

# 2022 Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference

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## Can the Russo-Ukrainian War End Without Nuclear Use?

### Speakers

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### Moderator

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**Michael Mazarr:** Good morning everyone. The first panel I'm delighted to introduce. My name is Mike Mazarr. I'm from the Rand Corporation. Delighted to introduce and moderate this first panel on a subject that is of urgent interest to all of us, obviously, that stems from this tragic war and the worrisome danger of escalation that we face. We're going to be talking about the situation with Russia and Ukraine. In particular the nuclear aspects of it.

It's a troubling subject to discuss in a way but I think as Tino was just saying, it's incredibly invigorating to be back in a room like this with this many people gathered together to bring our knowledge together to try to solve these kinds of problems. We have a tremendously expert panel to help us deal with this. To my far left, Kori Schake, senior fellow, and Director of Foreign Policy and Defense Studies at the American Enterprise Institute. Polina Sinovets, Head of the Odessa Center for Non-proliferation.

Joining us virtually, and I don't see his lovely mug just yet, but Patrick Porter from his home near the University of Birmingham in England and there he is. Patrick, one thing you need to keep in mind is that you are an immense presence looming over this room in ways that those of us on the panel can only-- Your words are going to have unique weight today because it appears that you're a magical presence. I can only say that at my age I'm glad they're not seeing me at that level of detail but it's great to have you and through the magic of virtual connections.

The way we're going to do this is I have a couple of initial questions to get the discussion started I'll ask each of the panel to comment on. Then we'll turn it over to questions from the larger group. As was mentioned, if you're here, please use the app. I've got this little magical device that will give me all the questions that are asked. If you are not here, use the Zoom chat function or question function.

Let's start from where we are to looking ahead. Militarily in some ways, Ukraine is still making progress. Russia has been taking actions in the last couple of weeks apparently designed to indicate that it is trying to draw some lines to Ukrainian progress and shock the West perhaps into a new approach to the war with missile strikes and all of this signaling about dirty bombs and possible sabotage that we've seen reports of and then some of the public signaling about nuclear risks. I'll start with Kori. Play out the next couple of months for us. From this point forward, what do you see happening from now through the winter and into next year, particularly around these issues of nuclear signaling, nuclear risks, escalatory risks?

**Kori Schake:** I would start with two points. The first is this is scary. This is legitimately an incredibly tense, worrisome situation, because Russia's invasion of Ukraine is failing. As they continue to be pushed out of Ukrainian territory, there are enormous incentives for escalation. That is to try and cover the failure of their conventional Army's invasion of Ukraine with either asymmetric escalations, attacking pipelines, crossing the most important boundary in war, which is to the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, trying to take out power plants.

It looks to me like Russian strategy is that they have acknowledged they can't defeat Ukraine's Army and so they are looking to split off Western support and corrode the Ukrainian population's willingness to continue to resist Russian occupation. My expectation of what's going to happen is that by next summer, Russia will have been pushed out of the entirety of the territory of Ukraine, including Crimea.

It is so shocking how fundamentally bad the Russian military is at warfare, and basic stuff they're not good at. Again, that's going to give enormous incentives to escalation, and so there will be a premium in the coming three months, I think, to signal very clearly and very concretely to the Russian government the consequences of crossing the nuclear threshold.

I guess one more point I would add is that I don't see meaningful military targets for nuclear use in Ukraine. There isn't a port or an airfield or massing of large numbers of troops that would be a traditional battlefield nuclear target. What I have nightmares about is as Russia's military is pushed out of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin concluding that he may be able to cover this humiliating defeat by launching a nuclear strike on the Ukrainian capital Kyiv to affect regime change by killing the Ukrainian government. I think we need to be very clear, and I think the administration has done a pretty good job of this, of making clear to the Russians that they will be in a fundamentally different international situation if they do that.

I would personally be more specific than the Biden administration has. That is to convey four or five things. First, our intelligence has been pretty good so far, and if we see any movement by the Russians towards nuclear use, we will publicize that internationally, so they will pay a diplomatic price the world over. Second, we will give the Ukrainians all of the intelligence and military assets necessary to preempt that use. Third, that we will remove any restrictions on the weapons we're providing the Ukrainians or their operational use.

I guess fourth, that we will commit to hunt down and bring to the Hague, anybody involved in the decision-making or the execution of the order because I think we need to raise the fence very high so that the Russians cannot fool themselves into

thinking there will not be major international consequences. Second to try and deter the use.

**Mazarr:** Okay, thanks. Patrick, let me come to you, and then Polina will come to you. Patrick, the same basic question. What do you see in the next few months, but in particular, is there anything Kori said that you disagree with?

**Patrick Porter:** Well, good morning America. I'm sorry I can't be there. I'm joining you from Britain where we know a thing or two these days about crisis instability.

[laughter]

I [unintelligible 00:22:04] in sympathy with very much what Kori said. Just a few points. I think there is an increased real risk of nuclear use. It's not probable, but it's less improbable than before and I see that probability as rising. Some argue that this is bluster, this is just coercion, and it may be bluster, it may be coercion, but that doesn't preclude it also becoming real down the track.

We have now the flip side of Ukraine's successful rolling back of Russia's forces that the enemy-- This autocratic enemy, this atrocious enemy is becoming more desperate. What's more, it may be the case that we could say that Russia shouldn't rationally use them, but doesn't mean they won't. That was the argument I had with colleagues before the war. I said Russia would invade. My colleague said he won't because he shouldn't.

When you're dealing with an unstable situation where the adversary perceives there to be first-order existential stakes, they might miscalculate. What's more? You don't have to be fixated on the peculiarities of Vladimir Putin to conclude that nuclear use is possible because it's in fact much more mainstream nuclear doctrine amongst nuclear-armed powers. When they're facing the prospect of conventional defeat, and where the stakes are high to be tempted to use them. This was after all part of NATO's doctrine in the European theater from 1965 to offset and forestall conventional defeat with a threat of nuclear use.

A similar story you can tell about Pakistan, India, even North Korea. I agree that there may not be a meaningful military target operational target, but I think the purpose would be coercive and to terrorize, and to make the west back off to make Ukraine back off, at least divide the west would be attempt attempted psychological terror.

Whatever strategy we are going to form, we're going to have a strategy of least progress. It can't be one that bets the farm on this being a bluff. This is very real. I agree with that.

Secondly, and as if this wasn't depressing enough, I don't see the scope now or in the near future for there to be any kind of diplomatic settlement here. I don't think there's scope even for bargaining. I don't think there's even a table actually, as much as we might like there to be one. Why do I say that? I think that both sides don't want there to be, and both sides have very rational reasons not to be. War termination short of outright defeat of an enemy is always difficult. In this case, both sides

perceive very important stakes in it, obviously. Both sides can't yet credibly commit to a future unless they win more. We haven't got that balance.

The battlefield outcome so far until Ukraine, it can win more. It's got the upper hand conventionally, it's achieved some stunning breakthroughs with western aid. Russia's atrocities make this much worse because Ukraine believe not only can it succeed, that it must succeed, that it's not dealing with an adversity that can be bargained with or just arm twisted, or talked out of it. It's dealing with a wild beast that has to be driven off its territory absolutely and without compromise. That's very much on Russia at this point.

It's not just that it invaded, but it invaded as gratuitously as it could have done. Even if the Ukrainian government was interested in bargaining, its people probably wouldn't let it. There's a from below resistance to this idea of compromise. At the same time, Russia's rear guard action now probably tells it that it can maybe hold on to these four **[unintelligible 00:25:53]**, particularly with the threat of WMD attacks, particularly with the possibility of splitting the West.

What's more, we have now an enemy that has foreclosed the possibility of bargaining in the sense Putin is burning his **[unintelligible 00:26:07]**, drawing red lines, making overt nuclear threats and threats to use anything means possible. What do I think coming in the future, I broadly agree with the stance that the Biden administration has taken. The west has interests here, they are real, but they are limited better to keep it ambiguous.

One of the problems is that for Russia to be truly punished here with measures short of war, you're relying upon some other actors, and I want to introduce some other actors into this, in particular India and China. We don't control what India and China do, but one thing we can do is to absolutely amplify diplomatically as Kori said, what's the Russian ambassador to the United Kingdom said the other day.

That Russia would under no circumstances use nuclear weapons. Now, that may not be true. It may be insincere. The Putin regime, after all, has a very well-founded reputation for lying its ass off. That can be something that is broadcast everywhere as an extra reason to fear Russia if it does roll the nuclear dice. If China and India cut trade ties and withdraw their economic and strategic patronage, then Russia is truly being punished across the board.

One thing I would add, and we can discuss this and I'm sure this is probably the most contentious part, is as well as, making clear that nuclear use would take Russia into a different place of peril with measures shorter war. The US has to focus more in its debate on the thing it can control as well, which is the arms that it supplies and the conditions of their use, and where geographically it would support their use. I'll leave that one hanging tantalizingly for the discussion. Thank you very much.

**Mazarr:** Okay, thank you, Patrick. Polina, I think both Kori and Patrick have sketched out a daunting next several months where Russia continues to lose worse and the potential for escalation grows. Is that the basic future that you see as well?

**Polina Sinovets:** Yes. Yes, I think so. This is more and more concerning. On some point I believe that the US attempts to persuade Russia not to attack seems to be

successful. Not to attack with nuclear weapons. Now they're trying to probe other different kinds of way how they can behave with the issue with this dirty bomb of course it can be a protects of using nuclear weapons, but on the other hand, it can be an attempt to understand what is the red line for the United States to act decisively, and what strategies they can apply regarding Ukraine besides nuclear weapons use.

As already probably was told here that for Putin this war is a game of a chicken and he just closed the door for himself or any kind of defeat, he needs victory by any prize. This is the most concerning thing for me because at some point I still don't think that he's interested to use nuclear weapons. I still don't think that he wants to use nuclear weapons. However, at some point, if he will feel himself trapped and feeling no other option, then he can do it. This is just to caress the West, just to prove that Russia is decisive because Russia is keeping that kind of notion that in the contest of resolve, Russia will always be the winner because Ukraine matters for Russia much more than for the West. Then there is idea that NATO would not interfere because of something which is out of the deterrence perimeter. On the other hand, as I understand, during the last month, even more than last month, during last two months. When Russian threats became much more credible, Russian threats to use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine.

This situation became much more important for the United States, not only because it was Ukraine at stake, but mostly because the international world order, nuclear world order is at stake because if anyone would pave the way for reaching foreign policy aims with the help of nuclear weapons or nuclear **[unintelligible 00:30:55]**, and if that turns to be successful, then he'll go further.

If Russia would succeed in Ukraine with this nuclear blackmail, with the **[unintelligible 00:31:06]** threats or using nuclear weapons, then it goes further, then Georgia will be the next, because main principle of Russian greatness and Russian existence is the gathering of lands principle. This was the way like Russian state was created and became great, starting from the Moscow Kingdom to the Russian Empire. This is the way Putin sees Russia can become great again. That kind of miss for the greatness is one of the main, probably, slogans of Putin having said that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest tragedy in history of the 20th century. He just signed on that.

This is why Russia is interested in gathering lands. If we are speaking about gathering lands, then Georgia will be the next, then Baltic States will be the next. Of course, they are a part of NATO, but if NATO would not react at this point, if the United States would not react on Ukraine, then Georgia will be the next, then Baltic states will be the next because Narva is the essential Russian city as Putin said, and so why not? If it's possible, the more you feel it's possible, the more you want. I think that this is the biggest problem.

This problem is rightly felt by the US administration, fortunately. Now the deterrent signals became much stronger just because it's not only Ukraine at stake, but the whole nuclear world order is at stake. At this point it's very important to put the dot to that expansionist aspirations of Putin. Otherwise, all the rules of the world order, which is still, I believe, based on the nuclear taboo and nuclear deterrence at the same time. When taboo is broken, deterrence is also broken, those are paradoxically

two things which are not complying, but, still, they're the main, they will be broken, and then some kind of nuclear chaos can become. I think that's all on my side.

**Mazarr:** Well, a lot of issues here to unpack. Polina, actually, let me ask you a quick follow-up question because this issue came up in all of the discussions. It seems like one of the central dilemmas here is that we want Putin to lose, we need Putin to lose, for norms and international law, he must lose. On the other hand, as we've all discussed, when he begins to lose the risks of escalation go up, and you said that he has foreclosed backing off.

Just quickly, is there any way-- What's the way around that dilemma? It appears that we are on the road to escalation if we are to achieve the thing we must achieve. Is there any way to thread that needle that avoids bigger risks?

**Sinovets:** As far as Putin, I still believe that Putin is rational. He is not that smart for calculating risks, but sometimes, but he's rational. He has a fear, there are certain fears he's cherishing. He should be probably clearly very demonstrated that he may lose everything, he may lose Russia. This is the main point. The costs and benefits are still on here, on the table because having Ukraine is not worth of losing Russia. He may lose Russia, but, on the other hand, he can still come back and say that the mission of the special operation was successful because, in Russia, everything depends on the interpretation. If you say that you have fulfilled what you wanted, to some extent--

Of course, it would be a very hard moment now because he had proclaimed the annexation of the regions of Ukraine, so he can't back off. This is the thing which they probably should think over now because, as I understand it, now Russian elites already started to think over how they can leave the war without that devastating loss or the reputation of devastating loss. This is a big dilemma. This is what I am afraid that Putin should receive some kind of rewards for backing off and what kind of rewards would it be?

**Mazarr:** You think it's important that we do offer him some kind of reward for backing off?

**Sinovets:** Yes, but not for the sake of Ukraine, obviously.

**Mazarr:** Of course, of course.

**Sinovets:** Maybe, it could be some kind of arms control development, which I don't really see now, but there should be something which he would interpret as a big victory, which is worth of leaving Ukraine. Probably, there should be no other options or the loss of everything or the opportunity to get at least his face and the butt and Russia and to stay the president of Russia. Of course, it's really hard to imagine how it can be done by the negotiations, but I think that this is something that everyone should think about because the only threats would not give him the idea how to leave this conflict without the significant damage for him as a president. The part of war still exists in Russia, and they already started to criticize him as a very incapable leader. He should present them something, showing that he's still capable leader, but what? This is the question.

**Mazarr:** Not so much that he's actually earned. That's a fascinating point, and, probably, we don't have time to develop it in detail. Given that resolving these situations is always about some level of assurance, as in the Cuban Missile Crisis. The withdrawal of the Jupiter missiles and the promise not to invade Cuba, but not rewarding aggression, so what fits into that? Kori, I want to follow up one thing you said. You predicted that the Russian army would collapse so much that, by next summer, Ukraine would have Crimea back. Independently of the Donbas, do you see Putin willing to lose Crimea and not go to nuclear weapons?

**Schake:** I don't know how to answer that, to be honest. I do think the more Ukraine wins, the dicier the escalation calculus becomes. Yet, I agree with Patrick's judgment that, as long as Ukraine continues to be successful, and Russia has demonstrated they are only the second-best army in Ukraine right now, that Ukraine is going to continue to win unless-- Patrick, I want to draw you out on this, my friend, you gigantic floating head in this conversation.

It sounded to me like you said you think the United States should be limiting the weapons or operational use we provide Ukraine in order to limit escalation potential. That, I actually disagree with. I don't think there's a face-saving way for Russia to lose this. I think us beginning to penalize Ukraine for their success in reclaiming their territory would be a damaging policy choice for the stability of post-war Europe.

**Mazarr:** What would you say if somebody said, "Look, starting from going to the Yalu in Korea, Hungary in 1956, the United States has confronted a lot of situations where we had to balance winning completely or standing up in a totally unqualified way for our principles with the risk of escalation." Doesn't that suggest that, as we've been doing, some level of calibration of what we're giving Ukraine makes sense?

**Schake:** September a year ago, we said we can't provide weapons to Ukraine because they'll just end up in Russian hands when Ukraine loses. By December we were saying we can't give them offensive weapons, which, I like Jim Mattis's description that he's been shot at both by offensive and defensive weapons and he can't really tell the difference. By March, we were saying, "Well, we'll give them offensive weapons, but none that range Russian territory." By May we were saying, "We'll give them weapons that range Russian territory, but they promise they won't use them that way." When Ukraine struck Russian bases in Crimea, we said, "But that's Ukrainian territory." What that suggests to me is that we are increasingly committed to Ukraine's success for the reasons Polina suggested, namely, this looks more and more like an international ordering more, and therefore we are increasingly committed. I think that suggests that we won't be able to privately pressure Ukraine to settle for less than the recapture of their internationally recognized territories.

**Mazarr:** All of it.

**Schake:** I think they are militarily strong enough to achieve it. Yes, this is going to be incredibly dicey, but a post-war Europe in which Russia fails to achieve its objectives in Ukraine is in my judgment worth running the risks of continuing to support Ukraine.

**Mazarr:** Okay. Patrick, let me come to you and ask a question about that. The international ordering aspect of this discussion. I have had many times, it was interesting that essentially immediately on the onset of the war, President Biden

came out and said, "NATO will not be involved. We will not commit US forces to this war." As Kori has rightly laid out there's been, if you call it mission creep or creep in the level of commitment and the level of perceived interest at stake, so that now when there's the potential for Russian use of nuclear weapons, you have non-governmental people coming out and saying the answer to that should be large scale strikes on Russian forces and Ukraine now that the US government has said that.

Do you believe that the level of US interests involved in this have shifted objectively over time? That what we should be willing to do now is actually different than what we were willing to do at the beginning? Or do you believe that we are getting a little out ahead of our skis because the interests really are the same? Patrick, you have [crosstalk]

**Schake:** Fantastic that we can't hear Patrick's answer.

**Mazarr:** Patrick, if you can't get the audio going, Kori is going to answer this and then you're going to have a whole different perspective. We're still not getting Patrick's audio. I can't see from here. Are you muted? From our end it looks like you're muted and you think you're not muted. I tell you what, I'm sure that there are technical people scrambling at this moment to untangle this. We will come back to Patrick with that question in just a second. Polina and then Kori, let me ask you that question.

You had mentioned also that this is a war for the future of the international order. If that's true, the United States probably ought to be able to be willing to do almost anything, including in fact entering the war. Do you believe we're there or do you believe that the United States should still constrain what it actually militarily does in this conflict?

**Sinovets:** I think it's still not the stage where the United States would be eager to involve militarily. At the same time, it depends, everything depends on Russia's actions. If, as Kori said that the more desperate Putin will be the more marginal measures he would resort to like a strike over key, I think it would eager to push the United States for the conventional strike on Russian forces which would do this. I think it would worth it otherwise all the system would be collapsed because of Russia. Otherwise, the US supremacy would be questioned.

The expediency of the whole world order would be questioned. The major security pillars would be collapsed. If the situation of the bombing of whole city would repeat. I think that everything is possible, I think that that message should be transmitted to Russian authorities in a very clear way. At the end, Russia is not that absolutely courageous and determined actor. I would refer to the classics, George Cannon sources of Soviet conduct where he said that Russians are taking always what it is weak. What they're eager to take, and they are never taking something which is really strong, which is really deter strongly.

He said that their goals are eternal, so if they don't see they can do it directly, then achieve their goals directly. They would like water, wait for the cracks, and then go into the cracks. They saw the cracks in Ukraine for some reason, they had this illusion that Ukraine is weak, that Ukraine would subdue that the army is not that capable. However, it was a big mistake. I think that the West should demonstrate

rationale that there are no cracks in this wall of the deterrents, no cracks in the result because what Russia is doubting about is the Western result. If the result would be signaled in a very strong way, I believe that they won't do anything.

**Mazarr:** You think they will back off?

**Sinovets:** Yes.

**Mazarr:** Well, it looks like we may have Patrick back, so and then Kori, I'll come over to you. So, Patrick, that question of is this a war for the entire international order and have the US stakes changed.

**Porter:** No and no. Can you hear?

**Mazarr:** Yes, we can hear you. Go ahead. I think you said no and no, and we can hear you.

**Porter:** Okay, great. I'll set out briefly an alternative way of looking at this whole crisis. I broadly support the Biden administration's position that the US has real but limited interests. NATO has real and limited interests in Ukraine, namely to help blunt Russia's aggression in order to protect NATO's flag so that there is not an emboldened predatory power on its doorstep ready to devour more. It has been very successful in doing so in blunting this offensive, in depleting Russia significantly, and hugely reducing Russia's capacity to threaten NATO's eastern flank.

Now, that's an important interest in itself. It's not all-important, because if it was all-important and if everything we know and cared for hung on this war, and everything we hold most dear or as **[unintelligible 00:47:15]** I used to say everything we hold most often was at stake. We'd already have troops in the field. I think we need to hold on to that basic assumption we're still working with here, that this is important for the West, but it's not all important.

It's all important for Ukraine, absolutely. This is part of the tragedy here. We have overlapping but at times divergent interests. Now, I'd like to further suggest that the statements here are not the domino ones that we are hearing. Were Russia to in fact use a nuclear weapon? It would be an appalling event, but it doesn't necessarily mean that predators at will can strike and use nuclear weapons to conquer and take territory against our vital interests.

North Korea cannot easily do that to South Korea without going to war against the United States. We have the ability to put in detailed arrangements to underline the credibility of our deterrents against things we absolutely are willing to fight and die for, namely to deploy permanent forces at Eastern flank of NATO, perhaps also with declare forces to tear up the founding act with Russia to make clear that they can't mess with us with anything like the same risk-taking or they'll be held to pay.

By the way, bear in mind we're talking about nuclear blackmail having gain territory. They have to gain the territory first. Now, to answer Kori's question very bluntly and directly, yes, I am advocating stopping short somewhere geographically, because I don't think it's the case simply that Russia is an emboldened creature that's only looking for weakness. I think it's also scared. Now, we might say it doesn't have the

right to be scared. We might think it being scared is unreasonable or irrational, and we might think there is little justice in this, and I probably agree with some of that.

The fact is it remains scared and it may well be frightened that where it to be conventionally routed in the field, that could be the beginning of the end, not just for its regime, but for Russia itself. I think we in the nuclear age are entitled to take that into account in making our calculations. I would actually withhold and try to support the taking of Crimea, withhold from going much beyond the February 2022 borders. I think there are other things we can do to live in a world where there is a nuclear blackmail precedent, because at the end of the day what's much worse dealing with real but manageable risks of some other countries, misinterpreting this as a general reach to try aggression, or actually doing what is not being properly spoken of here, which is to getting indirectly into a major hot, no kidding around war with Russia. That, let me tell you, would not only destroy this order we care about, it would destroy our ability to intervene against any aggressor ever again.

**Mazarr:** Interesting. Kori, you've spoken a little bit, I think on the other side of that argument, and you can answer him if you want. I also wanted to ask you one more question, then I'll do one quick question for all three, and then we'll go to the audience questions. The quick question is, it was striking to me that when Polina earlier was talking about giving Putin some face-saving way out without really rewarding him, you were actually nodding and I was expecting you to shake your head.

To address the risk that Patrick is talking about, even if you don't agree with his entire perspective, do you agree that in order to avoid escalation, there ought to be, we don't have to call it negotiations or diplomacy, but some US policy designed to empower Putin to get out of this and convince his people that he hasn't completely surrendered.

**Schake:** I disagree with Patrick's judgment that we should limit our support to Ukraine, but I do think it would be good American policy to think about other things we can offer, not sacrifices Ukraine can make, but other things we can engage with that might create incentives for Putin to cease fighting in Ukraine and withdraw. I can think of a couple potentials. Let me just say that I think a lot of the conversation, and Patrick's apocalyptic end to his comments just a minute ago, mistake how strong a position we are in and how weak and faltering a position Russia is in.

We do not have to intervene directly in Ukraine for Ukraine to win this war. Even if Russia crosses the nuclear threshold, I think the right response, both from a non-proliferation perspective and from a support for Ukraine perspective, is for us to give the same answer the people of Ukraine are giving. When I was there about a month ago, across the board from civil society leaders, business leaders, President Zelenskyy, their response to a Russian nuclear threat was, it won't change the outcome of this war. I think that's the way you diminish the currency of nuclear blackmail by taking away its political cache.

We can do that without direct involvement. To your very interesting question of is there anything we can give the Russians, I would think given the colossal failure of the Russian army in Ukraine, this might be a good time to talk to the Russians about a CFE treaty that limits deployments of conventional forces across all of Europe. It

would require enormous verification protocols for us to trust anything that the Russians say, but that could perhaps help stabilize the European conventional order.

A second possibility is we have long wanted a battlefield nuclear weapon, tactical nuclear weapons and arms control arrangement. That seems to be the only thing Russia still thinks might be useful in its military, but we reduce NATO non-strategic nuclear forces by an enormous amount at the end of the Cold War, Russia didn't. Perhaps the asymmetry of that advantage on their part might make them feel important enough to enter into those negotiations.

I'm grasping at straws. I don't actually have any good ideas, but I think given the strong position the United States and its NATO allies are in, we ought to be thinking creatively of other things we can do not make the Ukrainians do, that might help Russia find a face-saving way out of this?

**Mazarr:** That's fascinating. That's a thread that is not part of much of the public discussion, which is what you don't want to talk about negotiations involving treaty way parts of Ukraine, but what diplomacy can the United States undertake that can ease the path out, which is essentially the Cuban Missile Crisis.

**Schake:** Maybe a walk back to Russian access to oil market-- I don't know what it is, but I think it merits a lot of creativity, because we can afford to pay prices because we are in an incredibly strong position. If paying those prices reduces the terror Ukrainians are experiencing and gets Russia out of Ukraine's territory, I think it's worth spending a lot of intellectual capital on.

**Mazarr:** Very much so. Last question for each of you and just in a sentence or two. Patrick, I think has gone off video, maybe to save bandwidth but over the next, let's say three months, where would you rate the risk of use of nuclear weapons by Russia? Again, just a sentence or two? Polina.

**Sinovets:** I would say it would be very high.

**Mazarr:** Very high.

**Sinovets:** It would be the highest because this is the moment when they started to speculate over the dirty bomb, which can be used as a protest of using a tactical nuclear weapon. If they are doing it now, I just said it is, it means that it should be done quickly before the public opinion is having that awareness of that dirty bomb of the provocations Ukraine is doing. They are preparing something, and I think it should be soon. Plus again, the fact that the China and India during the last two weeks asked their citizens to leave Ukraine, which is happening not that often. They didn't ask to do it before, they asked to do it now means something is going to happen and this is my biggest concern.

**Schake:** I think the risk is medium for the next three months and higher subsequently, it'll be harder to tell that Ukraine is succeeding in the next three months because of the change of the weather and reporting on the ground, but once they push Russia out of the Donbas and can focus on Crimea, I think that'll be the point of maximum danger.

**Mazarr:** Patrick, you still with us?

**Porter:** I am. Can you hear me?

**Mazarr:** Yes. We can hear you. One or two sentences, risk of nuclear use in the next few months.

**Porter:** I agree with Kori. I think it's medium to getting higher. Why do I think that? I think precisely as Kori said, this is a weakened enemy and weakened enemy with large nuclear arsenal that perceives higher stakes in the conflict, and that rightly or wrongly fears that defeat in Ukraine is the prelude to the structure of the regime and/or Russia itself. It's very hard for us to actually alter that calculus. I guess my main pessimism here is that this is not a regime that's going to be satiated with promises of verified deployment promises. It's about the fearing of its own destruction.

I don't think it's going to accept defeat as we hope it would in Crimea and across the belt of territory on the mainland that it occupies. Because it won't accept defeat, the temptation to do the unthinkable will rise. I still don't think it's probable, but I think it's going to get worse. We need cool heads here and at least my photo, it might look like a cool head even if I haven't got one.

**Mazarr:** You look much better in person, the photo doesn't do justice. I'm turning now to the questions from the audience that have been submitted on the app and on Zoom. What I'm going to do is direct each question to one member of the panel just so we can get through as many of the questions as possible. I'll start with Polina, you've mentioned this before, Noah Mahu asked the question basically about the role of annexation.

Given the formal Russian annexation and the sham referenda that occurred in these areas, one interpretation is that makes it effectively impossible for Putin to withdraw from those areas because he is now claimed them as Russia. Is there any way that you think that Putin or a future Russian leader could wiggle out of that and allow themselves to be pushed out of those areas at this point?

**Sinovets:** I was thinking about that and I think that Putin, he's just playing the game of a chicken by saying that I can't stop. This is why in the best interest of the Russian elites is to remove him from power and say that it was all him, we're not about that and then start negotiating about bringing back everything which was taken away. Saying that his orders were illegal, we were afraid, we were pushed tremendously, we could not do anything.

At some point, it could become very, very uncomfortable for the Russian elites, because I think that they were supporting him as soon as he looked like he was winning. Now he's losing all the time, more and more. This is not in their interest to stay with him at the one boat because otherwise, Russia would lose. Then if they would get rid of him, then they can say, "Let's start everything from the white page. We were not about that. We want negotiations, we want peace. We would like to come back to the international order." There's still a face-saving issue. New Democratic Russia maybe it would not be really Democratic but whatever, much

better in new Russia with some hope for becoming Democratic without any black past which is associated with the dictator who is already out of power.

I think that this is the only face-saving moment for Russian Elites, unfortunately, because he's still in power. Even the former supporters or the current supporters of the war already started to think about how to end up the war with the less losses to Russia. This is the only way how to do this.

**Mazarr:** Okay. Kori, Harry Spencer, asks about NATO unity. With NATO experiencing difficulty in maintaining a unified stance on how to respond to nuclear use, how probable is it that responses will be more unilateral than collective? Are you worried in particular in the case of a nuclear event, that it would be hard to maintain NATO unity?

**Schake:** Yes, it will be hard to maintain NATO unity. It's always hard to maintain NATO unity, but one of the things I-- First, the political science state is pretty strong on the fact that free societies are slow to commit to common policies but incredibly enduring once committed because you have to win the domestic political argument. I do think NATO countries have won the domestic political argument on assistance to Ukraine. In fact, I think 97% of German greens want to arm Ukraine unlimitedly. Those people are pacifists, my friends.

They are pushing the German government to a stronger stance more closely in alignment with the US and the front-line states in NATO. What I noticed as somebody who-- When I'm in government I always get stuck with Alliance management jobs is that unity increases in direct proportion to how frightened we are. Russian nuclear use would scare the hell out of all of us and I think is likely to have everybody want to hold hands and stand close together. It'll be hard to figure out what to do but I don't actually doubt that we would have NATO unity in those circumstances.

**Mazarr:** Great. Thank you. Patrick, Heather Williams asked if you were Xi Jinping watching events in Ukraine, what lessons would you draw about the role of nuclear weapons in crises? Help us understand a little bit the arguments about precedent-setting or non-precedent setting. Do you think what comes out of US and NATO response to potential Russian nuclear use is critical in shaping Chinese potential actions?

**Porter:** I don't think it's critical. I think it's possible to see that not publishing enough nuclear use as a data point for future actions. On the other hand, if I've climbed to the top of Chinese politics and I'm commanding the other poll in the world. I know how many beans make five, and I'm not stupid and I'm not going to assume that what the West does in Ukraine is necessarily a commentary on whether it's willing to fight me over Taiwan. After all the West is waging a proxy war in Ukraine.

What China is more interested in is whether the West is willing to go to the war over Taiwan to actually fight a direct hot war over Taiwan. These are not directly analogous. Secondly, if anything, it probably already would have occurred to me that if I do successfully take Taiwan, I can then use nuclear threats to ward others off. It doesn't necessarily have to be a precedence set in Ukraine for me to make that

judgment. After all, this would not be the first time that a nuclear-armed state has taken territory from a non-nuclear-armed state rightly or wrongly.

Then implicitly with what are nuclear deterrent threats held that territory, Russia did in 2014, Israel fought a successful war in 1967. We should not be reacting to this as though we're innocent-suddenly confronted with the first intrusion of time into Paradise. We've lived in a world before of nuclear blackmail. We co-exist in a world of nuclear blackmail, and the risk is not zero. The ultimate question has to be this, it's not would it be regrettable that there's a nuclear blackmail precedent? Of course, it would be regrettable.

It's compared to what, compared to what are we talking about here. I think if we're going to say that that risk is dire, then we have to be willing to put something else on the table. Now, Kori isn't advocating direct military action but a number of others like David Petraeus are. This is certainly a lot of the discussion I think around Whitehall that there has to be a threat to, for example, write down Russia's Black Sea Fleet and in retaliation. Now, if you do that, I think it's war with Russia. We're comparing unfortunately some very bitter poisons here, and we need to be constantly bearing in mind which is the lesser evil.

**Mazarr:** Okay. Thanks very much. Greg Weaver asks about Ukrainian capabilities. I guess I'll put this to Kori. Do you think Ukraine would be militarily capable of preempting Russian nuclear use? Given the necessary intelligence, how do we-- The broader question of if we begin to anticipate Russian potential nuclear use, what do we do? Do we think about preemption?

**Schake:** I wouldn't want the United States to preempt use because I think it would be very difficult after the mistakes of earlier preemptions, in particular, the Iraq War in 2003, it would be very difficult to persuade even with the successes of intelligence in this war. I do think the threshold can and should be very high for American preemption even of potential nuclear use, but Ukraine is going to be the target of it.

If we have good intelligence and we are already involved in arming and providing intelligence to Ukraine, I would support allowing Ukraine to preempt with our assistance of intelligence and weapons, because I think the consequences of Russian nuclear use are so extreme for Ukraine that it merits allowing Ukraine to cross that threshold, but it's a hard call.

**Mazarr:** Thank you. Ankit Panda asked a question and some of us have been watching over the last 24 hours or so. There have been some new signals from some Russian officials perhaps distancing themselves a little bit from nuclear first use. The way he put it is that Russian diplomats have started to unequivocally rule out the first use of nuclear weapons. I think one of their UN statements, for example, said, "We don't intend to do this."

I guess really for all of you, Polina, I'll start with you just quickly, do you see a shift in Russian rhetoric over the last couple of days that indicates that maybe they've realized that they have other tools before nuclear escalation and that would be incredibly risky and they want to signal that they're not on the threshold of that?

**Sinovets:** I think so. I think that probably that great number of deterrent signals finally, not finally but at some point reached the highest authorities and that this trick with the dirty bomb as user protects for using tactical nuclear weapons turned to be heard by the West and interpreted in the right way. This is why they felt the necessity because they understood that the United States would confirm the Ukraine, and that might be some very tragic consequences even any kind of military escalation which would raise to the escalated level of nuclear war afterward.

I think that they have counted all that signals and they draw the right conclusion that it's not time and not the place to use nuclear weapons and even that kind of nuclear dirty bomb protects is not working because they were discussing it with the whole West. Shoigu was calling and discussing it, trying to understand what the reaction might be and then we understood the possible reaction. They decided that this is a bad plan and then let's plan another stuff because I think that they started to use these asymmetric strategies with destroying the electricity industry of Ukraine, the different facilities which provide Ukraine capability to live normally, to function normally.

It works in regard to Ukraine. It would not stop Ukraine from any contra-defense, of course, but, of course, it makes Ukraine not that capable in general. I think that they would stop now and think about other asymmetric strategies that would affect Ukrainian contra-defense capabilities other than nuclear weapons use or something like this.

**Mazarr:** I noticed you're shaking your head a little bit.

**Schake:** I don't think we should put any faith in anything, any Russian official or TV pundit should say because they all said in the run-up to the invasion of Ukraine that they weren't going to do it.

**Mazarr:** The statement now about nuclear weapons is different, or is no different from those potential earlier things. Do you think that-- obviously we're speculating here, but do they appreciate the potential risks or do you have any sense of thinking about do they view this as just another step in the use of military force or a massive threshold?

**Schake:** I don't know the answer to that.

**Mazarr:** A couple of the questions have to do with ways out of this crisis. I'll put some of the themes together and come back to Patrick and then others. One, I think Polina and Schake, one possible way out, which is that Putin gets overthrown and the new Russian leadership says we're going to distance ourselves and try to get out of this. Theoretically, Putin could have a push-to-shove moment and decide the risks are too great and I have to back off.

Kori has talked about actions the United States can take. Patrick, if you were advising the US government in particular, in terms of this essential dilemma that battlefield success of our partner leads to greater risk of escalation, they may well do it. That is, as you've sketched out a tremendous risk when the US interest at stake may not be existential. Give us a couple of ideas of ways to start to get out of this dilemma. Do you have any thoughts?

**Porter:** I'm not sure there is much of a way of getting out the next few years. I think we are dealing with managing a long conflict of varying intensity. At some of the time it may be frozen, at other time it will get quite hot, and it's actually we should be maybe not thinking so much in terms of decisive resolutions or ways out. I'm not against some of the ideas that Polina and Kori have come up with. I think the more likely scenario here is somewhere between one side absolutely collapsing or there being a revolution in Moscow.

You're more likely to get an unsatisfactory scenario more around the middle where if the unthinkable doesn't happen neither side can completely prevail. I think the Biden administration will prefer to remain cautious and measured in this provision of arms. The one thing I would suggest would be what the US can do for what it's worth and it may not be worth that much, is to foursquare an ambition of regime change in Moscow to do what it can to try and suggest that this is not an attempt to do the worst to Russia, is an attempt to ensure Russia is met with failure in Ukraine.

I think that the measures they've taken so far, just in terms of making it virtually impossible for Russia to recapture the territory it initially took, is welcome. I think this is about long-haul conflict management now, and that's going to require **[unintelligible 01:13:31]** trying to restore some line of dialogue with Russia, which is not there yet. I also think we can't take too many views as Kori said from what officials are saying because it seems quite aside from their tendency to tell lies is that the Putin and regime doesn't bother to tell them much in advance either.

It's quite a secretive regime from what you can tell in the way it makes its moves. There's only so much that can be done, and I think we actually need to think. Also just finally as well, the obsession with face of humiliation I think is gone a bit far. Not on this panel, but I think there's a lot of discussion about-face. Look, there is something inherently humiliating in invading a country, miscalculation, and being defeated against a smaller country and there's not that much we can or even should do about that in a sense.

There is some deserve humiliation there without piling massive amounts of extra humiliation if we can help it, rather it's about desperation and survival. I think that should be the core of what we worry about in Russia's thinking. How do we get them to accept that they can't make their aims to Ukraine without them thinking that this is the beginning of the end.

**Mazarr:** Let me just push back with one quick follow-up question. Your description of a medium term, this is a lasting ongoing challenge. That could be true, but we've got to get through the next few months, and as Kori is predicting, Russia is going to be losing more and more territory with the potential even of losing Crimea. We could get to a moment when this dilemma becomes extremely acute when they come back to more signaling, and say, for example, the areas we've lost in the East that happened but when Ukrainian forces cross over into Ukraine, or into Crimea, we are going to escalate.

How does the United States try to now avoid that moment if we are not prepared to put limits on our partner and if the other side is determined not to allow that?

**Porter:** Well, as I try to argue before and I can tell there's already pretty contentious on Twitter, I would say US overtly limits what is willing to harm and the conditions of the supply of arms, and I agree that that is unjust in a sense. There's immorality to that but we're dealing with the reason of state, and the US pursues its own interests and if it's interesting Crimea are less than existential. If they're limited, and they are because it's not putting its own forces in a field at least on mass, then if they have to think about the limitations they're wanting to draw.

In a sense I realize that's a losing struggle that I'm not going to persuade everyone in the room on that. That's just a judgment call. I think the US should not directly support an attempt to retake Crimea or go beyond the February 2022 boundaries, but in a sense, despair of the ability to persuade that.

**Mazarr:** That's exactly back to the dilemma and as President Zelenskyy has said in the last couple days, they intend on that. Kori, you got an answer.

**Schake:** Can I add one quick point not on Patrick's comments, but on Polina's. I'm jittery about us encouraging regime change in Russia because I worry that what may come next might actually be worse than what we have and I think we need to be really cautious about the downside risk. It's not at all clear to me that Putin is unrepresented of Russian elite and maybe even Russian popular opinion.

**Mazarr:** If I just come back on that, so I'm trying to get out of the situation where our approach is essentially to continue to back our partner and hope that this highly unpredictable isolated leader will come to a moment where he thinks actually the risks are too high.

**Schake:** I object to your characterization that continuing to calmly persevere in support of Ukraine regaining its territory is a hope-induced strategy. That predictable continuity in support of good policy actually creates the conditions for a better outcome than either raising alarms and putting limits on Ukraine's ability to regain its internationally recognized territory, or conceding to Russia their objectives. It's not hope as a strategy to say we actually have the right policy, and we need to calmly persevere while Russia acclimatizes itself to the fact that they are losing this war.

**Mazarr:** That does assume that they will acclimatize themselves to that and if they don't--

**Schake:** Reality is a poor choice of adversary and that's the position they're in.

**Mazarr:** We've had a few questions here about the role of other powers, particularly China and India. Obviously, no one on the panel is a specialist in those countries, but Polina as you've been watching this, do you have any sense of the role that particularly big outside powers China and India could play that's any different to help resolve this? Another question was about the conditions that might cause them to change their approach for example, in nuclear use. How do you see that playing out?

**Sinovets:** I believe that the positions of China and India are quite important, but in this regard, I don't think it would be decisive regarding influence Putin's behavior because he has a goal. He has a clear view that this is his territory and that Ukraine belongs to Russia. This is the biggest problem. It's just on the level of faith, on the

level of belief so if he believes that Ukraine belongs to Russia. This is the Russian internal issue, and this is why they're so [unintelligible 01:19:37] and somehow surprised why the West and anybody else and ultra world are caring so much cause of Ukraine because it's a part of Russia for them.

This is why I don't think that-- of course, China and India would hold all sanctions in Russia and join the international sanctions. It would affect Russian economy, but it would not probably affect Russian decision-making directly, because this is something internal for them. I think that they just want to finish it somehow with a positive outcome for Russia as they consider the positive outcome. At least remaining at the level of what they have gained now. I don't think that they are dreaming anymore about taking over all Ukraine.

They just want to retain what they have taken and then to sign something and to present themselves as a winner in the war. It's not really possible because Ukraine would not stop at the point when half of the significant part of the south is taken away. I think that it was a moment when Ukraine was ready in the negotiations to stop just bringing back all the territories, which were next after the 24th of February. At this point when Ukraine feel the strong support of the West, Ukraine is ready to take over everything, which was the next, even in 2014.

What I wanted to say that I'm not sure that this outer position of India and China would affect. I think that the more decisive factor is Ukrainian position of course, and the Ukrainian counter-defense, and what is amazing, which is a bit deviation from the main point, what is amazing that Ukrainian is not deterred by Russian nuclear weapons at all. What is interesting is that the West is reacting in this or that way, reflecting, but Ukraine is not.

It seems like there is no any influence of nuclear deterrents on Ukraine imposed by Russia, which is an interesting point because in this regard, deterrence is not working. I think that is a very good moment when we can evaluate the effects of nuclear deterrence for nuclear states, non-clear states, and other and the general situation of how nuclear deterrence is functioning as a political factor. Yes, coming back to the initial point, I think that position of China and India matters, but it won't be decisive in the Russian final decision-making to back up.

**Mazarr:** Kori, you basically agree with that?

**Schake:** It's actually surprising to me how little assistance China is willing to give Russia in this, given that they have a treaty of unlimited friendship. Russia is having to buy ammunition from North Korea and body armor from Iran. That's the level of Russian failure, but it's also the level of Chinese denial of assistance.

**Mazarr:** Which is fascinating because it's often portrayed as China supporting Russia and on their side, and they probably feel like we're trying to strike this balance without [inaudible 01:23:08] We're coming toward the end. I want to ask one last question of the panelists, and that is looking forward again. In terms of the larger ramifications for-- we've talked about the international system, but also the nuclear proliferation regime, how we think about nuclear weapons, not the world that we would most want to see, but 10 years from now, what principles or characteristics of the international system, and particularly in regard to nuclear weapons, do you

think we'll be living with as a result of this? We've only got a couple of minutes left, so if you could keep the answers brief. Patrick, let me start with you. What's the future world we're going to be in because of this conflict?

**Porter:** Well, I thank you, and what a wonderful opportunity to speak at this panel. Thank you very much for it. I want to jump off one point. Polina makes really important that Ukraine has not been willing to be deterred by Russia's nuclear arsenal. That's true, that Ukraine's interests in this struggle are as close to maximal as they could get. If Ukraine thinks, quite understandably the Russia is trying to destroy it, it's not going to be put off or deterred by the threat to destroy it.

Whereas we do not have maxim interests in this struggle. We do rightly need to think about our calculus with Russia's nuclear deterrent threats. At the same time, the fact that we are nuclear-armed as an alliance is one of the things that's helped us actually to arm Ukraine in the first place. If we were not nuclear-armed, if we had listened to abolitionists, we'd be much more wary about doing anything to help Ukraine at all. That's worth bearing in mind here. I think we are going to still live in a world where the nuclear revolution is the most important fact of international relations.

I don't necessarily see there being a wave of proliferation activity, but at the same time, I'd like to make a normative case. That there are some countries in the world that have a legitimate and reasonable basis to consider proliferating because they're living also in dangerous neighborhoods. The general anti proliferation bias that we see here needs to be counted. When I live here in a nuclear-armed country, you are all sitting there in a nuclear-armed country. There are countries like Australia that have to face the profound power shift going on in Asia, and they ought to be thinking about this question now.

Not only is proliferation does it denying does the nuclear revolution retain its power, some countries need to be thinking harder about it and maybe moving to the other side of it.

**Mazarr:** Okay. Thanks very much. Just quickly, Polina, the world we're going to live in

**Sinovets:** It's a very interesting question and I can give three models of the world we're going to live in.

**Mazarr:** Very quickly. We're just about out of time. Go ahead.

**Sinovets:** Yes, very very quick. The first model is the present model where nuclear deterrence is the basis of this non-pro proliferation world. Everything is based on the compromise where NPT is the compromise between nuclear and non-nuclear powers, which is probably the golden consensus. The other is the non-clear world, which is today there is a very strong accusation of non-clear trends and the TPNW supporters, if nuclear deterrents proves it's absolute inefficiency in this war, then I think that the supporters of the TPNW get a chance of seeing that non-nuclear world somehow.

The last one, which is the worst, is that if having nuclear deterrence would prove that efficiency, and that compromise NPT order and the non-nuclear world would be excluded from the agenda. It will be the world of absolute nuclear anarchy where everyone will think about having its nuclear arsenal, or it will be nuclear umbrella alliance or whatever. No, but it'll be the most dangerous and risky world.

**Mazarr:** Okay.

**Schake:** A non-nuclear power winning a war against the nuclear power will diminish proliferation. Although it may increase defense spending and arsenals, not of Russian weapons though around the world. It will be fabulous for the non-proliferation cause for Ukraine to win this war.

**Mazarr:** Well, I have to thank you for the most positive possible theme on which we could have ended this session. Join me in thanking the panel for their great thoughts. [applause] Patrick, although we can't see your face at the moment your small photograph reminds us of the handsome presence you've given to us. We will now have a 45-minute break before the next session. The conference will reconvene in Regency A at 11:15 for the next session. Tick, tick, boom.

**[01:28:10] [END OF AUDIO]**