



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 013

Thursday, March 31, 2022

Chair: Mr. Sven Spengemann



Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Thursday, March 31, 2022

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Good afternoon, colleagues.

Welcome to meeting number 13 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Pursuant to the motion adopted on January 31, 2022, the committee is meeting on its study of the current situation in Ukraine.

[*English*]

Colleagues, we're still waiting for our second witness. She will, I'm told, be connecting within a few minutes, and we will roll her on board as we progress, in the interest of time.

As always, interpretation services are available through the globe icon at the bottom of your screen. For members participating in person, please keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for mask use and health protocols.

[*Translation*]

Please also note that you are not allowed to take screenshots or photos of your screen. Before you speak, please wait for me to call your name and when you do speak, please speak slowly and clearly. When not speaking, please mute your microphone.

I would like to remind you that all comments from members and witnesses should be directed to the chair.

[*English*]

We will welcome our first witness. Our second witness, as I said, will join in a few minutes.

[*Translation*]

We have with us Mr. Yann Breault, assistant professor at the Royal Military College Saint-Jean.

Mr. Breault, you have the floor. You have five minutes to make your opening remarks.

Dr. Yann Breault (Assistant Professor, Royal Military College Saint-Jean, As an Individual): Good afternoon, and thank you all for your attention. It is my pleasure to address you.

The last month has been difficult. I am just recovering from sleepless nights watching the humanitarian drama that is the war in Ukraine unfold before my eyes. There is immense geopolitical uncertainty hanging over us. I am one of those who believe that this

drama will affect the future of the Ukrainian nation, but also that it goes far beyond Ukraine. This is perhaps one of the first points I would like to ask you to bear in mind. When we look at the situation, we see many very disturbing images. We have concerns and sympathy for the Ukrainians and their desire to freely choose their own geopolitical direction, which is quite understandable.

We are all horrified by the armed aggression perpetrated by a regime which until recently could be considered authoritarian, but which in recent weeks has taken on all the forms of what should be called a dictatorship. There is a tightening of the information sphere and the closure of a whole series of social networks. The last two free media outlets, the Echo of Moscow and Novaya Gazeta, shut down for good last week.

One drama is unfolding in Ukraine and another is threatening the future of democracy, even in Russia. However, an even greater drama is looming, namely the geopolitical divide that is in danger of widening at breakneck speed, and not just between Russia and the west. In the current situation, we need to get out of the information bubble we are in to some degree as a G7 country, with our allies Japan and South Korea, who are standing in solidarity with a wave of economic sanctions against Russia that are completely unprecedented.

That said, I am among those who are concerned about the fracturing of the international order. The sanctions adopted against Russia are supported by our partners in the other continents of Latin America, Africa, Asia, and especially by the vast Eurasia. On the other hand, although 140 states denounced Russian aggression at the United Nations General Assembly—which, of course, brought us great satisfaction—a good number of states, and not the least among them, abstained from voting or did not show up. Among these countries, as you probably know, are China, but also India, Iran, Pakistan and several others. This leads me to believe that the effect of economic sanctions on a country that is mainly an exporter of natural resources will unfortunately not really limit the Russians' room for manoeuvre in the long term. This is the view that currently exists in Russia.

My colleague Anatol Lieven spoke of a sibling rivalry existing between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, whose discourse and identity constructions could not be more antagonistic. There is therefore a certain dynamic in Russian-Ukrainian relations. However, there is another, even greater dynamic that explains the incompatibility and difficulties that the west has to face in its relations with Russia. These difficulties do not date back to the annexation of Crimea in 2014, but to a much earlier time. Some would say they go back to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. At that time, there was criticism in Russia of western foreign interference in Ukraine's internal affairs.

In my view, the deterioration in relations between Russia and the western world may have started the year before, with 2003 being a turning point, when Russian opposition figure Mikhail Khodorkovsky, owner of what was the biggest oil company in Russia, Yukos, was imprisoned by Russian President Vladimir Putin. It is really from this moment that, in the name of the state's desire to regain control over what in Russia are called "strategic resources"—which include, of course, natural resources such as hydrocarbons—there was an attempt by the political apparatus to regain control of the economy. This is exactly the opposite balance of power that we have in the west. It is a kind of incompatibility between two modes of governance, the one favoured by Russia, but also by China, Iran and several others, who want to play by different rules of the game.

The emerging picture in this theatre, in Ukraine, is also the re-configuration of the balance of power between increasingly distant geo-economic areas.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Breault.

Since our second witness isn't online yet, I suggest that we begin the first round of questions.

As usual, I'll let you know when you have 30 seconds left to speak.

• (1550)

[*English*]

Colleagues, we will start round one with Mr. Chong, for six minutes.

Mr. Chong, go ahead.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you. I believe the second witness has just appeared.

The Chair: Okay. That is good timing.

If we could perhaps do a very quick sound check, we will ask Professor Dyczok to present next.

Dr. Marta Dyczok (Associate Professor, Departments of History and Political Science, Western University, As an Individual): Hello, can you hear me?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Erica Pereira): Yes, we can hear you.

Dr. Marta Dyczok: Thank you.

I have had a bit of a technical issue, but I am very delighted to be here. I'm sorry I missed the beginning, so could you fill me in on where we are?

The Chair: Yes, Professor Dyczok. Thank you very much. It's great to have you here. Welcome aboard.

We are just at the point now where our first witness has presented his opening remarks. We'll pass the floor to you momentarily.

I was just saying that I will signal, in the course of our discussion, with this piece of paper when 30 seconds remain in testimony or questioning time.

Looking ahead, in terms of IT challenges, if you could keep your mike close to your mouth when you're speaking, as you have a portable mike, that will assist interpretation services greatly.

Without further ado, I will give you the floor for your opening remarks, for five minutes, please.

Go ahead.

Dr. Marta Dyczok: Thank you very much.

Today is day 36 of Russia's unprovoked military aggression against Ukraine. This has been the 36 most difficult days of my life, but this is nothing compared to the 36 days Ukrainians have faced and these last three days.

They have been doing an unbelievable job, but they need more help. This is a David and Goliath struggle. Ukrainians have impressed me and the world with how they have been defending themselves, but they cannot win this war alone. It would be as if the United States attacked Canada. No matter how brave, well equipped and powerful Canadian soldiers are, there's no way they could withstand an assault from a superior military force.

Canada has a very important role to play in this, both as an independent actor and as part of a coalition. As everybody on this committee knows, Canada and Ukraine have a special relationship that goes back 30 years.

In 1991, I was working as a journalist in Ukraine, and I remember being in the room in December, when then Canadian representative to Ukraine, the chargé d'affaires, the Honourable Nestor Gayowsky, walked into the room and read the telegram wherein Canada announced that it recognized Ukraine's referendum and welcomed it as an independent country. I felt so proud at that moment, as a Canadian of Ukrainian origin, and I would really like to feel that pride again.

What we've seen over the past 36 days and more is that the international institutional infrastructure that was created at the end of World War II is not functioning. It is not able to stop the war, and this is the time for new ideas.

I've often thought about our previous prime minister, Lester B. Pearson, who came up with the idea of peacekeeping forces and resolved the Suez crisis. This is one of those moments in history when we need to come up with new ideas.

In the various media interviews that I've been doing over the last while, I keep being asked what I think about Canada's role and how Canada is doing, and that's what I'd like to speak to. I would like to use Ukrainian President Zelenskyy's words. I think many people on this committee were in the House when he addressed it through Zoom. He thanked Canada for everything we were doing, but said Ukraine needed more help.

I would like to focus on five areas where I think Canada is doing well but could be doing more: diplomacy, military, economics, humanitarian and information.

I'll start with diplomacy. Overall, again, I think Canada has done a very good job. It has been coming out with statements in support of Ukraine and criticizing the war in Russia. Where Canada could take more of a role is in the peace talks, because the way this war is going to end is in part through negotiations. A number of European leaders have visited Ukraine as a sign of solidarity, and this is something Canadian leaders could be doing. They've been going as far as Poland, but nobody's been to Ukraine yet, which would show strong support for Ukraine.

In the field of diplomatic relations, Canada could be scaling down its diplomatic relations with Russia. They need to keep the embassy and consulates open—diplomatic channels need to remain open—but the size of its diplomatic missions does not need to be the same as during peacetime. We've seen this with a number of European countries, which have scaled down and said that this is not business as usual. They say, "Their country is perpetrating war; therefore, all of these diplomats and their families are not welcome in our country." That's in the area of diplomacy.

In the military area, even before this escalation, Canada had been supporting Ukraine through training and arms supplies, but again, as Ukraine's President Zelenskyy said, they need more help. You'll remember that when he addressed the EU and the G7 last week, he asked them to give 1% of what NATO has, which would really help them. I am perfectly aware of the—

I have 30 seconds. Oh my God, that went so fast.

On economic sanctions, focus on the energy sector.

In the humanitarian sector, please give health care to the refugees who will be coming.

On the information front, please be aware of the language that is used. There's been a huge improvement, but it's not "Ukraine"; it's "Ukraine", and it's not "the Ukraine crisis"; it's "Russia's war against Ukraine".

• (1555)

Words are very important, and journalists from Ukraine are constantly appealing to journalists in Canada and to Canadian politicians to use the correct terminology.

I've been racking my brain for new ideas. I think it's time to set up a task force of all the brains in Canada to come up with new ideas on how to end this war and future wars.

Thank you very much for your attention, and I'm sorry I went a little over time.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor, for being with us and for your testimony.

We'll go straight into round one of questions. Mr. Chong has the floor for six minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There was a reference to economic issues. It's one of the five points from our last witness and was also referenced by Mr. Breault in terms of the geopolitical situation.

I'd like to ask two sets of questions. The first is on food security and the second is on nuclear issues.

Synthetic nitrogen fertilizer accounts for, some have estimated, about half of the world's crop production. There have been suggestions in publications like *Nature* that without synthetic nitrogen fertilizer we can really feed only about three and a half billion people on the planet, rather than the seven billion we currently feed. I raise that because Russia is a major exporter of synthetic fertilizer made from natural gas. Russia accounts for about a quarter of global exports of ammonia and about 15% of global exports of urea, both of which are synthetic nitrogen fertilizers.

There are some who say that, as a result of this, there could be major food shortages in six months. In fact, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization issued a statement several weeks ago, saying that food prices could skyrocket by up to 22% in the next several months, because of these nitrogen shortages.

In southern Ontario, where I live, farmers are becoming somewhat panicked about this, because much of Ontario's synthetic nitrogen fertilizer comes from Russia. Sanctions could be imposed on that fertilizer, which would result in either its unavailability or its reduced application. That in turn would lead to significant drops in crop yields in the coming months.

Could our panellists comment on this issue?

Dr. Marta Dyczok: I'm not sure what the procedure is for speaking. Do we raise our hands or do we unmute ourselves?

The Chair: Let me push pause here for one second on Mr. Chong's time.

It's basically at the discretion of the member how to direct his or her time. You can respond directly back to them, and they can direct the questions to either or both witnesses. It's at their discretion.

Hon. Michael Chong: As per the chair's direction, if you feel comfortable responding to it and you have the background to respond to it, I'd be interested to hear your perspective. If not, I'm happy to move on to other questions.

• (1600)

Dr. Marta Dyczok: Thank you.

I'm not an agricultural expert, but you raise a very important point. The discussion around sanctions is about reciprocity. Sanctions always come at a cost. We all know that.

It seems that one particular item cannot be solely responsible for food shortages. Food supplies are complex. That particular item that you mentioned is something to be concerned about.

The other issue is that Ukraine is a major exporter of food. Ukraine's capacity to.... The spring season is coming, and they're being bombed. Their capacity to plant crops and therefore to supply the food that they.... I'd have to look up the statistic—

Hon. Michael Chong: Ukraine accounts for about 10% of the world's wheat exports, 14% of its corn exports and about 17% of the world's barley exports.

[Translation]

Mr. Breault, do you want to comment on this topic?

[English]

Dr. Yann Breault: That's indeed one of the major fields on which the power negotiation process is being played out by Russia. I think they have a view of a long confrontation ahead. It's not going to be solved in the coming weeks or in the coming months. Of course we're going to have to expect much higher prices. That will lead to terrible food insecurity within the southern hemisphere.

How it will play out exactly, we don't yet know, but it's something the Russians are definitely taking into account, and that gives them a sense that they will still have lots of leverage against the west in the coming months and years. We're under-evaluating the costs of this confrontation, and they think that in the coming months we will see the real price and public opinion, which is overwhelmingly supporting the just and right cause of the Ukrainians, will at some point be challenged.

I'm not getting into the details of the fertilizer, but that indeed.... Don't forget that Russia—the USSR—was a wheat importer. This country was not able to feed its own population. Now Russia is the number one exporter of wheat. I'm thinking also about the situation in Belarus. Belarus, I think, is the second-largest exporter of potassium, so the fact that the sanction also concerns Belarus is definitely something that will very much need to be looked into.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

I'll leave my nuclear question for maybe a subsequent round. I'll just note that Russia and Belarus, as you pointed out, Professor Breault, account for 40% of all global exports of potash, one of the three critical fertilizers that are used for crop production. Russia has 16% of the world's wheat exports, as you've also highlighted.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Chong, thank you very much.

We'll go straight to Mr. Sarai for six minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to both of the professors.

My first question is for Mr. Breault. You on your own were very shocked at the speed and the resistance of Ukrainian forces. I think

on March 24, in an interview, you acknowledged that, and I think all of us were pretty impressed by the Ukraine resistance.

Can you share, in your opinion, why and how the Ukrainian armed forces have been able to put up such a strong resistance?

Dr. Yann Breault: Since I'm working here at the Royal Military College Saint-Jean, I've been in contact with some of our officers, who have been training many thousands of Ukrainians for the past year. I wish I could say we've been providing helpful training to them.

I would pretty much also like to point out the fact that the Russian military, the guys who were there for two months, freezing, at the border in Belarus, thinking they were on a military exercise, at the very last moment were informed that they must accomplish this military operation, as they call it in Russia. I think there is a lot of evidence of low morale of the troops.

They were not angry at the Ukrainians. They didn't understand exactly what they were doing there. They were probably extremely surprised by the lack of enthusiasm of the Ukrainians. They were told this was about getting rid of a pro-western, bad Nazi government, and they were expecting some of the population to welcome their arrival, which was not the case.

I think for military analysts for years to come, in terms of the logistical failure and communication problem.... The support of the population for their fighters on the ground has been higher than expected, and the motivation of the Russians lower than expected.

I was among those who were predicting a three-day victory and Zelenskyy leaving Kyiv. I turned out to be absolutely wrong about it. Still, some further analysis will be necessary down the line to explain that military surprise we're witnessing on the ground. Even if my heart is with the battle the Ukrainians are fighting, it makes me dreadfully fearful of what is coming next, because if the conventional Russian forces cannot cope with Mr. Zelenskyy, they are in a very bad situation.

Their allies—China, India, Iran and others—support Russia because they thought they would give a humility lesson to the west by showing the limits of the western sphere of influence. Now that they are failing in that, there is a temptation to move further down the road of de-escalation, and the only playground where there is a strategic balance is in nuclear and the prospect of a full-fledged nuclear war. This is the only type of confrontation in which Russia can expect to find some balance and renegotiate a power relation with the west.

What I see now in the strategy the Russians have been carrying on for a few weeks is the increased intensity of the horror, the human rights violations and so forth. We think he is mad enough that he could possibly eventually consider using a nuke. A nuclear weapon is a weapon of dissuasion, but it has a dissuasive effect only if you think the guy who controls the button is crazy enough to use it. When Mr. Yeltsin was threatening us with a nuke in 1999, because he disagreed with the illegal NATO aggression against a country called Yugoslavia, everyone was laughing at him. "Come on, Boris," they said, "You're not going to really think about using these types of weapons."

Now, the persona that Putin is creating for himself is demonstrating that he's crazy enough, so he could possibly think about losing. He sent a Kinzhal missile. This is a new type of hypersonic weapon. It travels at 15 times the speed of sound. He used it to bomb the city of Luts'k, where the foreign military are training and rolling.... Of course, there were no nuclear warheads on this missile, but it could be used to carry nuclear weapons.

You see talk inside the Russian media on different types of low-yield nuclear weapons—tactical, strategic, etc. This is becoming part of the language we're using. This is the direction. Russia has no choice now but to move down that path, because it's the only way for them to achieve what they are aiming for, which is to challenge the unipolar moment.

• (1605)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Perhaps I could quickly ask you one more question. I was very interested in your comments.

Do you think Russia's current movement, both figuratively and physically, is a setback, or is it a play that the Russians are using in order to either negotiate or militarily syphon off one part of Ukraine versus the other?

Dr. Yann Breault: The first part of the battle was a total disaster, so this is a strategic setback, but the battle they are engaging in is not something new. It's something they have been publicly engaged in for many years: Remember the Munich speech in 2007, but it goes back to the Primakov doctrine in 1996, whereby they intended to challenge the unipolar world.

This is not going to end very soon, even if we strike a temporary ceasefire agreement that would provide some relief for civilians in Ukraine.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sarai and Ms. Dyczok.

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank both witnesses for their comments.

Mr. Breault, I was a bit surprised to hear you tell us—who had hoped for a quick resolution—that the conflict would likely last longer than expected, despite your fairly accurate analysis of the situation on the ground since the start of the invasion.

There are suggestions these days that President Putin isn't being properly informed of the real situation on the ground.

What do you think of this statement?

• (1610)

Dr. Yann Breault: It's perfectly plausible. Several years ago, we learned that President Putin wasn't even on social media. Every morning, he receives a briefing book with notes prepared by the intelligence service. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems that he has been more isolated. I saw reports that he's in an anti-atomic bunker, in Ufa, and that he's leading the conflict online. On a physical level, he's becoming more and more inaccessible.

It seems quite plausible that his generals are painting a picture of the situation that doesn't reflect reality. However, I'm not in the know. From an epistemological standpoint, just because a person has a doctorate and is a professor doesn't mean that they're in the know and that they're aware of the situation in the black box of the Kremlin. My comments should be treated cautiously.

That said, there are some telling signs. The fifth section of the federal security service, known as the FSB, has been reviewing the internal situation in Ukraine since 2008. The man who ran the section, Sergei Beseda, is currently under house arrest. President Putin is likely extremely irritated. In addition, seven generals have been killed in action, out of a total of 30. That's almost one quarter of the generals. He isn't happy with the situation and he's looking for people to blame. Personally, I doubt that this is affecting his determination to teach the lesson in humility that he dreams of inflicting on the west.

I also want to believe that we'll see a palace revolution, meaning that the oligarchs will join together to get rid of the man currently costing them billions of dollars. There's discontent within the military, including within the elite guard, the Rosgvardia, which provides security for the president and which was allegedly engaged in the fighting. Many have returned in a coffin. President Putin is annoyed. There are undoubtedly communication issues.

That's why I'm torn between the joy of seeing the Ukrainians lead such a heroic resistance and my concern about what will happen in the second phase of a confrontation that extends far beyond the Ukrainian theatre.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'm tempted to ask who is currently being taught a lesson in humility, but I won't go there.

I have a question about another issue of particular interest to me.

Don't you think that, by giving President Putin the impression from the start that, whatever happens, we won't interfere at any time, this gives him carte blanche to believe that he can basically do as he pleases?

Dr. Yann Breault: I absolutely agree with that.

Moreover, that is what President Putin has understood. In the American Congress, we even saw a general explain that two Russian ships had sailed away from the Black Sea ports just before the start of a battle. History may hold this against President Biden. From the outset, even before the intervention began, the Russians had already been told that we were not going to send troops on the ground. So we accepted, de facto, a kind of sharing of spheres of influence, a situation in which we concede that the heart of the Russian state is in Ukraine, in Kyiv—with all due respect to all my Ukrainian nationalist friends, who rightly hate this notion. Yet this is how things are understood in Russia, where they reject the idea that the heart of the Slavo-Orthodox civilization could one day end up in the American orbit.

This has been obvious since the Bucharest Summit in 2008. The French and Germans said that extending the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, or NATO, alliance to Ukraine was out of the question, and the Americans insisted on a resolution promising that one day Georgia and Ukraine would be part of NATO. This red line, which President Putin has been talking about a lot recently, was already mentioned in 2008.

It is incomprehensible to think that Russia would stand idly by. Russia represents 3% of the world's gross domestic product, or GDP. How can we expect to have a dialogue of equals with a poor foreign power, a country that is essentially an exporter of natural resources?

The Russians have a large number of nuclear warheads. The figures vary according to sources, but they have about 6,000, of which 1,500 are deployed. They have invested heavily over the last 15 years in developing hypersonic technologies that are capable of defeating the elements of the missile shield that we have deployed on their doorstep, in Poland and Romania, as you know. So they have been preparing for this confrontation for a long time. They feel they can teach us a lesson in humility, and the feeling is mutual. It's like when two guys with big arms meet in a bar and each one thinks he is stronger than the other. It could end up in a tough fight.

• (1615)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Isn't it precisely this commitment to never do anything that risks prolonging the conflict?

Dr. Yann Breault: I don't know who will be responsible for the continuation of the conflict. For the sake of Ukrainian civilians, we would like to see an agreement. For there to be one, there would have to be recognition of Russian sovereignty over the Crimean peninsula and of the independence of the secessionist territories. However, how can one negotiate with a war criminal? This is completely unacceptable.

The only solution we have is to hope for regime change in Moscow. Mr. Biden said this explicitly in Warsaw. When he called for regime change in Russia, he came to give President Putin the tools he needed to mobilize public opinion in his country to demonstrate that it is not only about denazification of Ukraine, but also about securing a sphere of influence on the periphery of the country over which Russia will have the upper hand. The problem is that the west is not prepared to accept this.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron and Dr. Breault.

[English]

Madam McPherson, please go ahead for six minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their testimony. This has been very interesting.

I'm going to circle back to the nuclear question a bit to start with. It's obviously extremely terrifying to think that Putin has control over nuclear weapons and may be feeling cornered enough to use those nuclear weapons.

Earlier today we were speaking to members of the Ukraine parliament. One of the questions we put to them was whether or not they felt that the Russian troops were pulling back from Kyiv because that may be a target. I'm interested in your perspectives on that.

They also brought up the point that, in fact, the Russian army doesn't need to use a weapon. They can just continue to attack the nuclear facilities in Ukraine. I'd love your perspective on that as well.

Finally, on the nuclear question—and I've done quite a bit of work in disarmament—one of my big worries with this is how being held hostage by a nuclear power sends a message to other rogue states that have access to nuclear weapons and how dangerous that is. Could you both comment on that?

Then I have some other questions on humanitarian issues and sanctions.

Dr. Marta Dyczok: I'm going to jump in first here. I'm not a military expert, but, on the nuclear question, we're all focusing on Putin, and I think military and nuclear experts know that this is not a decision that one person takes and can execute regardless of what's going on around him.

I think what we need to be paying attention to is what is going on in Putin's inner circle. I completely agree with my colleague that we don't have full information, because Putin is hiding. However, we do have information about discontent among his defence minister and various others. We shouldn't be focusing on whether Putin's crazy enough to use nuclear weapons, because he by himself can't make that happen. I think that's an important point to keep in mind. There's a process that would have to happen, and other people would need to be on board with that.

The nuclear facilities...I think everybody read that Russian troops were digging in around Chernobyl; they were digging trenches and they started getting ill, then started retreating. My impression is they don't actually know what they're doing. They don't have a clear strategy. That makes it simultaneously scary and...because mistakes could happen.

We saw the fire in Zaporizhzhia, where the nuclear power station was on fire and Ukrainian firefighters weren't allowed in to put the fire out. I cannot imagine that something like that is on the agenda, because if a nuclear power station blows, that will affect Russia much more than Canada or the U.S. I can't imagine they're doing that deliberately.

Ms. Heather McPherson: However, they may be doing that by accident.

Dr. Marta Dyczok: We've already seen the Zaporizhzhia case. Watch carefully what's going on around Chernobyl and these other nuclear power stations. My impression is they're trying to deprive Ukraine of energy rather than trying to cause nuclear explosions, because Ukraine gets a significant part of its energy through nuclear power stations. They've been targeted for those reasons.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Mr. Breault, did you have anything else that you wanted to add on that?

• (1620)

Dr. Yann Breault: I think the existence of nuclear power is one thing; a nuclear weapon is a completely different one. Securing the region around Chernobyl was dangerous, and it showed again how much disrespect they have for human considerations, sending their kids there to dig. Professor Dyczok was right to recall this. But what will come next? How do you expect the Ukrainian military to regain control over Chernobyl power without using weapons that might further endanger the situation?

It is extremely frightening, and this is precisely the objective the Russians are pursuing with this. They need us to freak out, and some of us were freaking out when there were 150 military stations around the borders and I was there telling the media, don't worry; this is part of a negotiation process; they're using intimidation to gain some leverage. Unexpectedly to me, they were crazy enough to move in with all the costs, both economically and militarily.

So now I'm freaking out—I'm sorry—about the use of nuclear weapons, because if they were crazy enough to do this, they could indeed go ahead, and this is something we need to keep in consideration.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I am running out of time really quickly. I want to ask you one last question before I run out of time.

One of the things we know there have been some moves on is looking at the multilateral systems that are in place and seeing if there are ways we can hold Putin to account there, so looking at the G20 and looking at the Arctic Council and other places where we can isolate Russia at this time.

I know you have only 30 seconds, but maybe each of you could give me a very short summary of how you would see using those multilateral institutions to further isolate Putin.

Dr. Marta Dyczok: Absolutely, those steps need to be taken. How effective they will be is questionable, but it's certainly demonstrable that being booted out of the G7 meant something. It cuts off access, and I think that needs to be happening on all spheres; it must be clear that if you behave like this, you're not a member of

the international community. There are discussions around the EU of excluding them from a lot of those committees, so that needs to continue. I think that sends a strong message, mainly to people around Putin, because I don't think Putin actually really cares; it's about the people around him who don't want to be international pariahs, although that's what he's making them into.

The Chair: Professor Breault, give a very quick answer, if you'd like to add to that.

Dr. Yann Breault: Kicking Russia out of the G20 is not going to happen. Too many states still support Russia at this stage.

China went as far as to give credence to the thesis that there were some bio labs sponsored by the CIA in Ukraine. When the issue was brought up at the Security Council of the United Nations, China said there should be an inquiry on that through a multilateral mechanism.

We could get satisfaction by excluding Russia from multilateral institutions, but that's not going to change the global picture we have right now, unfortunately.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you very much, Ms. McPherson.

Colleagues, we're at the beginning of round two. I would propose that we compress our time frame, because we have a second panel waiting for us. With your indulgence, we also have a few items of housekeeping to take care of for probably no more than five minutes at the end.

If it's okay with you, we'll reduce the allotments in the second round to three minutes each for the Liberals and Conservatives, and two minutes each for the Bloc and for the NDP, just to give everybody a chance to come in and ask this panel—

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Wouldn't it be four and two, so it's an equal proportion?

The Chair: That would take us past. We would have to compromise the second panel, Mr. Genuis. I think there is interesting testimony there as well.

Let's try. It inevitably goes a bit past those allotments anyway.

For three minutes, please go ahead. The floor is yours.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you. I will be fast, then.

I want to ask about the possibility of political change in Russia. Linked to that, what is the process specifically around the launch of a nuclear weapon by Russia? What parts of the chain of command are engaged?

Russia has a long history of palace coups. I just want to understand the possible scenarios and the implications for nuclear weapons.

Dr. Marta Dyczok: I'm going to give the chain of command question to my colleague. I can take the palace coup question.

As a historian...we've seen Khrushchev peacefully removed from power. I think that would be the best possible scenario.

The mechanism to remove him is either assassination or a palace coup. I think a palace coup is more likely. We're not going to see it until it happens, because people who are plotting this coup....

Again, as a historian...there were attempts to remove Hitler. They failed and we learned about them only afterwards. Something may well be happening that we're not seeing.

• (1625)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You would say that we can't assign any probability to that whatsoever. We have no—

Dr. Marta Dyczok: Absolutely. I think there is a probability.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I gather from your answer that we couldn't begin to speculate about what that probability might be.

Dr. Marta Dyczok: We won't be able to see it because it's a closed political system. If his opponents are scheming, they are hiding from him and from us.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Can I hear about the nuclear chain of command? I want to try to get one more question in after that.

Dr. Yann Breault: I share Professor Dyczok's take. Almost everything is possible.

On the chain of command, if you want to use a nuclear weapon, you need the approval of three guys: Mr. Putin, Mr. Gerasimov and Mr. Shoigu, the defence minister. This is why Mr. Putin called them earlier. In the very early stages, he had a special meeting with Mr. Gerasimov and Mr. Shoigu, and basically asked them to put the nuclear strategic command on high alert.

We didn't know at that point if that would mean the mobile launching base would be put on the railway. There was no observation of any movement, just adding more staff around, so we don't....

He needs three guys and he controls these two guys, so—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you. I have 30 seconds.

What is China doing? What is China's agenda? What can we do to counter Chinese engagement in this situation?

Dr. Marta Dyczok: China is just waiting to see how it's going to benefit. It's not going to support Russia or oppose Russia. It wants Russia to become weaker and then it will take over Russia's position in the international.... That's what China is waiting for.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Why does China want Russia to be weaker?

Dr. Marta Dyczok: It is because it can then fill in Russia's place and have a more prominent role.

Dr. Yann Breault: It's gaining access to cheaper natural resources. China is definitely the winner in this confrontation.

Russia is now stocked with this eternal friendship, as they called it at the start of the Olympic Games. Everything is moving, but China is siding with Russia in this battle against American unilateralism and the call for a multipolar world, so this eternal friendship might....

I don't think Russia is too comfortable with the asymmetric relationship they're engaged in with China in the long term, but at the same time, China is laughing because this is what is at stake.

If the west is trying to take both Russia and China at the same time, we have a problem. We don't have the economic and military resources to take these two superpowers at the same time. Nixon—

The Chair: Thanks very much, Professor. We'll have to leave it there.

Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Dr. Fry, you have three minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

I'm going to cut to the chase, because there are a couple of things.

As everyone knows, this is a catch-22 situation. You talked about the bar fight, and the guys standing behind Russia are Iran, possibly India, North Korea and China. These are the guys with the big guns. We are coming to that bar fight with knives. We have only one guy with a gun, and that is the United States of America.

In the beginning, when the Budapest agreement was put forward, that deed took away nuclear power from Kazakhstan, from Ukraine and from a lot of other people, so—

Dr. Marta Dyczok: Belarus.

Hon. Hedy Fry: —we don't have any big, new nuclear powers in Europe.

The second thing we must look at isn't whether he can press the button or not. It may very well be that these other guys standing behind him all have an argument with the west and with the United States, and they all want to prove a point. At the moment, we are hearing that nobody wants to push him in case he does this, so we are at a standoff here. Nobody wants to push him, yet he needs to be pushed a little further. Economic sanctions, unless we remove the Russians completely from SWIFT, are not going to work.

What do we have in our armament?

I am concerned about nuclear war. I think the last time we came as close as this was during the Bay of Pigs. Were it not for the political will of Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Khrushchev at the time, there would have been a nuclear war.

We know that we're on the verge of this. This has to be a consideration, but it shouldn't stop us from doing anything. What are the things that we, as the west, as the "allies" can do?

You're absolutely right. This is a standoff. At the end of the day, in the long term, it may very well be that Mr. Putin will not press buttons, and that all he really wants is to retain Donbass, Luhansk and Crimea and to get hold of Transnistria, etc. He may just be looking to do that, but he's putting big guns in front of him to get it done.

• (1630)

Dr. Marta Dyczok: I agree with you. This is a standoff, and the existing tools we have as members of the international community are inadequate. That was my point.

This is the time to come up with new ideas. I'm racking my brain, and I think we all need to.

I don't know that we're coming to this with knives, because an important part of what's going on here is an information war, and I don't think that should be discounted.

There's a lot of speculation, which you've just mentioned, on what Putin wants. He's made it very clear what he wants, and he's repeated it over and over again. There's that long article he wrote about how Ukraine is not a nation; Ukraine is really part of Russia. In previous statements that he's made, in his mind, Ukraine is part of Russia and he's trying to establish control over Ukraine and achieve regional hegemony. It's not about Crimea or Donbass, it's about restoring Russian greatness. If you're watching his statements, he's restoring Russian glory, and the way he's spinning it—

Hon. Hedy Fry: I'm sorry. I'm running out of time.

The Chair: You are, in fact, out of time, Dr. Fry. Thank you very much.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I didn't get a chance to [*Inaudible—Editor*]. That was a very short three minutes, Mr. Chair. I'm not pushing you on it. I would have liked to hear from Professor Breault on this, but there you go.

The Chair: Professor Breault, if you have a 20-second addition, I will give that to you, and then we'll have to go to Mr. Bergeron, just in the interests of time. We are very tight this afternoon.

Dr. Yann Breault: I'm a bad guy here, because the point is not whether we are right or wrong to try to oppose the dictator. It is, do we have the means? The answer is that we don't.

What is ending is that unipolar moment in which we thought NATO could play a role worldwide. What Russia and China are going to impose is a step back. The fact is that they will have their own sphere of influence, like they did when they engaged in 1968 in Prague, in 1956 in Czechoslovakia, and when they were in Afghanistan. All of this was terrible, but at that time we were acknowledging their strength and we said, "That's in their courtyard."

I think this is—

The Chair: Thank you so much. We'll have to leave it there, just because time is running very furiously this afternoon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor for two minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Perhaps I will have the chance to give Dr. Breault the opportunity to complete his answer.

These days, we are hearing from Ukrainian parliamentarians. They are telling us that the peace negotiations, in their opinion, are just a smoke screen and that Russia has no intention of concluding anything with Ukraine. They say that Russia claims to want to make a strategic withdrawal to concentrate on the Donbass, but this is still just a smoke screen, a cop-out, a ruse. They claim that the objective is still to take Kyiv.

What do you think about that?

Dr. Yann Breault: I believe that the current talks are doomed to failure, because the Ukrainians are not prepared to make any concessions either. For the survival of civilians in Ukraine, I would have liked to hear the Ukrainians accept the idea of neutrality and say that the idea of becoming a member of NATO is not acceptable. One could understand that.

Why not drop the Donbass, which is so pro-Russian? Why not recognize Russian sovereignty and focus on what would still be a great Ukraine, which could aspire to integration into the European economic space?

Why is the problem of corruption and lack of transparency not being addressed? I am sorry, but Ukraine is not a democracy. Opposition newspapers have been closed down, and I remind you that a few months before Mr. Zelenskyy knocked on NATO's door again, the ties between the International Monetary Fund and Ukraine were broken because Ukraine was not transparent enough.

So I hope that the Ukrainians will clean up their government. I think they should have made some concessions to save human lives. We encouraged them by supplying them with weapons. Now, in a way, they are the victims of our effort to limit President Putin's room for manoeuvre on the international stage. That breaks my heart.

• (1635)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Is it only up to the Ukrainians to make concessions?

Dr. Yann Breault: I find it appalling to have to answer in the affirmative, Mr. Bergeron.

That will have to be the case if we want this situation to be resolved, unless we find another solution or there is a palace revolution. I would like to believe in such a revolution, but I do not.

In order to save human lives, we should perhaps explain to the Ukrainians that they should consider the options that are presented. We sometimes hear them say that they even dream of going all the way.

My words go against the grain and I'm embarrassed to say them, because they go against what I want deep in my soul.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron and Dr. Breault.

[English]

We have Madam McPherson, please, for two minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I hear the pain of what you're saying in terms of negotiating with the Russians as they commit war crimes and crimes against humanity. I do hear that.

I want to talk about some of those other things that Canadians can do, because, as we all know, Canada does not have the ability to do certain things. We simply don't, but what we have the ability to do is to help people come from Ukraine, to bring humanitarian aid and to provide whatever services and whatever materiel we can to help Ukrainians defend themselves.

I would like to talk a bit about immigration and bringing people from Ukraine. All opposition members have called for visa-free travel for Ukrainians. Would that help? I'm going to ask that of Ms. Dyczok. I'm also going to ask about the idea of how we support Ukrainians when they are here. For example, I was in Poland just a few weeks ago, and Poland is able to provide some limited health care supports for Ukrainians when they're in that country. Canada is not providing that health care support.

Could you talk about that a little, please?

Dr. Marta Dyczok: To my co-expert, Ukraine did offer neutrality in the last series of peace talks, and that was rejected. It's not a question of their not being prepared to do that; they did.

To the humanitarian question, I think Canada should look at this in terms of short-, medium- and long-term strategies, because right now people are fleeing because they're being attacked. Some people are just looking for a place to shelter until it's over. Others will perhaps want to stay longer. I think we need to keep in mind that there will be different asks from people who are fleeing.

I think that health care absolutely has to be part of the package. These people are fleeing war, and they could be injured. They're probably traumatized. If they have any health issues, they need to be part of the package.

The funding is always the tricky question. People who are fleeing from war... Our university has already put together packages. It's happening across the board. I think the Canadian government is doing a really good job; however, some of the agencies that are working with the Canadian government, like the Red Cross, are spending their money on promotional materials rather than donating it to Ukrainians in need, so that's something. A friend of mine just got a package from the Red Cross. He donated \$500, and they sent him this big package, including a pen with his name on it. He said, "I gave money to help Ukrainians, not to get a personalized pen, thank you very much."

The Chair: We'll have to leave it there. Thank you very much, Professor.

Mr. Aboultaif, please go ahead for three minutes.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): I have a quick question, due to the shortage of time, to either one of you.

Do you believe it's a matter of leadership or a matter of an empire when it comes to Russia?

Dr. Marta Dyczok: Putin has imperial ambitions; that is without a doubt, and he wants to expand his influence, so that I think is very clear.

The question that nobody is asking, which I think really needs to be put on the table, is about this issue. We talk about Russia as a monolith, but it's the Russian Federation, and there are a lot of non-Russians in the Russian Federation. If you actually look where the energy is, it's not in the European part of Russia; it is in the non-European parts of Russia, so I think one of the possible negative consequences for Putin could be dissatisfaction in the republics. We've seen Chechnya squashed, but there's Yakutia and there are all these other Siberian.... Those are things that we should be watching as well, what's going on within Russia, and not just what Putin is saying—

• (1640)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: I'm looking to ask a question of Mr. Breault.

I'm looking to the future and the future is telling us that no matter how this ends—at the end of the day we are in the course of unfortunate circumstances in history—this is not going to be the final chapter of this conflict.

Would you be able to comment on that, Dr. Breault?

Dr. Yann Breault: After the Second World War, the U.S. economy was about 50% of the world economy. We live in a dollar-based worldwide financial system, and this is changing. Asia is moving forward. The U.S. economy is now about 22% of the global economy, so there's going to have to be, at some point, a new deal negotiated between world powers.

The way I explain it to my students is that the tectonic plates are moving, and the question is, are they going to slide smoothly or are they going to stop at one point and then provoke an earthquake? I see what we're witnessing in Ukraine as the first major earthquake we're having in these tectonic shifts, and that is inevitable. The U.S. is not going to be the sole world superpower for the next century. How are we going to transition to a multipolar world, where India will be there, where China will be there with Russia? This is the fundamental question. The Ukraine crisis is one of several new crises that will come down the path. Watch Taiwan in the coming months—

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Should we hope that this will be the last chapter before this escalates further and expands further?

The Chair: Give a very brief answer, please.

Dr. Yann Breault: Possibly.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Aboultaif.

Mr. Oliphant, please, for three minutes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): I will try to be quick. I want to have dinner with both of you because I need two hours with both of you.

Professor Breault, one of your areas is the Cold War and the re-emergence of a cold war. What are your thoughts...? We have a short-term issue. Looking ahead to the medium and long term, the plus side is the allied forces, NATO and the like-minded, are very strong. We've been never more united than we are right now. However, Mr. Putin is still at a very high level of popularity in Russia and in the federation. What are your thoughts on a cold war in the medium and long term?

Dr. Yann Breault: I will give you a depressing answer. I think a new iron curtain is already unfolding in the region, and Putin doesn't care about that. Since he came back in 2012, you could see the return of a very conservative ideological stance, according to which this degenerate, sodomite west is contaminating the soul of this great Slavic orthodox civilization. This seems terrible, but just listen to Patriarch Kirill justifying this war, because we're essentially fighting against the spread of LGBTQ+ ideas.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: That's right.

Dr. Yann Breault: This is going pretty fast. For a long while, Russians and Russia were interested in integrating the civilized world in a common house, to use Gorbachev's terminology, but not anymore.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Let's have dinner on that later. I think this is going to be something our committee needs to follow up on.

Dr. Marta Dyczok: Can I jump in on that one?

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I have another one for you, because I read a very interesting blog article today by a former BBC journalist, now independent, Farida Rustamova, who has done some interesting work on Putin's popularity.

In the early weeks, the disinformation campaign had not been launched by Russia the way it came in later, and her article is quite interesting in talking about the tenacity of Putin and how, if anything, the Western sanctions are creating a problem of unity among these oligarchs, not disunity.

Do you have any thoughts on that?

Dr. Marta Dyczok: Absolutely. It's a good question.

Putin's popularity is really difficult to get a clear read on, because it's a non-democratic society. That said, there are public opinion polls. In the early ones, when the war was escalated, starting in February, his popularity before that was quite low. It went up from 50% to 70%. In the last public opinion poll that came out, by the Levada-Center, his popularity had risen to 85%.

• (1645)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: It rose to 83%, yes.

Dr. Marta Dyczok: That is quite worrying. Again, we need to take that with a grain of salt, but I think that is an indicator.

As we all know, he has cut down all information coming from outside of Russia, so he is completely controlling the narrative. He is very good at stoking tropes—the West is trying to humiliate us, and so on—and that taps into Russians' feeling of post-imperial loss. We saw this in Britain, and we saw this in other imperial coun-

tries. When you lose empire, you lose status, and he's tapping into that.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: We don't want—

The Chair: Unfortunately Mr. Oliphant, I apologize. In the interests of time—I hate to do this—unfortunately, we will have to end it here.

Colleagues, on our collective behalf, I would like to thank our two experts for being with us this afternoon.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Breault and Dr. Dyczok, thank you very much for appearing before the committee and giving us evidence.

[*English*]

Please keep safe. We will suspend to allow our second panel to come on board, and then continue very shortly. Thank you.

• (1645)

(Pause)

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Colleagues, we're going to move on to the second panel, and I'd like to welcome our witnesses.

We have Ms. Magdalena Dembińska, who is a full professor in the department of political science at the Université de Montréal,

[*English*]

and Timothy David Snyder, professor of history, Yale University.

I will give each of you five minutes for opening remarks, after which we will go to questions by members one more time.

We will try to signal when there are 30 seconds left in your questioning or testimony time. I will hold up the yellow card.

[*Translation*]

Professor Dembińska, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Magdalena Dembińska (Full Professor, Department of Political Science, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for inviting me to appear before the committee.

The war was not expected to last this long. Despite Russia's military superiority, the Ukrainian army is resisting. The situation on the front has been stagnant for some time. All indications are that the Kremlin has made another ill-informed calculation. Let me backtrack a bit.

Indeed, in 2014, the annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in Donbass were supposed to deter Kyiv from turning to the west and signing association agreements with the European Union. This did not happen. The agreements were signed in 2015. Popular support for the EU rose to almost 75%. Support for NATO membership tripled to almost 60%. The wars, the one in Donbass since 2014, followed by the current one, blurred regional differences at the same time. Traditionally Russian-speaking and pro-Russian regions in the east and south are supporting Ukraine against the invasion of Russia and anti-Russian sentiments are growing.

In order to control Ukraine, the Minsk agreements of 2014 and 2015 were to allow—according to the Kremlin's interpretation—the reintegration of Donbass into Ukraine as an autonomous territory with a special status, which would have given them a de facto veto over Ukraine's future geopolitical direction. Faced with the fiasco of this scenario, Mr. Putin took advantage of a perceived weakening of the west and used military pressure at the end of 2021, hoping to obtain guarantees from NATO regarding the end of its enlargement and the withdrawal of its troops from the eastern flank. This has not happened. The invasion of Ukraine followed, with Ukrainian resistance and determination again surprising the Kremlin. Mr. Putin's idea of overthrowing the government in Kyiv and establishing a greater Russia has met with a real obstacle. We are now in a kind of stalemate on the ground that explains the impasse in the negotiations, where the parties are not ready to make concessions.

Moscow still demands that Kyiv recognize the annexation of Crimea and the independence of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. Moscow wants Ukraine's demilitarization and neutrality status, including implicitly non-membership in the European Union as well. If Ukraine says it is ready to discuss neutrality, it is asking for security guarantees in exchange. As for concessions on territorial integrity, it is clear that they would be considered illegitimate in the eyes of the population. Mr. Zelenskyy therefore wants to postpone any negotiations on this issue until the coming years. Any future arrangement will have to be put to a referendum. Indeed, any agreement reached above the heads of the Ukrainian people has little chance of holding.

It goes without saying that, in the face of the human drama unfolding before our eyes, a ceasefire is necessary. Even if it is not in Moscow's interest to prolong the war, which has cost it some \$25 billion since February 24, it is in Russia's interest to prolong the talks a little in order to gain enough ground to be able to talk about the success of its operation.

On the one hand, despite some breakthroughs by the Ukrainian army in recent days, it is unlikely that it will be able to push the Russian army out of its entire territory on its own. On the other hand, while sitting at the negotiating table, Russia is stepping up the scale and brutality of armed actions on the ground in the hope of breaking the morale of the Ukrainian side and bringing about political divisions leading to eventual capitulation. Waiting for such an outcome may be too long and too costly. Another scenario, in fact, is now emerging. It is the partition of Ukraine, which was already mooted in 2014.

In addition to Crimea, at the very least, it involves occupying the entire Donbass region in eastern Ukraine, beyond the territories controlled by the pro-Russian separatists of the self-proclaimed re-

publics, including in particular the city and port of Mariupol, which are still undergoing a brutal offensive.

However, the plan seems more ambitious at the moment. In the south of the country, the offensive is increasing around Mykolaiv and Odessa. In the Kherson region, Russian forces are trying to set up another pro-Russian people's republic. If Russia succeeds in advancing on these eastern and southern territories, it will have control of the land link between Donbass and Crimea and potentially also, through Odessa, with the self-proclaimed pro-Russian Transnistrian republic in Moldova. Moscow could then claim a geopolitical success, that of having cut Ukraine off from the Black Sea, over which Russia will dominate.

Where will Russia stop? That depends crucially on how much time it can buy before a ceasefire is signed, which is why it is important to keep applying pressure, sending more and more aid to Ukraine and imposing even tougher sanctions to rapidly weaken Russia's military capacity. Unfortunately, there is no realistic scenario for Russia's total withdrawal from Ukraine.

• (1650)

I do not like to make pronouncements and predictions about the future, but unless there is a dramatic turnaround by Russia, in the next few years or decades, there will probably be another frozen conflict, a ceasefire, a demarcation line between the warring parties. However, there will be no peace treaty, because neither Kyiv nor the international community will recognize such a forced partition of Ukraine.

For its part, Russia has a history of using territory in neighbouring countries to advance its geopolitical agenda. For more than 30 years, Transnistria as well as South Ossetia and Abkhazia have been destabilizing Moldova and Georgia, respectively, and standing in the way of their western aspirations. A prolonged confrontation is brewing, a wall between two civilizations, according to Mr. Putin.

Thank you for your attention.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Dembińska.

[English]

Dr. Snyder, please go ahead for five minutes of opening remarks.

Prof. Timothy David Snyder (Professor of History, Yale University, As an Individual): Thank you very much. It's an honour to be asked to testify.

After this extremely competent introduction, this *tour d'horizon*, what I would like to do with my time is just present a few concepts that I think help to understand the overall shape of what's happening. Then I'll look forward to your questions.

As a historian, I don't have any doubt that what we are passing through now is a turning point in the history of the world, but like all turning points, we can't really be sure which way matters are turning. I'll have something to say about that towards the end.

I think the concepts that are useful in understanding what's happening, the big concepts, are four.

Number one, the opponent that Ukraine is facing here, the enemy that Ukraine is facing here, can be characterized as an “oligarchy”. Russia is a state that is characterized by extreme concentrations of wealth. The Government of Russia can be understood as one dominant oligarchical clan, and we can understand Russia's war against Ukraine as the kind of fantasy that oligarchs indulge in.

The second concept, a second category and a second classical political term that helps to understand what is happening, is “tyranny”. Mr. Putin is a tyrant in the classical sense of the word, just as described in chapters 8 and 9 of Plato's *Republic*. He is separated from useful advisers. He's unable to listen to advice. He's more and more involved in his own conceptions, in which he seems to believe more and more.

A third useful concept—which was raised, I believe, in the last panel—is the concept of “empire”, and not in some kind of vague or metaphorical sense but in the specific sense of the history of European empires as entities that denied that other countries are states and that other peoples are nations. A very specific quality of Russia's aggression towards Ukraine is the consistent claim that Ukraine is not a state and that Ukraine is not a nation. This recalls 500 years of European imperialism. It also recalls very specifically the kinds of arguments that were used by Hitler and Stalin in 1938 and 1939, during a period of European imperialism inside Europe.

In addition to that, I would note—and here I'm echoing, I believe, what other panellists have said—that we are now in a second stage of the war, where the first stage was characterized by belief in this imperial vision and by the belief that Ukraine would fall in two or three days. The military operation, as it was initially conceived, assumed that there really was no state or nation that would resist, and that, on the third day of the invasion, Putin would already be negotiating with his own puppet regime and there would be a victory parade.

Because that did not turn out to be the case, the Russian military, along with the Russian national guard, Chechen irregulars and so on, must now try to make the world look like Putin's characterization. This is now, in a fairly literal sense, a war of destruction or a war of annihilation, where the Ukrainian nation and the Ukrainian state have to be destroyed or, at the very least, humiliated, so that the world looks like what Putin said it looks like.

The fourth useful term for me is “unreality”. This war is being fought in the name of not just these classical concepts, which are my concepts; it's being fought in the name of Putin's concepts, which are concepts like “de-nazification”. In effect, Putin is fighting a war of aggression in the name of the Second World War. He's fought a war that is to destroy a government and a state, which happens to have a Jewish president, in the name of de-nazification.

This war is being fought, of course, very meaningfully in reality, with thousands and thousands of people dying, but it's also being fought, in a way, in “unreality”. This is a war to take away concepts. It's a war to unmoor us. It's a war to make meaningless the words we use to sort out the past and think about the future.

My final word will be about democracy. We talk about democracy a lot, and we are now reaching a stage where the struggle against democracy has taken on an explicit, violent form. There have been plenty of anti-democratic movements, and they are winning, but it is not so common that a violent war is fought on this scale, with this scale of destructiveness and with this kind of suddenness, in order to destroy a democracy.

This is not a perfect democracy; it's a real-life democracy, but it has the basic attributes of the rule of law, of freedom of speech and of pluralism. The fact that this is an everyday, normal democracy helps to explain why Ukrainians are fighting. They're very aware of what losing would mean. It would mean losing their political existence, their civic existence and their national existence.

• (1700)

I'd like to close on a note that is perhaps a bit different. I do think that the right way to think about the end of this war is how to win. Winning does not necessarily mean Ukrainians driving Russians from their territory. Winning means Ukrainians doing well enough that political pressure is felt inside the Kremlin.

I do not believe the war ends until political pressure is felt inside the Kremlin, and I believe that's what we must be aiming for.

The Chair: Professor Snyder, thank you very much for your opening remarks.

Colleagues, I am challenged by the clock this afternoon. I propose that we do what we did in the first round, which is to compress our rounds of questioning slightly to make sure that everybody here has a chance to ask our second panel at least one question. I'm also mindful of the fact that it's Thursday night, and that at least some of us are travelling to our constituencies tonight, so I'm not terribly inclined to go late.

If colleagues are okay to start with an opening round of four minutes, I propose that this would give us the flexibility to potentially bring everybody into the conversation. If you're good with that, I will go to Mr. Chong for the opening round of four minutes.

Please go ahead.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My two questions are for Dr. Snyder. One's on nuclear, and one's on food security. I'll ask them both in terms of your historical view of these two questions.

Tactical nuclear weapons are the least regulated category of nuclear weapons and are not included in the strategic nuclear treaties that Russia is party to. Russia hasn't ruled out the use of a tactical nuclear bomb to protect its troops in retreat. Can you comment on the Russian tactical nuclear doctrine, and what in your view should be the U.S. and NATO response if Russia uses either a tactical nuclear weapon or, alternatively, a chemical or biological weapon?

The second question I have is regarding food security. It's estimated that synthetic nitrogen fertilizer accounts for half of all global crop production. In other words, without this fertilizer, made from natural gas, we can feed only about half of the planet's people, rather than the seven billion people who live on the planet today. Russia accounts for about a quarter of all global exports of ammonia fertilizer and about a sixth of all urea fertilizer exports. Many are raising alarm bells about food shortages in the next six months. From an historical perspective, could you comment on what potential food shortages could mean to geopolitical stability in Europe and around the world?

You have about three and a half minutes to address those two questions. Thank you.

Prof. Timothy David Snyder: Thank you. Those were both very cheerful questions, and I congratulate you on making my remarks even darker than they were in the original formulation.

On the first question, that of tactical nuclear weapons, I think my broadest point here would be that there has to be an anticipatory reaction that goes beyond North America and Europe. I think we ought to be able to build a broader consensus about the use of biological, chemical and tactical nuclear weapons than just North America. I think that should be something at least on the scale of the OSCE, but possibly going beyond the countries who would seem like natural allies in this business, because establishing norms about the use of nuclear weapons is something that doesn't just concern this war. That would be my first impulse.

My second impulse would be that—I agree with you—there has to be some kind of clear statement about what kind of deterrent would be at hand. I should say, I am less concerned about this scenario than some people seem to be. I think that Mr. Putin has succeeded very well in framing this war in terms of things he might do, as opposed to things he could do or things he would do, and I think there's an element of this that supposes we will spend our time being concerned about escalatory scenarios.

My footnote there would be—you didn't ask this directly, but I'm going to just add this—I think, pragmatically, the best way to prevent escalatory scenarios is to try to keep the war as short as possible, because it's not so much the intentions as the multiplicative effect of time that makes these things more likely. If we saw an opportunity to make the war shorter, this is one more reason to take it.

On food, I quite agree with you. I wrote a book called *Black Earth*, which is a history of the Holocaust, in which I tried to reintroduce the ecological factor; that is, the perception that shortages are coming tends to make perceived racial and other enmities much more tangible, plausible and salient in politics. I completely agree with this.

The short-term scenario, I have to say, I'm not so worried about. I'm more worried about a long-term scenario in which Russia controls all access to the Black Sea, and therefore Russian and Ukrainian food supplies are added to natural gas as the kind of thing that the Russian leadership can treat as a weapon. I don't think this war actually began as an attempt to control the Black Sea. I think it began as an attempt to overthrow the Ukrainian government, install a new government and create a pan-Russia. All of the evidence sug-

gests that. However, where we are now, I'm worried about the scenario of the Black Sea being controlled by Russia.

• (1705)

The Chair: Mr. Chong, thank you very much.

I'm struggling against the fiercely racing clock, as we can all see.

Mr. Oliphant, the floor is yours, for four minutes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I think it's Ms. Bendayan.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you as well, Mr. Oliphant.

Ms. Dembińska and Mr. Snyder, I'm very happy to have you here.

I especially want to thank Ms. Dembińska, who is a full professor at the Université de Montréal. I am very proud to be the member of Parliament for Outremont, where the Université de Montréal is located.

Ms. Dembińska, I read with great attention and interest your article of February 27, 2022, in the daily *La Presse*. I invite all my colleagues to read this article, entitled “La guerre, point culminant d'une série d'échecs pour M. Poutine” or “The war, the culmination of a series of failures for Mr. Putin,” which was published during the first days of this war.

In the article, you talk about the failure of President Putin's plans A, B and C. You end by talking about his plan B, in the context of this war. Of course, I also believe that President Putin's plan was to take Kyiv and install a puppet government there. Now it seems that this plan has also failed.

You mentioned a possible plan E, the division of Ukraine. Do you think this plan will work?

Ms. Magdalena Dembińska: Thank you very much for the question.

Of course, I don't have a crystal ball, but history will tell us. I think this is possibly the most realistic scenario, even if it is terribly sad. It is the most realistic in the sense that it gives Mr. Putin the opportunity to say that he has won, because he controls the Black Sea and can therefore separate Ukraine from the Black Sea, important ports, natural resources, and so on. Dr. Snyder has already spoken about this.

I think that is indeed the plan he is trying to implement. In order to do that, he has to move the front as quickly as possible. That's what he seems to be doing. Indeed, we have seen in recent days that there is an intensification of the offensive in Mariupol, but there are also, as I mentioned earlier, plans to set up another pro-Russian republic in the Kherson region. We also see that the Odessa region is under pressure. It seems that this territory in the south of Ukraine is the one that is currently under the most pressure.

It is important for Mr. Putin to act before signing a ceasefire. History shows us that, whether it is the conflicts in Moldova, Georgia or elsewhere, when a ceasefire occurs, the demarcation line of the warring parties is where the front line ends. So this line of demarcation is extremely important to Mr. Putin.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Do you think this plan includes Odessa?

Ms. Magdalena Dembińska: I am sure it does. As to whether this plan will be implemented, I am not sure. For Mr. Putin to be able to turn to his electorate—if he takes it into account—to say that he has succeeded and that he wanted to liberate Donbass—

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Bendayan and Professor Dembińska.

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor for four minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for the very enlightening comments they are sharing with us.

Maybe you followed the discussions with the first panel where we talked about a palace coup. I would have liked to ask you about that. If you have any comments on it, please feel free to say them.

You have heard that, by saying it would never intervene in this conflict, the West has basically given Mr. Putin *carte blanche* to pretty much do as he pleases.

Again, feel free to answer my question if you like. Does this give him the opportunity to use chemical, bacteriological or even nuclear weapons?

Finally, Ms. Dembińska, given the scenario you mentioned and the fact that Russia has made sure to set up some kind of puppet state inside most of the former Soviet republics, whether it's Transnistria, South Ossetia or Donbass, do you feel that Mr. Putin will continue on to Moldova if he succeeds with his idea to have connectivity from Donbass to Odessa?

Ms. Magdalena Dembińska: I will also give Professor Snyder a chance to answer the question, but as far as Transnistria is concerned, I would say that it's possible. On the other hand, the Transnistrians are careful not to state their position on this—unlike South Ossetia and Abkhazia, for example, which were quick to recognize Donbass, Luhansk and Donetsk as independent states and support Russia's invasion of Ukraine—because Transnistria has other interests. Even though it has close ties with Russia and relies on it for gas, finance, military security and so on, it also deals with Europe. More than 60% of Transnistria's exports go to Europe. So there is some interdependence.

For the time being, Transnistria doesn't seem ready to step in with its own army to support the offensive on Odessa. However, nothing is off the table, because Transnistria has a Russian military base under Moscow's command. So Moldovans certainly have good reason to be fearful of that.

However, at the moment, the Russian military is very much lagging behind and I don't believe it has the capacity to go that far. I believe that Mariupol is the strategic point that Moscow is going to

go after. Eventually, if everything drags on, Transnistria will also be involved.

As far as a palace coup goes, I don't think we can count on that happening in the short term. It's something that might happen in the medium to long term. In the Kremlin, all the leaders close to Mr. Putin, like the oligarchs, depend on him to maintain their wealth. He has surrounded himself with people who believe, as he does, in the idea of making Russia great. So I strongly doubt there will be a popular uprising. I feel it would only be possible in the very long term.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Dembińska and Mr. Bergeron.

Ms. McPherson, you have the floor for four minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, and thank you to the witnesses today. This has been very enlightening.

Dr. Snyder, you talked about the multiplicative impacts of time and the idea that, ultimately, what we are trying to do, in the short term at least, is stop the loss of life, stop the violence against the Ukrainian people. You also spoke about the idea of breaking Ukrainians through the brutality we're seeing. We have heard of gender violence. We have heard of horrific attacks on children.

It seems to me that negotiation is our only way through, to some degree, and I wonder what the potential for that is. I'd love some more insight into how Canada can play a role in that and how Canada can play a diplomatic role in terms of encouraging other countries to play a role in that.

We saw what happened at the United Nations. We saw those outlier countries. Some, of course, are easy to explain; others are less easy to explain. I'd like some more insight on that, on how we can go forward at that level.

• (1715)

Prof. Timothy David Snyder: Thank you.

In answering this question I'm also going to take the opportunity to say a word about the palace coup scenario, because I'm afraid I think they are integrally connected. I would like to believe that negotiation is simply a matter of there not being enough goodwill, but I believe that's not the case. I believe that negotiation is meaningfully possible only from the moment when Putin believes that his personal position is threatened. I may differ a bit here from my colleague.

I think that his disposition is actually objectively threatened at the moment, but he doesn't feel it. I think there are meaningful signs of dissent around the elite of the Russian state. I can go into detail if anyone is interested. I'm not sure that another month of taking casualties at this level and another month of sanctions and another month of international opprobrium will not leave a mark on the Putin regime.

The thing about regimes like this is that they seem inevitable until they fall, at which point it's their fall that seems inevitable. It's hard to predict, but at some point I think the combination of military losses, humiliation in Ukraine and sanctions could, if not lead to a palace coup, at least lead to that moment when Putin feels enough pressure.

While I agree with you completely that we want to negotiate an end to this war as quickly as possible, I think there's only one way to get there, and that is for the Ukrainians to continue doing much better on the battlefield than people expected. We need another month in which the Ukrainians are doing much better on the battlefield than people expected, and then we might get where we're wanting to go. The immediate implication of wanting negotiations is to arm the Ukrainians and think creatively about how best to help them hold the territory so that Putin feels the pressure. Zelenskyy is ready to negotiate. From day two of the war, he's been making propositions about how the war could end. It's Putin whom we have to be concerned about.

In terms of what Canada in particular can do, I would offer there that what the Ukrainians need, perhaps more than we realize at a distance, is a vision of the future. I think they are feeling more cut off and more alienated from us than we might realize. I think they're putting a brave face on things and trying not to make us feel too bad about how awful things are in their country. You wouldn't want to call up the Marshall Plan from Canada, but I think it's important for us, insofar as we can, to be promising things like significant forms of aid and a vision of a future Ukraine and what things will look like after the war. It's things like that, in addition to the military help. They're going to need a notion of how Ukraine will be a more western country after the war in order to stop fighting, because, remember, for there to be peace, Ukrainians have to believe it's in their interest to stop fighting, and that may not be as easy as it seems.

One of the ingredients for peace, therefore, is a west that offers them a better future. That has to be part of the deal.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Magdalena Dembińska: I completely agree.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dembińska.

[*English*]

We will go into our second round with the panel. Time is furiously ticking again. We're at 5:20, so I'm going to propose allocations of three minutes and one and a half minutes.

It becomes a bit meaningless with times that short. Inevitably the interventions will be a bit longer, but I'm going to try to get the entire round in. That should take us to about 5:35, and, as I said, colleagues, if we could do some quick housekeeping just before we break tonight that would be great.

Leading us off will be Mr. Aboultaif for three minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Chair.

Dr. Snyder, in the "bloodlands", where Ukraine is unfortunately placed, we have a war that is hard to understand. It's very complicated and messy, and of course it's hard to understand or to know what the result is going to be.

Do you believe that no matter the outcome of this war, because in my belief there will be no winner whatsoever... Regardless of the outcome of this war, do you see a path forward? Do you see that this is going to change anything in the future as regards the west, Russia and China of course, and the new reality that we will be facing?

• (1720)

Prof. Timothy David Snyder: I think that your two questions hang very closely together. Whether this is meaningful for the future depends very much on how we apprehend it now, what we're trying to do now and what we're aiming for now.

You may be right that there's no way to win this war. I don't actually agree with that. I think it's quite possible that Ukraine can win. It may not be more than 50% likely, but I think it's quite possible. I think it's important to orient oneself around that possibility, because if all we're thinking of now, at this particular turning point in world history, is the continuation of the war or a Russian victory, then we're not thinking of what the stakes are. I agree with you: I believe that the stakes for the future are very high. What the stakes are depends very much on who wins. If Ukraine wins, then we can say, "Ah, ha, this was a moment when democracies were able to defend themselves." If Ukraine loses, we won't be able to say that.

My evidence for that is, think about what the world would be like if Ukraine hadn't fought at all and Zelenskyy had fled. We would now all be very depressed indeed about the future of democracy. The fact that the Ukrainians have fought for five weeks already puts us in a completely different frame of mind. My suggestion is that the better they do, the better we're also going to feel about the future of democracy.

In terms of lessons learned for the future, I would refer back to the concepts that I said at the beginning. We are in a world where tyranny is possible. We're in a world where oligarchy is generally dangerous. We're in a world where imperial ideas are once again with us.

I would also mention climate. This war is separated from climate, but, as has already been mentioned, this war has a lot to do with natural resources. You can frame this war as a kind of prelude to what the 21st century is going to look like. If the hydrocarbon oligarchs are in charge, we are going to have this kind of war again and again.

If Putin is driving the way that the world is, we're going to have climate change wars the rest of the way. It's symbolic that ice shelves are falling off of Antarctica while we're not looking because of this war. Putin is a hydrocarbon oligarch. Defeating people like this, in a very broad way, is consistent with trying to make sure that we have an ecologically sustainable future. There's an idea of what a big stake all of this is.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Mr. Ehsassi, please, for three minutes.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Professor Snyder, you essentially teased us, because at some point you said you would not get into providing us with meaningful signs as to the fissures occurring in the Kremlin. Given that most of the commentary we've been hearing has been very general and at a macro level, I would be grateful if you could kindly provide us with some of the signs you have seen that suggest there is a lot of pressure on Mr. Putin—hopefully.

Prof. Timothy David Snyder: I put this argument into 30 points on my Substack, if anyone knows what Substack is. That's my second tease for Canadian parliamentarians today.

Here are some of the lines of division. The number one line of division is Putin versus Putin, tactical Putin versus ideological Putin. Ideological Putin clearly has the upper hand. The man just seems less in control of his political impulses than he did before.

Number two, going the next step closer to the ground, is Putin and the military. The fact that General Shoigu disappeared for more than two weeks is not a sign that all is well. The fact that announcements of new Russian doctrine—which, of course, are not to be believed—are made by lower-ranking military officers and not by Shoigu and Gerasimov is a sign that something is amiss.

The third level is the FSB, the Russian secret state police. One of the heads of its departments, Sergey Beseda, is reportedly under house arrest. He's the one who would have provided the information about Ukraine before the attack. The mistakes are all Putin's, in my opinion, and he's trying to farm them out to the generals and the FSB.

Another issue here is that because this decision was apparently made in a very small group—a handful of people—that means that potentially there are a lot of people just outside that immediate inner circle who could say, “Actually, I didn't vote for this. I wasn't in on that conversation. I'm not a war criminal. I'm not genocidal. I had nothing to do with this bad decision.”

Another line of difficulty is between FSB, or the state police, and the Chechen irregulars who are fighting in Ukraine. There's historically been a lot of tension between those two groups. If Putin has to take the side of the Chechen irregulars against the FSB, that could also be a problem.

Another line of possible dissent is with the men versus the officers. There are a lot of deserters. There are reports of men turning on their officers. It is a bit mysterious how many Russian generals have died. I'd like to give credit to Ukrainians for all of that, but I'm not 100% sure it's the case.

Those are some possible lines.... People who are wiser than me about this suggest that there is a certain amount of tension. I think, give this another month of the Ukrainians performing very well and let's see. It's impossible to say where something will break. I think the hairline cracks at least are there.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you very much, and thank you, Mr. Ehsassi.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I wonder if it would be appropriate to ask the professor to provide, in writing, the link to his Substack with that information.

The Chair: We can do that, if he's willing to provide that, absolutely. It's on the record.

Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor for one and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Dembińska, first, I commend you on your efforts to try to get Ukrainian female students from Kharkiv National University into Canada. If we can be of any assistance to you, please feel free to let us know. I understand that biometric testing issues are unduly delaying the process. We've already had the opportunity to speak publicly about it.

I'd like to hear what you have to say about the question left unanswered in my first round of questions.

We appear to be giving Mr. Putin *carte blanche* by not stepping in. Could this give him the opportunity to use biological, bacteriological or even nuclear weapons?

Ms. Magdalena Dembińska: Thank you for the question.

Since I'm not a military expert, it will be hard for me to answer your question very accurately.

I'm fairly certain that Mr. Putin has no interest in deploying those weapons. However, that doesn't mean that he won't do it. The threat of using those weapons, the fact that he could deploy them, is dissuading the West from stepping into the war in Ukraine other than helping Ukrainians in the country. I feel it's a deterrent, because people believe he is capable of doing it. Many people say that Mr. Putin is behaving irrationally. Because some people believe he's capable of using those weapons, all Mr. Putin has to do is use that message.

Will he do it? I can't say.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

Madam McPherson, go ahead, please, for one and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'll try to be very quick, Mr. Chair. I can see this is very difficult for you.

I'd like to follow up on that. In terms of the nuclear risk we are facing, what is the message that other rogue countries can take from the success Putin has had using nuclear as a deterrent, and what are the impacts on future arms control or arms prohibition discussions that we know are coming up, even just this summer?

Perhaps, Dr. Snyder, I can start with you.

Prof. Timothy David Snyder: That's a wonderful question. I think what Mr. Putin has done since 2014 has been to promote nuclear weapons more than any other leader has done before in history.

As everyone here will know, in 2004 Ukraine, by the numbers, had the third-highest number of nuclear weapons in the world and agreed to give them up. Since that time, Ukraine has been invaded at least twice, depending on how you count it, by the neighbouring country to which it actually gave the nuclear weapons back in 1994. I misspoke earlier—it was 1994.

That, along with the fact that Russia refers so often to nuclear weapons, is an argument for nuclear proliferation. It's an argument for little countries to arm themselves against big countries.

It will also be, if we let it go this far, if we don't think of our coherent response, an argument for all countries to say, "Oh, I can block the west, not by using nuclear weapons but by pretending to be unhinged and talking about nuclear weapons." That will give western politicians an excuse to do nothing. I think there is a long-term danger of this scenario.

• (1730)

The Chair: Ms. McPherson, thank you very much.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead, please, for three minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to ask a couple more questions.

I wonder, Professor Snyder, if there is anything you want to add in terms of those fissures within the Putin regime and if you see any ability to assign time horizons and probabilities.

Also, I'll ask again a similar question to the one I asked in the previous panel, just around the chain of command and nuclear weapons. What is the risk of a nuclear weapon being used in the context of a palace coup or the threat of a nuclear cataclysm being used internally against other internal factions?

That's a lot of speculation I'm asking you to do, but....

Prof. Timothy David Snyder: I'm going to link the two questions and try to minimize the speculation by telling you what I think the scenario would like look. I think that when we imagine the palace coup, we imagine it kinetically, three-dimensionally and very dramatically: the army storms the Kremlin or the FSB storms the room. I actually don't think it's going to look like that. I think it's going to look like late Stalin.

I think it's going to look like Stalin in 1951, 1952 and 1953. Nobody actually turned against him. People just stopped doing what he said to do, or they did what he said when it was counter to his own interests. I think that's what it's going to look like with Putin. I think what's going to happen is that the things he says are suddenly not going to convert into action. He's going to realize that and he's going to be afraid, and that's the moment when we get peace talks.

I'm less worried about the violent scenarios, because I don't think the institutions of the state are set up like that. There aren't really institutions in the way we're used to thinking about. There's a person and there are people who are intimidated by or dependent upon that person. The moment they are slowed down by whatever factor, and he ceases to be the leader he thinks he is, is the moment things start to turn.

That's the best I can do.

On the chain of command, I would suggest that you speak to someone who is actually a technical expert on those kinds of issues, which I'm not.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That's really fascinating.

Institutionally, in terms of the Russian state, how similar is it to the structures that have existed in Russia for hundreds of years? What are the notable similarities or differences between tsarist Russia, the communist structure and today?

Prof. Timothy David Snyder: Honestly, the communist structure looks like a bounteous flower shop of institutions compared to what we have now. When the Chinese try to understand Russia, they have trouble, because in China they at least have a party with party organs. In Russia, there really are no meaningful institutions. The party is the president's party—United Russia—and the parliament is the president's parliament. The only institution that meets regularly is his security council, and the security council is basically there to receive orders from Mr. Putin.

The Russian way of talking about it as the "power vertical", I think, is more useful than our way of talking about it as institutions. The way it all stops is when the people one rung down on the vertical slow down, stop doing what Mr. Putin says and give him something to think about.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Genuis. I'm sorry.

Our final intervention this afternoon is from Mr. Sarai for three minutes.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

Professor Snyder, this has been extremely interesting, with all the facts you've been giving us.

I wanted to know if you can shed some light on the negotiations that are happening right now. My understanding is that there are six issues. Four are related to neutrality and security in the region, and two are territorial. Is this a tactic for Russia to just buy time, or is it the endgame that Russia's been trying to get to all along?

Prof. Timothy David Snyder: I would be misleading you if I said that I or anybody else in the world were sure about the answer to that question. My own feeling is that Mr. Putin still believes that the big victory is within reach.

I think he's mistaken about that, and he'll find out within the next month that he's mistaken about that, but I think that from the Russian point of view this is still a distraction, because they think the big victory is within reach. I think he still thinks that the fall of the Ukrainian state is within reach and, at the very least, that something like the Black Sea is within reach. I believe he's mistaken. I don't believe the Ukrainian army will allow that to happen, but I think he is still in that mode.

As for the Ukrainians, I also don't believe that they're particularly ready to negotiate at this stage. I think they are also trying things out at this stage, because I think they believe they can also do better than the present set-up.

As for the issues, I agree with you. I think the issues have never really been the problem. You and I and a couple of other reasonable people could probably come up with something that involves territory, neutrality and security, and end this war.

The issue is that Mr. Putin was never actually fighting a war about NATO. He was never fighting about that. He was fighting a war to destroy the Ukrainian state. Now, where he climbs down to from that is something that is difficult for us to ascertain, which is why I think there has to be more of a push on him, so that he feels vulnerable before we get into that reasonable territory where we can talk about neutrality plus territory plus security.

As I say, I don't believe those issues are actually in themselves all that difficult. Zelenskyy, basically from day two of the war, has been talking about how these things are within reach. I think Putin still believes he can gain more from war than from talking at the present moment.

• (1735)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Last, really quickly, on sanctions, we've been reading that some sanctions.... They obviously anticipated a level of sanctions, and some say that Putin himself is not hearing about the damaging effects of the sanctions. Can you tell us if there's truth to that? Also, what's the magnitude of the sanctions' effect on the regime itself?

Prof. Timothy David Snyder: It will be a while before Mr. Putin understands the effect of the sanctions. I can say that the Russians were surprised by the scale of the sanctions. They were not prepared for this level of sanctions. Their idea was that the war would be over so quickly that we wouldn't really have a chance to react. I think they also underestimated how quickly North Americans and Europeans could get together on these issues.

I think it's affected the Russian economy quite significantly. Again, as with many other things, I think a month from now it's going to be more significant than it is now.

Mr. Putin is very much isolated from all of this, so it will take a while for this to reach him personally. As with everything else, he doesn't care about the effect of the sanctions, until by some vector it seems to weaken him personally. The Russian economy is going to look quite bad for a while before it becomes a factor that Mr. Putin actually takes into account.

That's not a reason not to sanction. From my point of view, it's a reason to sanction harder and more, and to try to help the Europeans get away from Russian natural gas and hydrocarbons in general as quickly as possible. I think the only way to end this war is for Mr. Putin to feel the pressure.

I would like to avoid this stagnation paradigm, in which we say, "There's nothing else we can do. We just have to stagnate for a while." I think we have to give the Ukrainians as much help as we can, so that a month from now we can have a conversation about ending this war.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sarai.

Colleagues, collectively I'd like to thank our two expert witnesses for their time with us this afternoon and for their insightful, tremendous testimony.

[*Translation*]

We're very grateful to them.

[*English*]

We will let you disconnect.

Colleagues, if I can keep members back for a few minutes—

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Oliphant.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: If you could indulge me for five seconds.... If we were in an old-fashioned meeting, I'd go to the witnesses and shake their hands and thank them, like we always did.

To Professor Snyder, even though you probably sometimes think you're just writing out to the universe, you have been a tremendous guide all the way through this conflict for me, from that very important lecture you did on the history of Ukraine. It was about 17 hours long, I think. I listened to the whole thing. I am a subscriber. I would commend it to our whole committee, because you've been a tremendous help to me.

Prof. Timothy David Snyder: Thank you, Mr. Oliphant.

The Chair: Mr. Oliphant, thank you.

There are others here who would very much like to express the same view. In the interest of time, I will collectively pass that on to Professor Snyder and Professor Dembińska.

Please feel free to disconnect.

I will keep colleagues for a few more moments, hopefully to do some housekeeping.

[*Translation*]

I thank you once again and I wish you a great evening.

[*English*]

Colleagues, there are a couple of things. With respect to next Thursday's meeting, there's been agreement by the whips to cancel that meeting in favour of budget date. That's the first point.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: I move that next Thursday's meeting be cancelled, and I move that the committee adopt the budget of \$2,675 for the study of human rights in repressive states.

The Chair: That is very helpful. I don't know if we need the first motion, but it's on the floor. Thank you for that, and for the second motion as well.

(Motions agreed to)

The Chair: There are two other motions I need. Can I get a motion that we meet tomorrow, informally, with a Ukrainian parliamentary delegation?

Hon. Michael Chong: I so move.

The Chair: The second motion is that we meet on April 7 with Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Hon. Michael Chong: I move that motion.

The Chair: Both motions are on the table. Is there any opposition?

(Motions agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The third and final point from my side is that there have been consultations with the vice-chairs with respect to our work on Monday.

• (1740)

The two options were on vaccine equity and the Strait of Taiwan. On a plurality basis, I think the preference was to start with vaccine equity. That does not mean we will not study the Strait of Taiwan. That will come at a subsequent meeting.

I just wanted to put that before colleagues so that the clerk can begin inviting witnesses.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I would just like a clarification, Mr. Chair.

I understand that the committee meeting was allowed to be held on April 7, when we had just heard that the whips had decided to cancel committee meetings for that day.

Is this true?

The Chair: The regular meeting of this committee is cancelled, but the meeting with Mr. Grandi will take place.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: What time is the meeting scheduled for?

The Chair: The meeting will take place at 9 a.m.

It's an informal meeting that is not part of the committee's schedule.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: All right.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues.

[*English*]

Keep safe and thank you.

We stand adjourned until the next meeting.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>