

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

**“My ‘Hell’ in Russian Captivity: Taira Paievska on Russia’s War in  
Ukraine”**

**Committee Members Present:**

**Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), Chairman;  
Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN), Co-Chairman;  
Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), Ranking Member;  
Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)**

**Witnesses:**

**Yuliia “Taira” Paievska, Ukrainian Veteran and Volunteer Paramedic, and  
Commander, “Taira’s Angels”;  
Hanna Hopko, Co-Founder, International Center for Ukrainian Victory, and  
Former Chair, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Parliament of Ukraine**

**The Hearing Was Held From 9:07 a.m. To 10:24 a.m., Room 106, Dirksen  
Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD),  
Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

**Date: Thursday, September 15, 2022**

CARDIN: (Sounds gavel.) The Helsinki Commission will come to order. I want to acknowledge Senator Blumenthal, a Commission member who's with us. I appreciate him being here.

Let me just point out that this is obviously a very busy time for the United States Senate, so some of our committees are meeting simultaneously. So, members will be coming in and out. And I apologize to our distinguished guests that there will be an in-and-out flow of members of the United States Congress during this hearing.

We are so honored to have a real hero with us today –Yuliia Paievska, better known as Taira, her nickname, is well known to the people of Ukraine. Today's hearing is "My 'Hell' in Russian Captivity."

We have seen from afar the atrocities that have been committed by Mr. Putin and Russia in the unprovoked attack on Ukraine. We've seen that from afar. But I must tell you, there's nothing like a firsthand explanation and experience for us to have a better understanding of the atrocities committed by Russia in this war in Ukraine.

So, as we saw the conflict unfold in Mariupol and saw the atrocities that are committed, we're going to have a chance now to see some firsthand footage of what happened in Mariupol by the person who took those videos. Taira was a volunteer medic to try to save lives – and she did save lives – during this conflict. She was able to take certain videos that she smuggled out, that the Associated Press was able to put together.

So, by way of introduction, we will play a short video from the Associated Press based upon Taira's footage, which was smuggled out when the besieged city fell, and let me just caution everyone watching this video – for obvious reasons – contains horrifying images of the reality of Mr. Putin's war on Ukraine.

So we will start with that video and we'll then – I'll then have the opportunity to introduce Taira formally.

(A video presentation is shown.)

(Technical difficulties.)

CARDIN: We're going to try to restart that.

(A video presentation is shown.)

CARDIN: It really is a privilege to welcome the indomitable Taira here with us today. For her exemplary courage having served on the frontlines of Ukraine since 2014 as well as her harrowing experiences in Mariupol, Taira is justly regarded as a national heroine in Ukraine.

You're a person who volunteered to help, to deal with those caught in conflict, to provide medical assistance you volunteered. She's a symbol of the Ukrainian resistance to Russia's brutal war of aggression. Her capture by the Russian forces in March gripped the whole Ukrainian society.

A medic captured and subjected to cruelty for trying to help, including the Russian soldiers, Taira will testify as to the deplorable conditions of her three months of captivity and the plight of those who remain unlawfully detained by Russian occupation forces. Taira's firsthand account will complement the testimony we heard on previous hearings in July of life in Ukraine's newly-occupied territories regarding thousands of Ukrainians arbitrarily detained, interrogated, beaten, and tortured in so-called filtration camps, and the litany of Russian violations of international humanitarian law documented in the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism reports and other human rights reports.

However, no report can adequately capture firsthand experience, and that's why we're so grateful that you're with us today. Before I turn to Dr. Hanna Hopko, who's also joining us for a more fulsome introduction of Taira, I would like to acknowledge that we have in our audience guests, Ukrainian parliamentarians from the NGOs that have worked in regard to these humanitarian efforts. We welcome all of our international guests that are with us today.

I also want to acknowledge Senator Shaheen, a member of the Commission who's with us.

I will now turn – and we are joined by the co-chair of the Commission. I'm going to give him a chance to catch his breath for one second before I turn to him.

Senator Shaheen, would you like to make any opening comments?

SHAHEEN: I would just like to thank you for appearing before the members of the Commission today, and for your heroic efforts in Ukraine.

Thank you.

CARDIN: Congressman Cohen?

COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate you calling this meeting – this important meeting, and I apologize for being a little late. I want to thank all the Rada members who are here, and we had an opportunity to meet with three of the members last night. It was a very informative evening.

And I was privileged to host Ms. Paievska, who has done some amazing work and had some amazing experiences that she's going to share with us, which is really important I think for the world, but the American public as well, to learn and to hear firsthand what's going on in Ukraine.

Your bravery during Mariupol siege and war, battle, is commendable, courageous.

Thank you. I salute you.

I can't imagine what it would be to live like that, but you provided people life and aid. It was so important there was medical personnel to help those people, so you were an angel.

Thank you.

I look forward to the testimony today. What Russia has done in Ukraine needs to be known, and it needs to be punished because it is inhumane, it's immoral, and it's been deadly, and it's been life-altering. There's too many people for no reason, but for the ambition and misdirected and misconceptualized thoughts about Vladimir Putin, who is somehow putting himself in the body of Peter the Great and astral planing three centuries, and eventual destiny to be lying up there next to Lenin, the sooner the better.

I thank Senator Cardin for calling the meeting. This Commission will look after the situations in Ukraine over the years and be an eye that's important and a voice that's important for Congress and the American people.

Slava Ukraine.

CARDIN: Thank you, Representative Cohen.

The United States stands with Ukraine. We are with you so that Ukraine can win this conflict and maintain their total sovereignty, and the international community can hold those responsible for those atrocities accountable for their actions.

Today's hearing is another part of that process for us to get the information so that we can not only help Ukraine maintain its sovereignty, but also hold those accountable for their atrocities.

So, I will now turn to Dr. Hanna Hopko, who needs little introduction as she is well-known to the Commission, one of the leaders of the Euromaidan during the Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity in 2014. Dr. Hopko subsequently served as an independent member of the Parliament in the Ukrainian Parliament, where she chaired the Foreign Affairs Committee from 2014-2019.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, she established, together with other Ukrainian activists, the International Center for Ukrainian Victory, which advocates for Ukrainian interests internationally and supports civil society's efforts towards victory in Ukraine.

Dr. Hopko, welcome back to our committee.

HOPKO: Dear Senator Cardin, Dear Senator Wicker, Dear Commission Members, I'm honored to speak at such an important hearing when Ukrainian armed forces and Ukrainian

people are defending the Free World from the devastation caused by the Russian totalitarian regime that is going beyond Ukraine's borders.

I visited Helsinki Commission in April wearing a T-shirt with the photo of Yuliia Paievska and a written appeal: "Free Taira." By doing so, I was advocating for the release of Yuliia and Ukrainian civilian defenders. I still can't believe that Yuliia is testifying in the front of you today.

Just two weeks ago, Yuliia was back from Orlando Warrior Games, where she won three medals, two gold and one bronze, just two months after she was released from the captivity. What an unbreakable spirit. I'm so proud that Yuliia is here today.

From the beginning of Russian invasion in 2014, Yuliia rescued 700 people, trained first medical aid around 10,000. Yuliia's mission is to save lives. Ukraine's mission is to defeat totalitarian colonialism, defeat treason of nations. Moscow's clear objective is to destroy the Ukrainian nation as a viable political entity through the war of obliteration. Russia wants to break the Ukrainian nation the same way Stalin did with the Holodomor as genocide against Ukrainians, which took millions of lives in last century.

We are Ukrainians. This is why Russia want us to be killed, but they will never achieve this goal. Ukraine's military victory is the only way to restore respect for international law – the tool to ensure the right of nations for freely to choose their own future; the way to demonstrate that totalitarian regimes are not allowed to attack their neighbors and to do genocide.

Ukraine's victory means achieving a strategic goal to ensure the inevitability of punishment for international crimes by Russia Federation and its leadership. I'm so thankful to the U.S. investment in democracy, for the military assistance, and humanitarian aid. Your weapon is a game changer now in the battlefield and successful counteroffensive. It's another example how Ukraine armed forces and Ukraine is the most effective recipient of U.S. military assistance.

The best way to help Ukraine to win faster is to provide more weapons, impose tougher sanctions, recognize Russian aggression as a genocide, and designate Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism. And also, thank you to the Representative Cohen for his initiative to recognize Russian aggression as a genocide.

We all have dreams, big dreams, and responsibility to pursue them. When I was here in April with the T-shirt "Free Taira," I had a dream to see Taira to be released, and now she is sitting today with us. And I have another big dream one day to visit Moscow, which has memorials – which will have memorials in honor of victims of two genocide: Stalin's Holodomor and ongoing aggression. This is why the international tribunal and reparations to Ukraine are key for international justice. All of this would be a powerful signal to Ukrainians, who are still in Russian captivity. We cannot forget our brave warriors of light. Thank you for staying with Ukraine. It's time to win with Ukraine.

Thank you, Senator Cardin, for your leadership, for your many times visiting Ukraine from 2014, and actually conducting here in June also important briefing on decolonizing Russia. I think your Commission has very proactive position in developing a strategy towards Russia, because in 1991 when Soviet Union was disintegrating, it was defeat of communism, but not a defeat of colonialism. And I think with the victory of Ukraine we will see that never again totalitarian or authoritarian regimes attack any sovereign nation. And I'm honored that today Yuliia will share her painful experience, and you have this opportunity to listen to her and help my country to win faster. Thank you so much.

CARDIN: Thank you very much, Dr. Hopko.

Taira, I understand that you will give your remarks in English, but you have a translator because of the language issues. We certainly understand that. You may proceed as you are comfortable. Again, it's an honor to have you before our committee. We admire your leadership in trying to save lives on the battlefield, and for the international community to understand exactly what is happening in Russia's aggression. You may proceed.

PAIEVSKA: Dear Senator Cardin, dear Senator Wicker, dear Commission members, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your conviction with helping and keeping Ukraine your thoughts and prayers. My name is Yuliia Paievskia. My comrades call me Taira. Originally, I am a graphic designer and the president of one of the Ukrainian – (inaudible) – Federation. My name is Yuliia Paievskia. My grandfather was a World War II hero. Now, as my country is at war, I am a paramedic. My mission is saving lives. Russians call me a Nazi, like they call everyone, every Ukrainian who fights them or simply doesn't want Russia in Ukraine.

The first 20 days of this war I spent in Mariupol, which was hell. After that I spent three months in Russian captivity, which was hell too. I'm not the one to make politician speeches. I'm not a politician. Let me just tell you the stories of which I was witness. Curiosity is one of the reasons, along with – (off-side conversation) – perseverance – excuse me – and confidence in one rightness which allowed me to survive in hell. When my tormentors advised me to commit suicide, I said no. I will see what happen tomorrow. I wonder how far they can go in their madness and anger. And then one day, when it seems there was no hope, someone looks into the peephole and called my name. "Get your things and get out."

This is how my journey to freedom begins. A colossus with feet of clay is the essence of the Russian empire – pseudo-empire. This was provided by our army, which is driving the enemy out from our land. Thank you for your giving so much to drive them with out with – but we need more. I hope you are here not because of curiosity. I hope that you are here in order not to allow this moment to happen.

Pregnant prisoners was – is unknown either to their relatives to the state, a fighter who was beaten for three hours and then thrown into the basement like a sock and only a day later someone come to him. A dead child in mother's arms. A 7-years old boy with bullet wounds, dying in my lap because I cannot ward death off in this case. Prisoners in cells screaming for weeks and dying from the torture without any medical help. That is the torment of hell. And the

only things they feel before this is abuse and additional beating. My friend's eyes – whose eyes I close before his body cools down. Another friend, and another, and another.

I see a half a million people dying before my eyes under airstrikes, methodical, planned. Airstrikes at hospital and residential areas. A hospital full of wounded soldiers and civilians when the anesthetic drugs have run out and the antibiotics are about run out too. Surgeons and the entire medical staff sleeping two, three hours a day because surgery is one after another. Medevac cars arriving every five, ten minutes where the wounded and the dead are lying on top of each other, and worse fate too – impossible to understand when if – even if you cry.

Burning cries with burned people in them. Police officers taken out from under the rubble. The women and children mutilated beyond recognition after another shelling. People collecting water from puddles. Looted homes. Dogs who once were pets dragging human limbs around the city. Prisoners who are forced to take off their clothes by their killers before they're murdered slowly and with slaughter. Specially-equipped torture chambers. The association against the prisoners that are absolutely the same, where the only names changed in the paper. And even the (gender ?) of the assessed does not change. No one is trying to investigate. Evidence is obtained simply by using human torture.

All these facts is into the area of the middle age. I'm a witness, like other thousands of prisoners. I speak for them. Our soldiers were dying in their cells, screaming for six days – one, screaming for six days. And on the seventh day, his body was placed on the stretcher by his cellmates. And this prison guards took what was left of the soldier. Another one dying from the torture quietly for the six days, and another – only later we learn about his death due to lack of medical assistance. And this is only teeny part what – of what I personally know. Russia is confident of its impunity and the infinity of its propaganda, as well as the infinity of its natural resources. They have a moral right to wage this war.

This is not our war. This is the third world war. And until the understanding of these facts become global, Russia keeps rising up against and again, killing its citizens and destroying the world. The sacrifice that my people bring to the altar of freedom is a sacrifice for the world war. And I know that we will win. But even after our victories, and we will recover over time and will again gather forces for aggression, and history will go full circle, if nothing is changed. Death, suffering, the loss of blood, why? Why?

Together with Mariupol, they killed the image of noble and the invincible warriors. The world saw it is a(n) insolent heart, without any idea of military honor. No human rights rules, and customs of war are being observed. And this is considered the norm. Why? One of my torturers asked me: Do you know why I do this to you? I answered, because you can. And certainly – he certainly did not expect such an answer. That's right, they do it because they can. Because they were told by their leaders that they have the right to do it. Because at one time it was provided to them. Because the world gives them such an illusion.

The world was silent, watching the crimes of the Russians in Georgia, Syria, et cetera. But the victories of the Ukrainian Army in this last week show us that they can't, that their rights of strong is just an illusion. This is Colossus with the feet of clay. The free world community

has enough influence to stop this madness. We must start with the issue of prisoners and the fate of civilians in the occupied territories of Ukraine. The issue of prisoners exchange is on the – (off-side conversation) – reluctance of the Russians of cooperate. As always, they choose it not as strategy.

Our prisoners are mostly keep in the territory of the so-called Luhansk and Donetsk Peoples Republic. It is convenient for the Russians to transfer our responsibility to the so-called – (off-side conversation) – authorities of the so-called republics to avoid the retribution. But everyone knows that nothing is done in the occupied territories without order from Moscow. And the handlers from the special service of Russia stand behind each of – each of them. The world needs to insist the facilitating the access of the United Nation and the Red Cross mission to our prisoners, both military and civilian, because none of the humanitarian mission have access to our people who are illegally held in inhuman conditions. The world needs to insist on the participation of the international community and officials in negotiation regarding prisoners exchange and release.

This is currently our main issue. And I'm asking for your help in this. But the next ones will appear, the fight against propaganda of Russia's fascist regime, because this is the primary weapon. A fair trial of the war criminals with objective investigation. Treatment and (political ?) support of war victims. We must change main Moscow narratives because they will deny the people of the world the right of life, no more and no less. Victory takes place in the hearts and the minds, which is no less important than the force of the arms.

We have a lot of support, including our biggest one – supporters, excuse me – including the biggest one, the people of the United States who are supporting our fight for survival directly, as well as thousands represented – representatives in both chambers of the United States Congress. Using this opportunity, I would like to thank all of you for your strong voice of support in providing historic amounts of security assistance and appropriation bills. Please continue supporting new supplement budget of \$1.7 billion of United States is more – or more. Designate Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism. Recognize this aggression as a genocide. Help us to save Ukraine, Europe, and all democratic world.

Thank you.

CARDIN: Well, thank you for your courage and for your service to humanity, by what you have done in Ukraine and what you continue to do to bring this message to the world community. Your testimony is powerful, firsthand testimony. You give a face to the victims. We hear the numbers, but you give us the specifics. And we recognize that every one of those numbers represents a person whose life has been changed forever or who has lost his life. You point out that no human rights rules or customs of war are being observed. And we never thought that we would see in our lifetime a country pursue a war and observe no rules or boundaries whatsoever.

And you point out in your testimony that nothing is done in the occupied territories without orders from Moscow. Mr. Putin's responsible for these actions. You also point out that they have violated international norms. The unprovoked attack on Ukraine violated every



condition of the Helsinki Final Act, which is what this Commission is about. and then you point out that Russia has violated every international standard and responsibility in regards to conflict. They have targeted civilians. You're before us as a targeted victim, a civilian, a medic trying to save lives. They violated every international norm on treatment of prisoners. Your testimony points that out, and specific examples of violating prison rights. And you point out that one of Mr. Putin's tools is to use propaganda, false information, to fight against the propaganda of Russia's fascist regime, because this is their primary weapon. I couldn't agree with you more.

So I'm going to ask a question that perhaps you've already answered, but I want to understand this. Why were you imprisoned? You were there as a medic to help civilians and help soldiers who were injured. There's international protection for our medics that are there in conflict. Why were you targeted? And why were so many civilians captured and imprisoned? Was part of the military strategy of Russia to target civilians for military action against them, to be imprisoned and tortured, to show the Ukrainian people there'd be no mercy to anyone? Is that what you experienced? Why were you apprehended? Why were you put in prison?

PAIEVSKA: (Through interpreter.) I was detained during a document check. I cannot say exactly why specifically I was detained, but I understand they checked their records, their database. And they saw that I was a paramedic. And at present, at war, that, in their eyes, was a crime in itself. Later, when I was in captivity, I was being tortured. And they tried to make me get a confession – some kind of confession from me about some alleged crimes, which I had never committed. They didn't care to know the truth. They just wanted me to admit guilt for something I had never committed. Their intention, the goal, was to create an image of some kind of a beast out of me and charge me with things I could not even imagine.

All this was targeted towards – targeted to the Russian population to create an image of a horrible enemy and show them this image. I believe they were doing the same with other captive – people in captivity. And they used torture in order to falsify those alleged crimes that people would be forced to confess. I have seen footage of Russian propaganda TV programs, where shown with people I know in person confessing of things that I know for sure they have never done. So I can well imagine what was – what they did to those people in order to get those video recordings. All this is done in order to release themselves of responsibility in the aggression against Ukraine, to produce that image of a merciless enemy. And me as an example, just look at me, in order to justify their crimes and their desire to seize my country. This is my personal opinion. Thank you.

CARDIN: Of course, that violates the Geneva Conventions in so many different ways. Did you have any opportunity for any outside contact? Talk a little bit about what experiences you had as far as being cared for while you were under captivity.

PAIEVSKA: (Through interpreter.) At the time when I was detained, I already had a concussion caused by explosion of mines that were shot at the hospital, where I was. I had a strong headache and other conditions. And I asked to send me a doctor. They told me I do not deserve that. I asked to allow me to make a phone call to inform my husband about where I was and what happened to me. They did not allow that. They said, you have seen too many American movies. There'll be no phone call.

They took away all my belongings, including the medicines that I need to take every day. I have my thyroid removed. For this reason, I have to take a hormonal medicine every single day. It's called substitution therapy. But only after about 10 days when I was – when I kept asking for that every moment, I received my medicines back. And this was really a miracle because the attitude of theirs was not to give me anything, not to allow anything. The same was with my medicines for asthma. They wouldn't let me keep that medicine. And in order to get myself a spray of that can, I would have to knock on the door forever until they would come and let me use it.

Thank God my aggravated conditions were not happening very often, because every time I would bother those poor guards they would get very angry at me. Rude talk to us was the norm. But they felt like it was just a normal thing to do. They took away all the clothes I had except those I was wearing. For those three months, I only had one set of underwear, the one I was wearing. One pair of jeans, one t-shirt, a little cardigan, sort of, and a coat. That coat saved my life, because it kept me from dying from cold. The conditions of keeping people in captivity was really inhuman.

They captured me in March when I was very cold. All the cells where we were kept in different places, but all of them invariably had no windowpanes, just the bars on the window. It was always terribly cold. There were no blankets for us and, of course, no pillows. And most of the time not even a mattress. So we slept on bunks made of metal. That, in itself, was a kind of torture. In the course of those three months, I was only able to wash myself with more or less warm water when they took us to showers once. They refused to receive any packages of supplies of any kind.

In my case, there were no relatives or family to come and bring such packages, but there were other girls in other cells who had family, but they could not receive those packages either. And I don't know if I should mention that but, of course, no toothbrushes, no toothpaste, no creams of any kind. You can forget about that.

CARDIN: Thank you. Congressman Cohen.

COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you for your testimony and your life. When you were arrested, captured in Mariupol, do you believe that they knew who you were and what you had been doing?

PAIEVSKA: (Through interpreter.) Well, when the men in uniform of Donetsk Republic security was checking my ID, he saw my name and he kind of remembered some information he knew. So he left, went inside, and stayed there for a few minutes. He was either checking some lists or making a phone call to get, I don't know, orders. So when he came back he said I need to get out of the vehicle. And that's how it all began.

COHEN: And then when you were taken, I guess, to a prison after that were you treated differently than the other prisoners, do you believe, because of your past deeds?

PAIEVSKA: (Through interpreter.) They did not treat anyone with politeness. There were some civilian girls, just plain civilian girls, nothing special, and they were beaten, just to scare them, I think. That's why they do it. But of course, I did get special treatment. It's very unpleasant for me to recall all that.

COHEN: The troops from the, I think it was the Azov Brigade in Mariupol, were some of those individuals in the same prison as you were?

PAIEVSKA: (Through interpreter.) I was kept at different locations, but at each of those locations, yes, there were some guys from the Azov group.

COHEN: Do you have any reason to know or believe that they were treated differently as well?

PAIEVSKA: (Through interpreter.) The Azov prisoners of war were treated with special cruelty. For some reason also, they have a particular hatred to soldiers from Ukraine's military unit named Aidar. I heard from them something like in their system these units are recognized as terroristic organizations.

COHEN: It's amazing to me that that – and it has been – that the Russians refer to the Ukrainians as Nazis. But the only behavior that's been similar to Nazis that I've heard of is the behavior of the Russians, particularly in the incarceration and prisons that you've experienced and we've heard about.

INTERPRETER: Excuse me, was this a question, sir?

COHEN: Not right.

PAIEVSKA: No, you're absolutely right.

COHEN: Thank you. Thank you. I yield back.

CARDIN: We're joined by Congressman Wilson, who's the ranking Republican member of the Helsinki Commission in the House of Representatives.

WILSON: Thank you, Co-Chairman Ben Cardin and Co-Chairman Steve Cohen for holding this somber, but important, hearing. I appreciate our witness today for her service to those who've endured the worst at the hands of war criminal Putin. Our witness today, veteran humanitarian Taira Paievskaya, has provided lifesaving medical treatment to hundreds and has documented critical footage of atrocities committed by Putin's murderous thugs since 2014. The civilized world is inspired by the determination of the people of Ukraine. Victory for Ukraine is crucial in the conflict worldwide of democracy, rule of law, being opposed by authoritarians' rule of gun.

The world continues to witness unspeakable acts of brutality committed against those captured by Putin's forces, but perhaps most prominent are the images from Mariupol, where

Putin's forces bombed a theater sheltering hundreds and where Ukrainian heroes nightly held off Russian forces, against all odds. It is critical that the world hear the stories of those who endured the worst under captivity and forced relocation. The evidence is essential to prosecution of war crimes when Ukraine repels Putin's forces and achieves victory.

Tara, I want to thank you for your service. The world cannot imagine what you've been through. And we thank you for taking the time to speak to the Commission today. One of the most important mandates of the Helsinki Commission is to amplify the plight of victims' human rights abuses. We must continue to champion this cause and release of those currently suffering in captivity.

And I now get to a question. And that is, on February 24th I received a German newspaper which correctly identified this war as a cellphone war. And the significance of that is that Putin atrocities can be exposed as never before. So with that ability you certainly made a difference with bodycam footage from Mariupol and a devastating account of the suffering caused by Putin. I want to thank you for the footage that you made. I want to thank you for the extraordinary lengths that you've made to get this to the world. With that in mind, are other persons able to use their ability to record and present to the world the truth of what's going on in Ukraine?

INTERPRETER: Sir, excuse me, could you rephrase the question? I wasn't sure I caught it.

WILSON: The question is this: With the ability of cellphones you can't hide anymore anywhere in the world. And in fact it gives an opportunity in conflict to expose the atrocities right away. And so are other persons in Ukraine using this ability to expose the atrocities so that the world understands the inhumanity of what is being conducted?

PAIEVSKA: (Through interpreter.) I believe that others are doing this too. If there electricity, if there is cellphone connection, then they certainly would do it. War is war. And you do not always have communication or electricity. That's the first the enemy does, ruin communication lines.

WILSON: Again, thank you for the success you've made in overcoming that. Another question. It's really sad that the world has been subject to misinformation by Putin. And prior to your being captured, have you been subject to disinformation? Additionally, since your release has there been disinformation provided by Putin to question your goals and your achievements?

PAIEVSKA: (Through interpreter.) Russian propaganda has created a whole film. I watched this film and it's obvious how fake it is. However, it is efficient for the Russian – for the Russians to blame me for bad things. Personally, I feel very irritated about it because all my life, all the time I spent to the war zone I dedicated to helping people. I refused myself many things in order to be able to do more and provide more for the military servicemen and civilians in need. But their interest is in lies in order to remove blame from themselves. I feel sad about it, but as long as truth prevails that will bring our victory.

WILSON: And a final question, war criminal Putin unintentionally has unified Democrats and Republicans in the United States. He has unified NATO as never before, with now Finland and Sweden joining NATO with an 830 mile with the Russian Federation, and also to encourage countries like Germany and Italy to achieve the 2 percent of defense spending. Additionally, he has unified the European Union, and unprecedented the European Union is providing aid to the people of Ukraine as never before. With that in mind, what more can people in the world do to assist the people of Ukraine achieve victory?

PAIEVSKA: (Through interpreter.) I think it is very important to conduct investigations of the crimes of the Russian fascist regime in order to reveal the lies and their treachery, so that we put an end to this aggression and to all future intentions of such aggression. It is very obvious that if they achieve victory in Ukraine they were planning to move on further into Europe. So collecting evidence, recognition of Russia as a sponsor of terrorism, strengthening of sanctions, and, as you rightly pointed out, the world has to come together, has to unite. Because we are dealing here with a problem we have never had in the world since World War II.

And then again, we need more – I apologize for saying this again. We are very thankful for everything you’ve given us already. But in order to develop this – the military success, we need more weapons. You can see that your arms, your weapons, are in good hands. We are not – we’re using it properly. We’re not using it against civilians or for anything bad. Ukraine is fighting the war with honor. And one thing we need, in part, is anti-aircraft defense systems. Because they are failing to defeat us in land warfare, they are trying to destroy us from air – with airstrikes. And this is not only about the military, which would be bad but not half as bad. But they are making strikes at critical infrastructure facilities. And they rejoice from that.

So we are asking for additional resources – air defense resources. But like I said before, victory is achieved in the minds and hearts, along with the strength of – the power of weapons. I firmly believe in this. And so I am asking to stand together against that propaganda influence. Russia has inherited the old traditions of the Soviet Union, in that respect, the traditions of that kind of propaganda. I would suggest that more work is done by specialists on that issue, how Russian propaganda impacts the minds of the Russian people as well as people in the occupied territories. It’s terrible impact. That said, without weapons, all that will have no meaning. Thank you.

WILSON: And as I – as I conclude, I agree with you that, indeed, the dictator Lukashenko by accident revealed, indeed, the was not going to stop in Ukraine, it would go to Moldova. We know that it would then proceed to Georgia. We know this would give encouragement to the CCP, the Chinese Communist Party, to go after Taiwan. We know that Tehran would want to fill their goal of vaporization of the people of Israel, and vaporization of the people of the United States. And so your success is crucial to all of us. And we’ve got great leadership with Senator Ben Cardin. Thank you.

CARDIN: Well, again, I want to thank our witnesses. The Helsinki Commission – U.S. Helsinki Commission, since the days of the Soviet Union, has been a voice for those who have been victimized by oppression. I want to thank Dr. Hopko again for bringing your case to our

attention. We think that is the only way that we can be the advocates for those who are imprisoned and whose human rights have been abridged, is by putting a spotlight on it.

So this is an open invitation. If you have information about other individuals that may be in a similar circumstance that you were in that we might be able to use our megaphone here to amplify their cause, please feel comfortable to get that information to our staff. We will certainly never want to put anyone in greater jeopardy, but we do think that putting a spotlight is important so that the oppressors know they're being watched and knowing that we're taking action to try to help them.

So that's an open invitation from this Commission. At any time if you have additional information about individuals that we might be helpful in raising their concerns. Because we are concerned about every individual who's been victimized. And we want to help those individuals. And putting a face on it, it helps us get the international community more unified and energized to stop these atrocities and to do exactly what you're saying, to provide the wherewithal so that the Ukrainians can defend their sovereignty and win this war of aggression against Russia, but also to hold the perpetrators accountable for their atrocities.

And your providing information to us certainly helps us. And your testimonies today before this Commission is a major step forward. And once again, we thank you for being here. We thank you for your courage. We thank you for saving lives. And we thank you for what you're doing on behalf of the Ukrainian people and, as Mr. Wilson said, on behalf of all of us that feel threatened by Mr. Putin's asymmetric arsenal trying to bring down our democratic systems of government.

With that, the Commission will stand adjourned. Thank you. (Sounds gavel.)

[Whereupon, at 10:24 a.m., the hearing ended.]