



FOREIGN PODICY

Russia and Ukraine: On the Brink of War

February 4, 2022

Featuring James Brooke, Bradley Bowman, and Brenda Shaffer

Hosted by FDD Founder and President Clifford D. May

MAY: Vladimir Putin is threatening to erase the sovereignty, independence, and self-determination of Ukraine. What caused this crisis? What are the likely consequences not only for Russia and Ukraine, but for the U.S. and for Europe? How would a war between Russia and Ukraine turn out? What lessons are the rulers of China and Iran learning? How do Russian energy resources and Europe's need for them factor in? What are Putin's goals short, medium, and long-term? What should be the goal of the U.S. and its allies?

To dig into these issues, we're joined by James Brooke, a former *New York Times* foreign correspondent and former *Voice of America* Moscow Bureau Chief, who just days ago, left Ukraine and where he had lived for six years as editor in chief of *Ukraine Business Journal*. Also with us is Bradley Bowman, senior director of FDD's Center on Military and Political Power who previously served as a Senate national security advisor, U.S. army officer, and assistant professor at West Point. Also joining us is Brenda Schaffer, FDD's senior advisor for energy. I'm Cliff May and we're all glad to include you too in this conversation here on *Foreign Podicy*.

Brad, let me start with you and maybe just outline the current military situation. What do we know? What don't we know? What do we think is going on?

BOWMAN: Thank you, Cliff. It's a real honor to join you, Brenda, and Jim to discuss this topic. I would say I would start with this. In the October-November timeframe, we started to see indications regarding a major military buildup around Ukraine, and that buildup has continued more or less a pace since then. We're now to the point where you have more than roughly 130,000 combat, combat support, and combat service support Russian troops near the Russia-Ukraine border in Belarus, in Russian-occupied Crimea, and potentially coming up via amphibious operations in the Black Sea.

Now Putin has very shrewdly said, "what? Me doing anything wrong?" and covered these in a guise or a disguise of military exercises. We have seen major military exercises before in some of these regions that allows him to build up the combat power and avoid the blame, but it's transparently cynical what he's doing, I think. It remains unclear whether there will be an invasion. Russia consistently denies that they plan to do an invasion. It probably will ultimately be Vladimir Putin's decision. He may not have decided, and that invasion can take many different forms, but the bottom line is we are somewhere between 40% and two thirds, going closer in the direction of two thirds of the deployable combat power of Russia is assembling near Ukraine. If this were to go forward in anywhere near that level of scale of activity, it would be one of the largest combat operations in Europe since World War II.

MAY: What can you tell us about the defensive capabilities of the Ukrainians?

BOWMAN: When you look at Russia versus Ukraine by most military power metrics, there is no comparison. Russia is more powerful by far than Ukraine in almost every metric. A lot of people point out systemic weaknesses in the Ukrainian military. There's some truth to that, but it's also true that the Ukrainian military has gotten significantly better since 2014 in Crimea, what we saw happen in Crimea. By the way, we shouldn't forget that we have many service members within the Ukrainian military that are combat hardened because of the Russian-supported separatist movement that they have been fighting in the Donbas. So, if Vladimir Putin is sitting in the Kremlin, thinking that he's going to have an easy walk in the park in a major invasion of Ukraine, I think he'll have a rude awakening.

MAY: And two things. I just want to tell people in case they will remind people, Donbas is the Eastern section of Ukraine. It's industrialized. In 2014, about the same time that Putin took Crimea, he also sent into troops, some of them in uniforms, some of them not in uniforms, and essentially there's been warfare going on since 2014 in that



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region, it's a dangerous region. It's sort of semi-occupied I would say. Conquering Ukraine is one thing, holding it is another. It depends, do people say, "well, we're going to form a resistance and we're going to make this very bloody and uncomfortable for the Russian troops who are here now." I think that's hard to predict how that works out, but I don't know, do you have a sense of how devoted they are to that, the people of Ukraine?

BOWMAN: Very quickly if I may on Putin and with full deference to you, Cliff, who's followed this for decades. I think Putin would be happy to accomplish his objectives at the negotiating table. So, at a minimum, he's doing what former Secretary of State, the late George Shultz said, "trying to cast the shadow of power over the negotiating table." He'd be very happy to achieve his concessions at the negotiating table and absent that, I'm sure he'd be very happy to go back to his KGB Colonel playbook and look at some assassinations and other intrigue to potentially have a coup in Ukraine. But the point that you've made in your column ["Czar Wars" in *The Washington Times*], Cliff, that is excellent, that I hope folks read is that in an actual military aggression against Ukraine could take different forms and not all of them involve a major occupation where you would have high Russian casualties.

They could use punitive long-range missile strikes and other events. They could just formally annex the Donbas region that we were discussing earlier. They could come up from the South and try to connect some of Crimea via land bridge. They could do something from Transnistria. There's a variety of things here, and they could take many different forms. I think those many different forms will determine how many Russian casualties we'll see and what areas they're fighting, as Jim knows better than me. You'll see different levels of opposition from Ukrainians.

MAY: I'll just make the one point and then ask you one more question before I move on. The column that you refer to, Brad, is on *The Washington Times* website on Tuesday night in the paper and Wednesday morning it'll be on the FDD.org website as well. I just want to make this clear. We're going to discuss this more, but Ukraine is not a NATO member. American troops, NATO troops will not fight inside Ukraine. Neither are Ukrainians asking that they do so. What they have been asking for is that they get the military, the lethal military equipment they need to better defend themselves by themselves. I just think that's an important point because you see some places would say, why should we go in there and fight for Ukraine? Well, no one's talking about us doing that.

BOWMAN: That's such an important point, Cliff and I'm so glad you emphasized it. Just a quick, additional comment on that. Exactly right. So, I'm a big believer in the value of the North Atlantic Alliance. I think it's a major grand strategic asset for the United States. Putin is a wonderful advertisement for the value of NATO membership, because he's done what he did to Georgia in 2008 and he's done what he did in Crimea in 2014 and in the Donbas. Because both Ukraine and Georgia are not NATO members and his number one demand that he's saying is that he doesn't want Ukraine to become a NATO member.

Of course, Putin's own actions are creating the primary reason why Ukraine would like to be a member. So exactly, the Biden administration said, "we're not going to deploy U.S. combat forces to fight Russia in Ukraine. "Ukraine is not asking for that. They are pleading for weapons. I have a piece in *Defense News* ["Biden must act now to better arm Ukraine. Here's what that should look like"] where I've talked about how the Biden administration was very slow to respond to those requests. We have seen six shipments now arrive in there. Those are positive, but I think they're entirely insufficient and they're certainly belated.

MAY: All right, we're going to come back to NATO, I hope because I have more questions than that.



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Let me go to Jim. Jim, you've lived in Russia. You've lived in Ukraine. Putin says, and he said it particularly in an essay that I think he wrote, or somebody helped him write, but I'm pretty convinced that it was his views, about a 5,000 word essay came out last July. The basis of it is that, "hey guys, Russia and Ukraine are not two separate countries. They're one country. Now during the Soviet area, yeah, we may believe that this was a separate equal Republic of the Soviet Union. Ha, ha, ha. This is Russia. Who are you guys kidding?" Talk to us a little about that and in particular, talk to us about how Ukrainians see it and how most Russians see it too? Do they see it? How dare these guys break off with us? Or do they say "no, they're okay."

BROOKE: Yeah. I think Putin sort of sees Ukraine as a big Texas where people talk funny, carry guns, and have right-wing politics. But it's an integral part of his view of the Russian empire and Brzezinski said, "Russia without Ukraine is not an empire." So, it's a really crucial part. They could do without Kyrgyzstan or some of the little stans.

I think in terms of what the Russians think and I lived there for eight years, it's like the U.S. and Canada. There isn't a lot of difference between Americans and English-speaking Canadians and I know we can debate that, but they're intermarried. They have very friendly relations—On the people level, very friendly relations. But you know, the Russians have been inculcated with this very historical propaganda for the last eight years since the invasion of the Donbas and they believe that Ukraine is run by Nazis. I mean, it has the only Jewish president outside of Israel, but it's run by Nazis and when Zelensky took over, it was actually Jewish prime minister. Once again, only Israel had that two-fer.

So, it's irrational and there's been a poll of young Russian men between 18 and 25 who would be doing the fighting. They're not really interested in this battle against Ukraine. On the Ukraine side, Ukraine has moved on. Putin has lost the hearts and minds of Ukraine and you can argue that Putin really in a backhanded way is the father of Ukrainian nationalism. We call it a secessionist or a civil war. Ukrainians like 80% see this as Russia attacking Ukraine, not just now, but going back to 2014. So, they see that for eight years, they've been waging war to defend their country against Russia. You've got the second largest land army in Europe after Russia, 250,000 men, many of them cycled through there. They all have boyfriends, girlfriends, parents, a larger group.

So, the Ukrainian fighting force is not so bad. They've got, I think, 6,500 tanks and the British army has like 250. So, I wouldn't write them off by any means, but Putin has lost Ukraine's religion, language, and the military. Just look at language, everybody in Ukraine for the last 35 years, kindergarten through the end of high school through university has been studying in Ukrainian. It's a full-fledged language, which linguists say is actually closer to Polish than to Russian. You can toss a coin about that one about that one. So they speak Ukrainian and all the advertisings in Ukrainian, all the media is in Ukrainian. It's a very easy thing. It's not like reviving Gaelic in Ireland. I mean, Ukrainian is very similar and they've done a good job on that. There's another phenomenon that Putin doesn't understand. Putin would think that since the four of us are speaking English, we've got to be British subjects. Sorry, there's more to language than –Language is not a nationality, but he thinks that because there are maybe 10,000 native speakers, 10 million of native Russian speakers inside Ukraine – first language speakers, that they should be run by Moscow. Well, there's this phenomenon called the Russian-speaking Ukrainian Patriot, which Putin doesn't quite capisce, doesn't get it. He discovered, to his mortification, when they tried to declare People's republics in other cities of Ukraine and the people did not respond. So, language is big.

The religion, on Putin's watch for the first time in I think in 350 years, Ukraine has a National Orthodox Church, recognized by the Patriarch of Constantinople. In 334 years, and that happened two years ago. About half of the parishes in Ukraine have migrated away from the control of Moscow to the control of Kyiv. Now the Moscow churches, they did



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things like they refused to bury soldiers, dead, coming back from the front line. That went over like a lead balloon in villages. It's like, "Where are these guys getting off?"

So, you've got a separate church, you've got a separate language. The army, once again, is very strong and they've just announced they're going to bring in another 100,000 [troops]. You've got a territorial defense. I was talking to a friend of mine in Kyiv, and he said he was supposed to have a date a couple weekends ago, but the woman was out attending sniper school.

MAY: They couldn't go together? It sounds like a great date to me. I don't-

BROOKE: Except for her. So there's a real mobilization. In polls, 50% of Ukrainians say they will physically fight Russia. Another 20% say they'll engage in civil disobedience. Something that Putin would like to forget, but from 1944 to 1954 more Soviet security personnel were killed in Western Ukraine than during the 10 year Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. So we think the Mujahideen and the Taliban are pretty scary people, which they are, but the Ukrainians took their toll during that decade because they did not want to be part of the Soviet Union.

You've also had a real decommunization, which is a big word for tearing down Lenin statues. It's called 'Leninopad' and every single Lenin statue in Ukraine has been torn down over the last eight years. There are two left and they're both in Chernobyl, which is sort of a Soviet theme park. But all the May 1 towns in the October collectives, all these Soviet names have been changed.

Now what's also happened is many times they've been replaced by the names of the Partisan and the Ukrainian National Resistance Army heroes who have their own controversies behind them. But you've had maybe seven years of glorification of the anti-Moskal, anti-Moscow, resistance of '44 to '54, and movie after movie glorifying the men and women that stood up and where they were couriers, and they were doing sabotage. So this has been the mood inside Ukraine for the last eight years. These are the films that people are watching. That is something that Putin's going to have to deal with if he makes the move in.

Now, one thing, just to follow up on what Brad was saying about the non-conventional warfare, we all know about hybrid—What Putin could do, which would really essentially kill Ukraine, is to blockade the Black Sea ports. Ukraine is one of the top five world food powers in terms of exporting food and the Chinese would not be happy about this, but they have a huge Russian Navy presence in Sevastopol, excuse me, in Crimea. They could very easily blockade the ports and only 20% of Ukraine's exports travel by rail west to the EU. So that is a very concerning element.

MAY: By the way, a note on timing, as long as you brought it up. I don't think that Vladimir Putin wants to insult or anger Xi Jinping in any way and for that reason, I would predict that between February 4th and February 20th, there is no invasion. Now, why do I say that? Because that's when the Olympics are and Xi Jinping wants the news media to focus on that. Then after February 20th, the window is a little limited because he will want to go in while the ground is frozen hard so that his tanks and other such heavy vehicles can maneuver. He won't want to go in once the spring thaw begins. We don't know exactly when that is, but sometime in March, that'll be the end of the real window of opportunity for him if he wants to have a land invasion.

BROOKE: Yeah, and I think the German troops found that Ukraine in March was a sea of mud. It's big mud season and I covered the Sochi Winter Olympics in Russia in 2014. I remember seeing Putin 10 feet away and he was hobnobbing with all the International Olympic people and playing the game and even talking to the press and it was all very funny.



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Turns out he'd been up the night before plotting until 3:00 AM the takeover of Crimea. He just wanted the Olympics to be over and then he'd do it.

Going back to the Chinese, there's that famous picture of the Chinese premier talking to George W. Bush in Beijing for the Summer Olympics and at the same time, Putin was cutting Georgia in half and it was a major distraction. I think the Chinese are really pissed at that, to have that sideshow going on. So I agree with you. I think he will not move during the Olympics.

MAY: It's another point I want to get in before we move to Brenda, and that is – You know because you've seen my column. My sort of theory on this is– and I've been a Putin watcher for a long time. It's kind of funny just to note that I was an exchange student in the Soviet Union many years ago at Leningrad State University, at the same time that Putin was a student at Leningrad State University. Again, I'm not going to claim that we hung out together and drank brewskis and had a good time, but we were there and I followed him for a long time. So I think he believes, and with some justification, that he is the Czar, the Emperor of Russia, and that his mission is to restore the Russian empire which fell apart in the Cold War.

That means a lot of things because the Russian empire, which became the Soviet empire, I mean, the Soviets were not going to give up anything, even though they were going to claim they were anti-imperialists, including central Asia, as you know, and then eventually Eastern Europe became theirs. Putin has I think, ambitions for all of that, eventually. But particularly, as you know, Jim, the proper title was Czar of all the Russias. All the Russias meant Belarus, White Russia and of course the Russia that's 11 time zones all the way to the far east, where I know you've been, we've talked when you were there, but it also meant little Russia or the frontier of Russia. Ukraine means, essentially, frontier and so to get that back is very much his mission. Belarus is pretty much a vassal state. Lukashenko, the dictator there for a while kind of resisted, but really can't anymore, as demonstrated by the fact that we've got Russian troops pointing at Ukraine from Belarus right now. So I think that's important.

There's one other thing. We believe in the West, I think, in the principle of self-determination and that no border should be erased through military force. For that reason, we should stand against this, among other things, because otherwise there's no international law. You can say that the Czechs and the Slovaks have come from the same roots, but if they don't want to be Czechoslovaks, they want to be Czechs and Slovaks, they get to. You can say that Serbians and Croatians and Montenegrans, they're from the same roots, but if they don't want to be Yugoslavs, they don't have to be and military force shouldn't be used. Do you agree with me on all that?

BROOKE: Yeah. I think one of the best monikers for a Czar was the 'gatherer of lands', which is a catchall phrase for this kind of perpetual expansionism and a leader, a Czar, who expands Russia is a good Czar. Does the world's largest country really need more real estate? I don't think so, but that's the concept of gatherer of lands. I think Putin, he's turning 70 in October, and he's worried about his legacy and he does not want to be the Czar who lost Ukraine after 300 years.

MAY: Right. Right, right. And by the way, the word Czar, the etymology of it, it comes from Caesar. That's where it's from, really.

BROOKE: Yeah.



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MAY: Okay. I want to talk with Brenda a little bit about energy, because this is playing a role that a lot of people don't understand and in particular, what we see is that energy is the—fossil fuel is the basis of the Russian economy. We buy very little else from there. Even vodka is not—There's much better vodka from Texas than you can get from Russia these days. The problem is that Germany in particular has decided, it would seem, to become more dependent on Russian gas and oil. Very odd, it seems to me.

Maybe you can explain if there's any logic to it, Brenda, that the Germans under Angela Merkel decided to close down their nuclear power plants, which have zero emissions, and instead they've been building the Nord Stream 2 [pipeline] to bring in additional fossil fuels. The administrations before this one were against it. Biden decided essentially to give his blessing. Maybe he thought this was a gesture that would be reciprocated, one that the Germans would appreciate, that Russia would appreciate, and that would help things. But it didn't turn out that way. Is there a logic to this that I'm not understanding?

SHAFFER: Yeah. First thing, I think this crisis has huge implications for both oil and natural gas. So, I think the media tends to focus on natural gas because that's Ukraine as a former major transit state of Russian gas, but with such a tight global oil market, above \$90, easily we can get to \$100 a barrel, which would have—it's huge economic implications, but also psychological, political implications domestically, for the United States. Russia, even by just holding back a little bit of oil production, which is a lot less accountable—When you have gas stoppages, you see it. The pressure goes down. It's very clear that the gas isn't flowing. With oil, if they just release 300,000 barrels less a day, that's enough to pop up the price probably another three, four dollars towards \$100. It's a lot less accountable because that's more like self-accounting with oil. So one, I'm concerned about the oil issue.

Yet gas is in the background, but I think that the West, or the United States, has super-sized Nord Stream 2. We've turned it into something much more strategic than it is and then yes, in a way because of that, those policies—This is, I think, part of the goals of Putin in this current round with Ukraine, but it really isn't additional Russian gas to Europe. It's a new route. In my opinion—Maybe, James, if you feel differently on this, I'd love to hear your opinion. I think, actually, getting Ukraine off its pusher is good for the Ukrainian economy, Ukrainian politics. We're talking about a billion, a billion and a half dollars a year transit fee.

It's really not that essential if your whole budget depends on a billion and a half dollars and we've just turned this into a symbolic issue when it's really a lot less important than it looks. I agree the optics of—There's a couple decisions. Releasing the sanctions on Nord Stream 2 at the height of a conflict with Russia, even the administration's decision to withdraw support from the EastMed pipeline from Israel, Cyprus, and Greece, that pipeline never had any commercial support. It was not going to happen, but the optics of withdrawing support while you're having a crisis with Russia over Ukraine, the timing seems quite problematic.

MAY: Yeah. Jim, I'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

BROOKE: Right. I think, Brenda, you're correct that the gas going across Ukraine has dwindled to about 20% of where it was at the height of the Soviet era, let's put it that way. Maybe 25%, but it still has a geostrategic value. In other words, if Russia does not depend on this route, it's kind of, their hands are not tied for attacking Ukraine. There's no downside for them. They can still meet their markets.

I think Putin is playing as fairly carefully in that he's not given the Europeans extra gas, as you know, the reservoirs are dangerously low, especially in some countries, but he's kind of meeting his contracts. So on one level it looks like he's



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being a good businessman, so to speak, but he's getting a huge run up. The price of gas in Europe has increased eight fold. He's making money hand over fist on this. Now I think he realizes that he can't – I was reading an essay about, can he shut the gas off entirely to Europe? That would be very bad for Ukraine, because the slow Europeans would finally realize they are too dependent on Russian gas and would work on alternatives. Alternatives are Norwegian and North Africa and even Nigerian gas, LNG obviously.

I think there's another thing that we Americans don't take that seriously, which is the wind and solar renewables, but the Europeans take it very seriously. They have this sort of green 2030 plan, and that's really going to hurt Russia. I mean, there's some thought that Putin may act this winter because his power is at its peak. Europe's dependency on his gas is at its peak. I mean, there was a day last March, the British Isles are quite windy, but a hurricane blew across the British Isles and supplied half of their electricity. This is not a fringe thing. Everyone curses Scotland's weather because it's so darn windy. Well, now Scotland is not known for north sea oil. It's known for their wind power. I think if you play this out, 2030 is what 8 years from now or so, Europe will be importing a lot less gas from Putin and he'll have much less leverage over Europeans.

MAY: Let me –

SHAFFER: Okay. Can I jump in here?

MAY: Go ahead. Go ahead. Respond Brenda.

SHAFFER: Yeah. Two things, one on the current European gas crisis, both security of price and security of supply. Yes, Russia is a factor, but Putin walked into an open door, a door that the EU opened for him. Exactly as you know, one point – This idea that finance majors with game theory thought, oh, let's don't have contracts and then these little models with the price surge, it'll bring gas to Europe, right? Well, basically that's like saying, "hey, I have a way for you to have a cheaper car, don't pay your insurance payments." Sure, that would be cheaper, right? But Europe basically set itself up for this crisis. It sits next to the biggest reservoirs of gas in the world. Russia, North Africa, East Med, Caspian, even eventually at some point Iran. Instead of making deals and tying itself in getting the cheaper pipeline gas, it decided to tie itself to the international LNG liquified natural gas markets, which is much more expensive and much more volatile. I mean, basically by moving over to hub-based prices, it helped Russia because Russia is the swing producer.

I would also say, I have to say, I disagree about the sort of near-term green future for Europe, because we forget all the time, every U.S. policymaker, European policymaker, that today's renewables go hand in hand with natural gas. That 50% win that you talk about was dependent on 95% gas being available and keeping the base load fuel stable. I think actually current generation of renewables, it actually creates demand for natural gas more than the opposite.

MAY: Brad, let me play devil's advocate or Putin's advocate here for a second in the sense that, look, people say, hey, we didn't want Soviet missiles in Cuba. He doesn't want American missiles in Eastern Europe. He claims that NATO is a threat to him. Any legitimacy to his claim that NATO is a threat to him?

BOWMAN: My short answer would be no, absolutely not and I'm so glad you asked that, Cliff, because you hear a lot of Americans kind of echoing, perhaps unwittingly that Kremlin talking point and it's particularly notable for me that you hear a lot of folks on the American right echoing that talking point. I think of Ronald Reagan rolling in his grave when I hear that sometimes. The suggestion that NATO is Napoleon in terms of the threat to Russia, or NATO is Nazi Germany in World War II in terms of a threat, I mean, it's just not credible. If anyone looks at the facts on the ground and anyone



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looks at the history, NATO, I would argue has shown incredible restraint in terms of the combat power we put near Russia. As I said earlier, the primary reason the Baltic countries are pleading for American permanently stationed forces and weapons and the Ukrainians and Georgians want to get into NATO is because of Vladimir Putin.

I'm not advising Vladimir Putin. I wouldn't want to, but if I were, I'd say, "hey, if you're concerned about NATO expansion, you're concerned about Western combat power, note to self, maybe you should stop invading and occupying your neighbors. That might be a good place to start." This idea that there's something comparable – and you have to look at the nature of the weapons too, right? I mean, I was working in the Senate when the Obama administration refused to provide weapons to Ukraine, to arm itself. It was based on what I call the "provocation premise," which is related to what H.R. McMaster has called strategic narcissism, where we think everything bad that happens in the world is a reaction to us.

I just always like to echo what he says, and that is sometimes there's just authoritarian thugs that are going to take what they can get and sometimes there are terrorists who want to kill us. We just have to decide how we respond. And as Jim has said eloquently and, Cliff, as you have written eloquently, Putin wants to reconstitute as much of the Soviet Union as possible. He's got a world view of might makes right, and that's directly contradictory to the post World War II order of self-determination, international borders, and rule of law. An America has to [decide] whether we want to listen to the wisdom of Winston Churchill when he said, "appeasement is feeding someone else to the crocodile in hopes that he'll eat you last", we should not feed Ukraine to the crocodile. That will not go well.

MAY: Okay. The only reason nations want to join NATO is because they fear somebody and that generally is Putin who they fear. I think we believe that a free nation, a democratic nation should have the right to join a defensive pact if it wants to and not be vetoed by a neighboring dictator, which is what Putin is saying we should not only recognize but guarantee in a treaty. He's not asking, and that's not a request. That is a demand he is making. You will guarantee that you will never admit NATO. It could actually be easier for him to say, and he may to the Ukrainians, "I want you to guarantee to me that you will never apply to join NATO." That would be harder for us to stop.

One thing I wanted to get back to, I think you are absolutely right, Jim, that since 2014, with the taking of Crimea, with the taking of Donbas in the East, with all that's gone on, Putin has done more for Ukrainian patriotism than anybody in world history, but it's worth remembering because people don't, what happened in the Soviet era and I'm thinking in particular of the Holodomor, am I pronouncing it right?

BROOKE: Holodomor. Holodomor.

MAY: Right. It means extermination by famine. This was a famine that was imposed by Stalin on Ukraine because they weren't collective about it. Go ahead.

BROOKE: He actually sent the Ukrainian troops to Siberia, they locked off villages, and let them starve to death. They killed two to four million people out of a larger population of maybe 18 million. It's a traumatic thing and the largest museum in Ukraine is now being built, honoring Holodomor. This is something that obviously was suppressed during the Soviet era and only kind of dribbled out a little bit. But once going back to the 30 years of independence and people learning to speak Ukrainian, they all know about the Holodomor. They all have watched these interviews with survivors. It's a central thing.



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The Russians say, “well, there was a lot of people killed in Kazakhstan and it rust off”, this sort of thing. But this was really designed to subdue the Ukrainians who always are hard to control and the extent that until Stalin had starved the Ukrainians into submission, then he moved the capital from Kharkiv, which is about 50 miles to the Russian border to Kyiv, to center Ukraine because he traumatized and depopulated much of the country. He felt that he was secure having the capital of Ukraine back in Kyiv. So that’s very central and it’s incontrovertible. The Russian protests just sort of go over people’s heads. They don’t really take them seriously.

MAY: We’re running low on time, but there’s at least a couple of subjects I need to get in here. I think it’s important for people to understand. This one, I guess, Brad, you answered this one, but anybody who wants to, and the question is what is the Budapest Memorandum? Hint, it is not a Robert Ludlum novel. You want to answer that?

BOWMAN: I can take a swing or Jim can whatever.

MAY: Go ahead. Take a swing.

BOWMAN: Bottom line is I don’t think we can be talking enough about the Budapest Memorandum because what it is in 20 seconds or less and, Jim, or you can correct me if I get the details wrong. It’s a memorandum signed by Moscow, by Ukraine, by the United States and, I believe the United Kingdom in which Ukraine agreed to give up the Russian nuclear weapons on its territory in return for guarantees from all parties, but obviously Russia, that they would not use military force against Ukraine and threaten it or use it. So Russia is in direct violation of the Budapest Memorandum right now. Ukraine is saying, “boy, I wish I hadn’t given up those nuclear weapons.” But I mean, that’s the central issue. Anyone who’s been paying attention for the last decade or two though, shouldn’t be surprised that Russia doesn’t feel constrained by its commitments, think INF Treaty and otherwise. They’re being consistent at least in blowing off their treaty, commitments, and other obligations.

BROOKE: Yeah. I mean-

MAY: Go ahead.

BROOKE: We forgot that 30 years ago, Ukraine was the world’s third largest nuclear power. They gave all the Soviet nuclear weapons back to Russia in return for a piece of paper. Now there are a couple of implications there. One is Ukrainians don’t go for Finlandization and pieces of paper that’ll respect their sovereignty or their neutrality. But unfortunately, other countries were watching, well, Americans don’t really know what the Budapest Memorandum is, the North Koreans know, and the Iranians know that you can sign a treaty, give up your nuclear weapons, then get hit over the head.

MAY: Right. Right. The Chinese know because they had an agreement with Britain that the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong would be respected. They violated that. If treaties can be violated with impunity, if giving up nuclear weapons is a bad idea, we are shaping an international environment that is not friendly to American values and interests.

Two more questions I’ve got to do, but if you have other points that you really want to get into, I’ll give you a chance to do that too. One is this. I’m going to be bipartisan about this. After 2014, the United States and its NATO allies should have said, we have a problem with Putin. We need to deter him from ever doing – If we can’t roll him back, how do we dare



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deter him from continuing on? He's now, he's taking a slice of two provinces off Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. He's taking Crimea. He's in Donbas. We got to do something and we-

got to do something. We've had, what, three administrations in a row that seems to me, have not said, "This is a problem. We're going to attempt to solve it in a serious way." That's why it's a bipartisan criticism, I think. You're nodding your head, Jim. Let me turn to you first.

BROOKE: Yeah. No, I agree with you. I think the worm has turned this winter. I think that the Biden administration, Boris in London, and the EU realize we've got to stop Putin in Ukraine – that he wants more than Ukraine. Then there is the whole Chinese thing. The Chinese are watching very closely, and if the West folds on Ukraine, well, it's green light for grabbing Taiwan. So –

MAY: Absolutely.

BROOKE: I think that might –

MAY: Because Ukraine is a country. Taiwan is only a rogue province.

BROOKE: Yeah. It's a nice place. I've been there. It's a nice rogue province.

MAY: I think it's a country. You think it's a country, but most of the world doesn't think it's a country. So it's easier in a certain way. I don't mean to belabor that.

BROOKE: Cliff, and Brad.

MAY: Go ahead.

BROOKE: You brought up very aptly that many people seem to think that NATO is an aggressive alliance that's going to gobble up western Russia. Do you know the lineup of battle tanks? How many do the Russians have, and how many does NATO have? Maybe throw in the Brits, even though they're on an island somewhere.

BOWMAN: No, I don't have those numbers in front of me, but it's a great question. Cliff and I were exchanging emails about this. I think it was yesterday. If you look at the total combat force of NATO, including the non-U.S. combat force of NATO, it's quite significant, but, obviously, various degrees of readiness and logistical and maintenance readiness, not to mention whether the respective nations, those 29 other member nations, would have the political will to employ it. There's no doubt that there's significant combat power there. I mean, you have multiple countries with F-35s. You have France, United Kingdom with aircraft carriers. You have little niche capabilities by some of the Baltic countries on cyber, so there's real capability there, but in the end, we know that military force is only as good as your ability to use it or your political will to use it. Those are two different things, unfortunately.

BROOKE: Yeah. A friend of mine heard that the Germans are going to send 5,000 helmets. He thought, "Oh great." And I thought you meant 5,000 helwuts –

BOWMAN: But Cliff, can I jump in?

MAY: Yeah, go ahead. Go ahead.



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BOWMAN: Yeah, I can't resist. So I've got a piece coming out maybe tomorrow [“Germany helps Putin with its double standard on arms exports”] on this very issue. You know, even as the U.S. intelligence community is warning that we could see a massive Russian invasion of Ukraine in February right: Ukraine requested ships and weapons from Germany. Jim, as you just said, what was Berlin's response is, “Hey, we're going to send some helmets.” As someone who's worn some helmets and fired some weapons, I'd prefer to have a weapon if I have to choose than a helmet, but a helmet's nice. But German Defense Minister Lambrecht tried to justify this decision by saying, “The German government has agreed that we do not send lethal weapons to crisis areas because we don't want to fuel the situation.” But here's the problem: that's actually not true at all. Germany has, I would say, a proud history of sending weapons to South Korea, for example, including during 2017, the year of fire and fury, and that helped deter North Korean aggression. They have a history of sending to the Baltics. I'm talking tanks, howitzers, and patrol craft. So, there's something unique going on there with Ukraine that makes Berlin particularly nervous, but it is not accurate to say they have not sent weapons to conflict zones.

MAY: Let me just ask this, and I'm going to give each of you one minute to make any points that you want to make that I didn't ask questions to bring out from you. That is this: Jim, you say that the worm has turned, and NATO sees it differently. I'm not sure Germany does. Germany has not – I mean, Germany is sending helmets. That's not contributing in the way it should. Germany doesn't spend 2% of its – It's the richest country in Europe. It doesn't spend what it should on the collective defense. Germany seems to be very, I don't know, solicitous of Putin and by the way, a few other countries – Croatia has said it would pull its troops from Eastern Europe in the event of a conflict with Russia. There's two things going on here, and I'm not sure which is the truth.

One is that Putin has already successfully shown the divisions and dysfunctionality of NATO, but the other possibility is that now NATO sees those dysfunctions and divisions and recognizes or will recognize that it has to make more of an effort, that it can't just be doing what it's been doing, which is yes, you join. You don't have to contribute to the collective security. What you're getting is an American guarantee of your security, whether or not you do anything in support of NATO. Let me ask you just – weigh in on that and any last thoughts you have, and then we'll close it out for today for now.

BROOKE: Just a quick thought. I was very good friends with an Italian ambassador in Kyiv, and he said the big Italian companies don't want to go into Ukraine. They don't want to screw up their relationships with Russia and just names like Fiat and Olivetti – The Russians do have a veto power, and it's one reason why Ukraine does not have a normal investment environment because for the Germans, the big stage is the commercial relationship with Russia.

MAY: Mm-hmm. Brad, your final thoughts here?

BOWMAN: Thanks, Cliff. I've really enjoyed this conversation with you, Brenda, and Jim. I just would, if I may, end where I began, and this really is a clash of two world views, which sounds very academic and wonky, but it has real world consequences. Let's remember we had two World Wars begin in Europe that involved the violation of international borders. This is something that implicates core American national security interests, and democratic principles. And I think we are weak at our own peril.

MAY: Brenda, I'll tease you with this one. We also had two World Wars in which oil played a pivotal role. Why did Nazi Germany invade Russia? Well, I don't think it's because Hitler thought, “Wouldn't it be nice to have a little villa in Stalingrad?” I think he wanted the oil of the Caspian and needed it because he didn't have enough oil for his tanks as we learned in the Battle of the Bulge when his tanks ran out of fuel and were bombed like sitting ducks. In World War I, it



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was very much about oil-powered weaponry. That's very much what the war was about. So let me get your final thoughts on all this if you can. It's a hard question, I know.

SHAFFER: Sure. I recall the films of Hitler taking his birthday cake and taking a bite of Baku, which was his goal with the invasion of southern Russia exactly. To get to the Caspian is that geopolitics of energy has not gone away. The fact that people have dreams of a future without fossil fuels, that future may come, but it's not quite soon. We really need to still worry about conventional security of supply and security of price. We're already having factory – It's not just about getting the energy, but at what price? We already have factories closing down in Europe, and that can bring a chain reaction that eventually triggers a global recession. It really is something that could happen.

On the other hand, the gas weapon, you only get to use it once. You use it once. It creates a crisis, and countries respond. By the next winter, they're in a different situation. I mean, for decades, the United States together with Europe really took care of European energy security. We see projects such – you mentioned the Caspian Southern Gas Corridor. That's one of the only markets right now in this crisis and last winter that's functioning pretty well is actually in Italy, which has also the pipeline supplies through this project. So we still need to think about the hardware of energy renewables. Today's renewables go hand in hand with natural gas. You need that base load fuel. We don't have a technology right now to replace that. Yes, we really need to return – The current White House National Security Guidance mentions the word energy ten times. Seven out of the ten, it's in the context of clean energy and the other three aren't in the context of energy security, or security. We really need to get back in the game of energy security.

MAY: That's a very important point and one, we should come back to and give at least a whole podcast, too. We could have gone on for hours more here. The time has gone very fast. The conversation has been absolutely fascinating. Thank you, Brenda Shaffer. Thank you, Brad Bowman. Thank you, Jim Brooke, my old friend, and thanks to all of you for being with us and listening with us today here on *Foreign Podicy*.