possible and right now. Russia's air force is, unfortunately, more than 10 times larger than the one that we have in Ukraine, and Russia has so far not been able to achieve total air supremacy because the Ukrainian airspace is still being contested.

But Russia does enjoy Russian – Russia doesn't enjoy air superiority in Ukraine and they have been – as you can see, they have been shelling – launching rocket attacks all across Ukraine, even in the western part of the country. So we need fighter jets as soon as possible. We need more tanks. We need more heavy weaponry.

And some Western officials are afraid that sending fighter jets would escalate the war. But this is, in fact, not true because the fighter jets are not so significantly different from the heavy weapons that the West is already sending and the West is, I hope, will be sending more in the future.

So we need weapons as soon as possible because peace talks with Russia are – unfortunately, we don't have high hopes for it and we – and there's no reason for us to believe what Russia is saying and we will never believe what they have – what they will – what promises that they will make.

NISHANOV: Thank you so much, Asami.

Olga, if I may direct this question to you. We have a question. Have you or your colleagues found that Russian forces are deliberately targeting journalists? I know there were multiple deaths. But can you speak to how deliberate the Russian forces are in their targeting of journalists?

TOKARIUK: Yes. That's a very important question and, in fact, we've seen that many journalists were already killed in this war. By the Ukrainian government counts, it's about 20.

But they are also counting those journalists who were killed as a result of explosions in their cities. So not, like, you know, while they were performing their duties as journalists.

But we can definitely speak about at least several instances when journalists were deliberately killed by Russians while in the field while working and one of such cases is a Ukrainian photographer, Maks Levin. We worked together at Hromadske, an independent Ukrainian TV station.

Maks was one of the most brilliant Ukrainian photographers. He covered the war since 2014. He survived the Ilovaisk massacre when Ukrainian troops were surrounded and the Russians promised a safe passage for them but, instead, they were ambushed and many – like, hundreds of Ukrainian soldiers were killed in Ilovaisk.

Maks was there. He, miraculously, escaped alive from Ilovaisk, and since then he was working on, you know, several projects related to Ilovaisk and also, in general, to Russian war in Ukraine. So a person with a lot of, you know, experience of working in conflict zones, a person who knew how to move, who, you know, was trained in – like, who was familiar with all the safety protocols for journalists working in a war zone. He disappeared. He went missing in mid-March in the northern suburbs of Kyiv and then several weeks later after Russian retreat from those areas his body was found there with gun wounds. So he died after being shot by Russian soldiers.

Maks, of course, was wearing, you know, no recognition marks. He was wearing protective gear but it didn't help because it seemed that Russian soldiers deliberately, you know, targeted and killed him as a journalist. And he's just one example. You know, there were other journalists, both Ukrainian and foreign, who were killed deliberately by Russians, mostly in the areas around Kyiv in the first months of the war.

There are also multiple cases of abduction, kidnappings of journalists, in the occupied territories of southern Ukraine – Kherson region, Mykolaiv region. Parts of the latter two are under control of the Russian occupying forces and we are hearing, you know, very worrying reports about the abduction of journalists. And just today, actually, I didn't have time to read more about the story but I saw that the blogger in Kherson was shot dead in his car.

So, you know, it seems that Russians are deliberately targeting journalists. They want the world to, you know, not to get the truth about what is happening. In fact, we know that also journalists in Mariupol, two Associated Press photographers for the reporters who were present there in February and in March and who, you know, reported the bombing of the maternity hospital, who documented it, who took photos and videos of that, who also documented the bombing of the drama theatre in Mariupol, later, they – when they – they had to flee, actually, Mariupol. They had to escape the city because Russians, basically, were looking for them, were hunting for them.

So they got tipped off by the Ukrainian police and Ukrainian forces that they have to get out and they were – like, a passage was organized for them. Like, somehow these Ukrainian forces managed to take them out from Mariupol, and they were telling, like, a very detailed

account of, you know, of the – how they were working in Mariupol and how Russians were looking for them.

So it's a deliberate tactic, you know, to target journalists, independent journalists, journalists of foreign outlets, also Ukrainian journalists, those journalists who are reporting the truth. But at the same time, we have to say that Russia is also facilitating the access to territories that it occupies to so-called journalists who are, in fact, propagandists, not just from Russia but also from China.

We've seen reporters of Chinese state media who are in Mariupol and in other areas under Russian control, of course, making, you know, reports about Russian liberators and how local population is happy that Russians came and, you know, they're liberating them from Ukrainian Nazis. Well, obvious propaganda.

But what is the most worrying is that not only Russian and Chinese journalists are doing that. OK, not journalists. They are, you know, propagandists. But there are also Western ones. There is Graham Phillips, the U.K. – you know, I don't know how to call him. Definitely not a journalist, someone who was pushing Russian propaganda since 2014.

There are Italian journalists also in Mariupol and in Russian-occupied territories who are in Italy polluting the information space with all the, you know, crazy conspiracies, Russian narratives and, in general, they are distorting the picture and, you know – and the fact that they are getting invited on major TV shows, also on mainstream television, sometimes also on the public TV, this is something, really, very worrying.

So there is a huge propaganda and disinformation war going on in the West as well and I think we should be also cautious about that and should be paying attention to that, and should be asking questions how is that possible, how these people get there, what are they doing there, how Russians facilitate and enable their work. And I have, you know, my reasons to believe that they are not doing that for free, either. And also, you know, how the governments should react to this and also the media. They shouldn't be given a space, given airtime, giving, you know, a platform to these people.

Of course, big tech has a responsibility as well, because we know that YouTube, for example, provides a platform to these people who earn money, who – you know, whether this – spreading this genocidal propaganda. So that's another issue but still very, very important.

NISHANOV: Olga, I think you've just – absolutely, absolutely correct in that and I think that's one of the reasons why we wanted to do this is because, again, as I pointed out, people who have access to free information are spreading the same narratives, I mean, people who should know better deliberately, like you pointed out, sometimes maybe not deliberately.

But the point is, again, we wanted to highlight you, the three of you, as the voices who are on the ground, who are talking to different people, who are a diverse set of people who are in Ukraine. And, yet, there's – like I pointed out, there's a unity in your narrative, and it's not because somebody's telling you but because you are telling the truth.

One question that I got from a YouTube comment is, and I think just this is a – seems like somebody from the United States – they are asking a very specific question in a very sort of American way. What is one thing you would like to see the United States and its allies to do in Ukraine in terms of aid?

I think, Asami, you'd mentioned the jets. I mean, please feel free to add anything else. But what is the one thing? And I realize that one thing is never a one thing, but what's the – what would you like to see in the next two weeks? Because as we, as all of you pointed out, the next two weeks are going to be very critical to the war.

KATERJI: I'll go first. I'll offer you three things. That's fighter jets, anti-aircraft systems, and man-portable air-defense systems – MANPADS. They need them now.

TERAJIMA: I would agree with Oz. We need fighters as soon as possible and anti-air defense and everything. We need every – all the heavy weaponry that is needed to protect Ukraine because we need to end this war as soon as possible.

But, I think, another important thing that is often not talked about enough is about for people, for people all over the world, to continue thinking about Ukraine and to continue having interest in what's happening here because if that goes away then it's even more difficult to, you know, impose tougher sanctions or, you know, alienates Russia from the rest of the world.

So we need everyone, like, either you – whether you're a student or whether you're, you know, working already everyone to think about what's happening in Ukraine every single day and continue keeping up with the news.

NISHANOV: Perfect. Thank you.

TOKARIUK: I would add that I think the U.S. should be working more closely and talking more persuasively with the European partners, especially with Germany. You know, the German government is really very, very reluctant and very disappointing and, you know, unwilling to provide Ukraine with heavy weapons.

Germany is the only, basically, European country with major significance who is against the oil and gas embargo on Russia. Of course, it will have costs for Germany, but the cost for Ukraine and, potentially, for Europe and, you know, the free world are much higher.

So I think the U.S. should be working, like, persuading Germans, persuading European allies, to, you know, take a more harsh stance on Russia, to somehow wake up to the reality, because I have a feeling that while Americans, you know, and people in the U.K. have a better understanding of what is happening, I have a feeling that many continental Europeans, especially in Western Europe, they are still in denial. They're still living in a very dangerous illusion and a very – they have a very naive approach to what is happening.

I hear – you know, when I hear suggestions that Ukraine should just surrender for the sake of saving lives, you know, this is so dangerously naïve. If Ukrainians surrender, there will be no more Ukraine and Ukrainian lives will be even more in danger.

Now there is a hope for these lives to be saved. But if Russia is allowed to win it's the end of Ukrainians. You know, they will just have carte blanche for genocide. So, somehow, I think there should be more, like, stronger transatlantic communication, cooperation, and action on Ukraine.

NISHANOV: Perfect. Thank you so much. One very quick question from a Senate staffer. They're asking, is it helpful when European leaders or any other political leaders visit Ukraine? Does it strain the logistical – are there logistical challenges that are associated with it?

Are there any negatives? I mean, all they can see is a positive. Is there anything negative to political leaders from the West or, frankly, from anywhere in the world who are friendly to Ukraine visiting Ukraine? Is that a good thing? Is that a helpful thing?

KATERJI: I think it's a good thing as long as it's backed up with an increase in support. If you want to come here for a photo opportunity, as powerful a symbol as that is for the Ukrainian people a photo is not going to change the course of the war.

But if you're turning up with a lorry of, you know, 20 MiG fighter jets behind you, then, yeah, come for the photo op. You know, the more the merrier.

TERAJIMA: I also agree that –

TOKARIUK: Yes, I –

TERAJIMA: Go ahead. (Laughs.) Sorry.

TOKARIUK: No, no, Asami. Go ahead.

TERAJIMA: Oh. I was going to say that, yes, I agree with all that. Yes, it's good. I think there's more benefits of, you know, world leaders visiting Kyiv and meeting President Zelensky themselves and because this shows solidarity, how the world is, you know, united. The world is showing a united front against Russia.

But they need to come with more sanctions and also for more promises of weapon deliveries and more actions on how to help Ukraine.

TOKARIUK: Yes, I agree with my colleagues and I would just add that Russians are really nervous when they see all these foreign leaders visiting Kyiv because, you know, they get the feeling that the world stands with Ukraine, and also they hold off their missile attacks they would otherwise be launching, you know. They are really – like, they are uneasy with the thought of, like, hitting Kyiv or hitting Ukrainian railways where there might be a train where, you know, some Western leader is inside.

So more of these visits are needed because this also increases, somehow, a security of Ukraine, I would argue, and, of course, Joe Biden would be very welcome to visit Kyiv. I know that many Ukrainians would see it as the most powerful signal that could be sent.

KATERJI: It really is. I mean, Joe Biden is different. You know, I don't think Scholz is going to get a very merry reception here at the moment, or Macron, for that matter. But a visit from Biden would be very different. Put it that way.

NISHANOV: Great. Thank you so much. And I know we're running out of time but one more question, and I'm being very frank here. This is a bit of an unfair question. So feel free to answer or not answer this question.

But one of the questions that I got was do you think we need to engage Russians on the propaganda war? Because the question is they seem to be – the vast majority of them, according to polls, seem to be completely brainwashed.

Is it a waste of resources and time to try to convince them otherwise that what's happening in Ukraine is, potentially, a genocidal war, that they're killing Ukrainians, raping babies? Is this worth engaging the Russian citizens who may – the idea being that they may, potentially, then put pressure on the government?

KATERJI: So my feeling about –

NISHANOV: Maybe an unfair question, but – yes, please.

KATERJI: My feeling about that is very clear. I would recommend people read Hannah Arendt on "The Origins of Totalitarianism." I believe that Russia is a fascist military dictatorship in the same vein that the Third Reich was in 1940. I believe that trying to convince these people who are brainwashed that their government is committing fascist crimes is a waste of time, a waste of resources.

The only language that Russia will understand is a military defeat. That's the only language they'll understand. And the longer that we keep prevaricating, wasting time, you know, thinking that there's an alternative solution, that maybe we can, you know, have a diplomatic breakthrough by talking to Russian people about this it's just – it's a fantasy and I would – at this point, it's insulting to the Ukrainian people, in my opinion.

NISHANOV: Olga, Asami, do you – any thoughts on that?

TOKARIUK: Yes. Well, I think this question partially stems from the recent proposal of Alexei Navalny, the Russian opposition leader who is now in jail, to dedicate more resources not into buying Javelins for Ukraine but into investing to combat Russian – the Kremlin propaganda.

You know, this idea was not very well received here in Ukraine because it was seen as if somehow Navalny is saying that, well, it doesn't really make much sense to arm Ukraine and

you should, rather, like, work with Russian people. So while, of course, definitely, there is a need to work with Russian society, I think that, in fact, there are so many – there is so much evidence of, you know, even those Russians who know what is happening in Ukraine, who get this information from their relatives in Ukraine or, you know, their former friends in Ukraine so they have access to information, but they refuse to believe that this is actually happening.

So they choose, actually, to believe Russian state propaganda because that somehow absolves them of responsibility and of the need to react. So people in Russia, many of them, know what is happening but they choose to turn a blind eye to it because somehow, you know, if they endorsed the position of the Russian government and they'd support this war, well, then they – you know, they do not feel that somehow it's their responsibility to stop it.

So, unfortunately, Russian imperialism is not something new. It is not something that only Putin now is – you know, is doing. For centuries, Russia in the Russian empire, Soviet empire, now post-Soviet Russia had an imperialistic attitude to the colonial attitude to Ukraine. It exterminated, you know, Ukrainians in many campaigns – artificial famine in the 1930s, you know, aggressions against Ukrainians, gulags for Ukrainian intelligentsia in Soviet times, just to name a few over the last 100 years.

So the problem is so deep rooted it's not – we cannot, you know, absolve Russians of responsibility by saying that this is just because they are watching propaganda and they do not know what is happening. Many of them know what's happening. They endorse this war or at least they choose to ignore it and not react to it because deep down they are imperialists and they support this Russian imperialist attitude to Ukraine.

I think, you know, Russia must be defeated militarily and then Russia should undergo, the Russian society as well, the process of – you know, the crimes should be punished. Perpetrators should be brought to justice. An international tribunal should be established and there should be a vast debate and a reflection in the Russian society about what led to this war, you know, about the whole ideology – Russian imperialist ideology. It should be abandoned.

There are no easy solutions, you know, and just, like, investing in combating propaganda will not solve this.

TERAJIMA: I agree with my colleagues as well. Trying to engage with the Russian public, who have been – you know, who grew up listening and watching this Russian propaganda is practically impossible and there's no point as well because we need to focus on other efforts to help Ukraine – to directly help Ukraine and there's so many things that the world should do rather than, you know, trying to engage with the Russian people and let them understand what's happening in Ukraine because, as Olga said, majority of them support Russia's war against Ukraine. The majority of them know what's happening in Ukraine and, yet, they don't stand up against it.

I have a friend – I used to live in Moscow myself. I grew up there in my childhood as well and – (audio break) – told me that they don't – they don't want to see what their country is doing, what their soldiers are doing, because they cannot do anything about it. So many of them

don't – even if they do know, they don't want to directly engage to stop the war or speak up against it. So there are so many other things that the world should be doing rather than trying to convince the Russian public about stopping their government and stopping their soldiers.

NISHANOV: This has been incredible. Thank you so much. Very, very clear answers to the questions that – to the difficult questions that that we had here on the panel. I think there's no doubt in anyone's mind that Ukraine is going to prevail, that Ukraine is going to win. There is no question in my mind and everyone that I talk to on the Hill, whether – or, you know, with the administration there's just no question that it's going to happen.

The question is it's the cost the Ukrainians are going to – that will bear in the process and how many lives are going to be sacrificed, frankly, before this goal is achieved. Ukrainians will win. Ukraine, as a nation, will continue. There's no question.

But from what we're hearing today from you is we need to do more to make sure that the costs that are – that are incredible already, that are just unbelievable already, that they are not continuing to multiply. And that's the message that we're going to take away from this and that's the message that we're going to continue using and continue employing in shoring up support for Ukraine, for even more support.

And I think – I know that Congressman Cohen is with us, but as he pointed out, you know, a lot of things that, again, even within the, you know, certain parties, it's not a partisan issue. Ninety-five percent of Congress, as he said, is on board. So more support is going to come and your testimony today will – no doubt in my mind, will contribute to that.

So thank you so much for having this incredibly difficult conversation and I'm really hoping the next one that we're going to do we're going to do, maybe, in Kyiv or maybe somewhere in Ukraine. Maybe we do it in-person and – you know, because these conversations are important.

I think, Asami, as you pointed out, it's really important that the world, you know, does not turn away. This is happening and people are dying and we need to be continuing to be talking about this, and your contributions are immeasurable from what you do day to day and from this panel, frankly. I mean, this is just one effort that you do. What you do day in and day out is incredible.

So from the bottom of my heart and from the Commission, on the Commission's behalf, on all the commissioners that we have and, as you guys know, we're both Republican and Democrat. We are nonpartisan but we are bicameral. We have the members of Congress. We have senators.

So on behalf of everyone, thank you so much for doing this. If you have any parting words that you would like to share with us please do so, and we are already running out of time but we are here to hear from you.

KATERJI: Thank you.

TERAJIMA: Slava Ukraini! Thank you. Thank you as well. I just wanted to say glory to Ukraine and glory to the heroes, as we say here in Ukraine.

KATERJI: Thank you very much to the Commission for having me. If there's anything you can take away from this it's that I believe Ukraine can win this war with material aid that it needs and I urge Western capitals to hear the cry from Ukraine for the aid that it needs to win this war, the war of extermination against its people.

TOKARIUK: Yeah. I just want to say that I wish everyone in the world believed in Ukraine's victory as much as the Ukrainians themselves do.

NISHANOV: Absolutely. That's an incredible, incredible statement to close out this briefing. Thank you so much.

Once again, please feel free to reach out with – and I think, you know, we might have some follow-up questions so I might come back to you with some questions from staffers and members of Congress.

But, again, from the bottom of our hearts, thank you so much. Most importantly, stay safe, everyone, you, your loved ones, everyone you know, but also all of Ukraine. Thank you so much.

TOKARIUK: Thank you.

TERAJIMA: Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:37 a.m., the briefing ended.]