

MAY: Well, welcome, and thank you for joining us today. I'm Cliff May. I'm FDD's founder and president.

I say this objectively: Ukrainians are defending their homeland from the unprovoked, from the illegal and imperialist war being waged by invading Russian troops under the command of Vladimir Putin. I also say this subjectively: Ukrainians are on the front line of a global struggle. They're fighting in defense of what we at FDD persist in calling the free world.

So we're pleased and honored to have with us today Ambassador Oksana Markarova, who has served as Ukraine's envoy to the United States since April of 2021. Ambassador Markarova previously served in Ukraine's Ministry of Finance, so she's good with math as well as diplomacy, and she spent nearly two years working in the private sector, a useful experience for most people, and that's also a subjective opinion of mine.

So thank you, Ambassador, for being with us today.

Before we jump into today's discussion, just a few housekeeping notes. As most of you know, for more than 20 years now FDD has operated as a nonpartisan research institute exclusively focused on national security and foreign policy. FDD is a source of timely research, analysis, and creative policy options. We take no foreign government or foreign corporate funding. We never have. We never will. We host a variety of centers and programs. We believe in strengthening American national security. We believe there is no adequate substitute for American leadership of free peoples and of peoples who aspire to be free. For more of -- on our -- for more information on our work, I encourage you to visit our website. It's FDD.org, very simple. You can follow us on Twitter -- @FDD.

And thank you again, all of you here, and the -- all of you in the -- watching -- for joining us in this timely, important conversation.

With that, I'm pleased to formally welcome our distinguished guest, Ambassador Markarova, and dive into our discussion.

Let's start with the news. I'm an old newsman.

Two drones struck the Kremlin, and...

MARKAROVA: Two?

MAY: I think -- what -- was it more than two?

MARKAROVA: I think it was less than...

MAY: Fewer? OK. I thought it was...

(LAUGHTER)

It struck, like, the -- it hit, like, the flag, and right away, you had Dmitry Peskov, -- Putin's spokesman, and Dmitry Medvedev, who I'd call the -- Putin's factotum, saying, "Oh, they're trying to assassinate Putin. How -- oh, how could they -- terrible." Others have said and suggested this is a false-flag operation; in other words, that maybe this was -- Putin did this to himself as an -- to try to rally people. "You see? Russia is under attack." Just what is -- what's your theory on what happened here, and your response to it?

MARKAROVA: Well, we saw it on TV as well, and it's surprising that -- actually, how unprotected -- that something like this that can happen above Kremlin after they have bragged about being such a superpower. But then, we also dared the second-largest army in the world, then we thought they would take -- or some people thought that they would take Kyiv in three days. And regardless of who's behind this incident -- and Ukraine is not, you know. We clearly stated right away that Ukraine in no way is involved in this attack on Kremlin.

But you know, we shouldn't allow ourselves to be diverted from the facts, and the fact is for 436 days, Russia is waging aggressive, unprovoked, unjustified war on Ukraine, and there are real terrorist attacks, and there are real crimes that have been committed. But they're committed by Russia on the territory of Ukraine. And for 436 days, not only Ukraine has shown that we're capable of defending our homes, our loved ones, our freedom, our democracy, not only that we will never give up and that we will stay the course and we will defend our country, but also how responsible we are and how we fight this war according to all the international rules and how we are very responsible with regard to, you know, the -- even defending our country. We're doing it in the most responsible way.

So again, whatever it is, is it a way for them to explain why the May 9th parades will not be held in so many towns, the cities now? All -- you know, whoever did that, you know, we should stay focused on the fact that there is war in Ukraine and that war.

MAY: People should know that's -- every year, they're celebrating the victory over the Nazis, over Germany, right, and this is going to be a difficult year for that in a lot of ways and -- which gets to the second thing that's in the news today.

Your country is under attack from the Russian Army but also from something called the Wagner Group, which is called a mercenary army but it doesn't hide -- it's not hired by just anybody, it's hired by it works for Putin but it's two separate armies.

So Yevgeny Prigozhin, who's the head of the Wagner Group, there's a -- there's a Telegram video of him. You've shown it to me, I've seen it. It's really extraordinary. If you haven't seen this, you should look because it's Prigozhin, and behind him are corpses, his troops dead on a battlefield, very bloody, and he is railing against Sergei Shoigu, the Defense Minister, saying "I'm going to have to pull my troops from Bakhmut because you won't give me the ammunition I need to fight the Ukrainians." This is really an -- I mean, this is an extraordinary thing.

And maybe -- you imagine the U.S. -- if, you know, two generals went after each other in the U.S. Army on the record like that. I'm just interested in your thoughts on this extraordinary [situation].

MARKAROVA: Well, yes. First of all, you know, again, during this very difficult time, when Russia reinvaded Ukraine, right -- because, you know, the war -- they started the war with us in 2014 -- but during this, you know, almost 15 months of the full-fledged phase of this war, all Russian criminals -- and there's the Armed Forces and the conscripts and Prigozhin and other -- you know, like, Wagner Groups and other groups, which call themselves mercenaries but of course they are there because the Russian government told them and the Russian President told them to be there -- have always been bragging about how they will take Bakhmut. I mean, it's been there -- the fight in the east has been particularly brutal.

And to see him, you know, publicly, on the record, attacking other part of the war criminal group that is actually waging the war in Ukraine is actually, you know, saying the truth, first of all, that he is disclosing the fact that they are

running out of ammunition. So it means sanctions are working. It also means that, you know, there is an opening for us to continue what we have to do to liberate our country.

Now, how shall we interpret this? How shall we look at this? And how will Ukrainians look at this? It just proves that all the priorities on which we are working with U.S., first and foremost, but also other allies -- weapons, more weapons to us, more financial and other support for us to be -- to be able to faster liberate our -- our land, but also more sanctions to Russia -- this is -- this is what we should be thinking about, you know, that we have to double down because we can win it faster.

And I think we shall see more of that, because again, what are -- Russians are fighting for there? I mean, of course there are many more of them, they have more -- more equipment. Let's not underestimate the enemy. But, you know, all our soldiers, men and women, who are defending our homes, there is a very clear motivation there. This is the only homes we have and we will defend them with everything we have. What is their motivation to wage an aggressive, unfair war and war crimes in Ukraine? There is none.

MAY: Let me get you -- get you to elaborate on this -- this a little bit and broaden it from the news to the bigger -- some of the bigger questions. Would I be wrong to think of this war as Ukraine's war of independence?

MARKAROVA: Yes -- yes.

MAY: I'd be wrong or I'd be right?

MARKAROVA: No, you will be -- you will be right. You know, we have been occupied. It's very much our war for independence, for our territorial integrity and sovereignty, but actually for our right to exist, because if you listen to Putin and everyone from Russia -- and they have been very clear about their objectives. Since -- essentially since we became independent in 1991, all the countries that became independent who were occupied by the Soviet Union -- us, Baltic states, other countries -- they have always seen the break-up of the Soviet Union as a good thing -- you know, something that generations of Ukrainians fought for, something that we never wanted to be part of. And Russia is the only country where, consistently, the message from Russian leaders have been "this is the greatest tragedy" and how they always wanted to reconstruct.

And it goes deeper even than Soviet Union, because when you listen to them, you clearly hear that Soviet Union or Russian Empire or the Russian Federation now is something that they want to expand and reconstruct, and again, return all the nations and all the individual countries that they were able to occupy in some period of time.

So for us, that fight for independence never stopped. In 1918, we were successful, we became independent -- together with Finland, by the way. We were even together with Finland in the league of oppressed by Russia people and we fought for independence, became independent, didn't hold it for a long time.

We fought for it even after World War II was over. You know, people in Ukraine fought for independence and were imprisoned by Russians, all the way up until 1989. And in 1991, you know, we fought to create and do all the institutional reforms and Russians tried to change it.

So the two revolutions that we had in Ukraine, the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, the reason for that was that both times before the revolutions, Russia was able to install pro-Russian either government

officials who wanted to again return to the Russian integration – re-occupation -- rather than continuing the path of European integration and our independent path, and people of Ukraine repeatedly said no, either in the elections in -- in the referendum in 1991 or in elections in 2004 or 2013 and '14 or said it on Maidan when there was nothing else we could do. Just went out publicly, saying no.

So it's all about that, it's all about freedom and independence.

MAY: So my pet theory on Putin -- and I'm sure you've thought a lot about who he is and what he believes -- but -- it's my pet theory but I've been following Russia for more than a half a century. I was an exchange student there a half a -- 50 -- 50 years ago. He sees himself as the czar, and it's the czar's duty to restore the Russian Empire, to bring all the Russia's back together, and the Empire under the czar, he -- his mission in this part of his life, he must have all of -- all -- and what does "all the Russia's" mean? Well, it certainly means Russia but it means Belarus, which is essentially a vassal state. Lukashenko has little room to navigate. He's -- he can say -- he can say maybe instead of no sometimes, maybe. But it's certainly -- and he would -- he would like Finland, he would like the Baltics, he would like Kazakhstan, he would like Central Asia.

The Soviet Union, after all, in a lot of ways, was a rebranding of the Russian Empire because they took everything back and more. So I think that's what he sees himself as trying to do, is -- is restore the Russian Empire because he's the czar, he is both Ivan Grozny, Ivan the Terrible, and -- and Pyotr Veliky Peter the Great. You -- is that a fair way to see it?

MARKAROVA: Well, I think that's probably part of the -- part of that, but unfortunately for him, he's not a czar, he is a KGB operative...

(LAUGHTER)

... and today is not 19th century. So, you know, the world is different. The, you know, ideas that empires could be successful in the 21st century are just not feasible, and we see it.

And with the development of the nations, with the cooperation that we have between ourselves, with the freedom of press, with the social media and everyone having access to this and being able to record and show, like his own Prigozhin did yesterday, how can you create something that is so outdated and that was not even feasible at the beginning of the 20th century? That's why empires started collapsing.

MAY: Yeah, I'm -- I actually am going to quibble with you because I do think that Putin and his closest allies, Xi Jinping and Ali Khamenei in Iran, they also are empire builders. There is a Chinese Empire. Xinjiang is part of is Xinjiang is part of the Chinese Empire, Ali Khamenei definitely wants an empire and has one in Lebanon and Syria and other places, but these are these are empires of the 21st century, and whether they succeed or not, I think that -- that question is very much out.

I do think it's important to make the case -- and you have but maybe of more -- that Ukraine both is a separate nation from Russia -- Putin denies that -- and has a right to be a -- a separate nation from Russia. And maybe just talk about that for a minute -- for a minute.

MARKAROVA: Well, of course. First, we existed before Russia even was created, or Moscow-wide kingdom. I mean, if we -- if we will have more time or maybe do a separate discussion on the history, it's a fascinating, actually, of history.

Ukraine or Kievan Rus has been in the center of European history, and, you know, there is a lot to discuss in -- in many centuries, dating back to, you know, 2,000 years ago, when we adopted Christianity in Ukraine, you know, like -- and -- and -- but it's -- you know, we have separate language, we identify themselves as Ukrainians. We always thought of ourselves as a different people.

There is definitely a separate country and separate nationality, and even despite the fact that we were occupied by literally more -- almost 400 years, because after the fall of Baturyn, you know, the -- the central city when Peter the Great was able to take it, and our Hetman, by the way, democratically-elected at that time, Mazepa, lost, and Peter the Great, together with his General Menshikov, did exactly what we have seen in Bucha and in Mariupol and other places. He destroyed the whole city and he killed everyone, including children, in Baturyn.

So, you know, we are separate people -- by the way, the difference between Ukrainian and Russian is almost exactly the same as between Spanish and French. It is a different language. And we see now, with the -- especially with this -- Russians who engage in the illegal war in Ukraine on the battlefield, how difficult it is for them actually to even understand. I mean, they have no idea where they are and they do not understand, you know.

But that's not even the case because in the modern world, we do not think in terms of nationalities, we think in terms of international rules and the borders that are recognized by everyone. Our borders have been recognized by all the countries, including Russia, in 1991.

Our people, 92 percent of them, voted for independence in 1991, and actually, out of all former Soviet Union or Soviet Union-occupied countries, you know, we not only -- it's not only our Parliament that proclaimed independence. We had a referendum, we asked our people.

That also has to do with a very long tradition of democracy in Ukraine. You know, we always say we are democracy on steroids. You know, Ukrainians really -- free in expressing opinions, to even have -- it's a very Ukrainian joke, that when you have two Ukrainians, you have three point of views, meaning that we like to discuss everything.

And you see it in -- in our relations with the government in Ukraine, that people are not afraid to voice it, people are always going to the elections, electing their government and protecting their choice, as it happened in 2004 when the elections -- when they tried to steal the elections and President Yanukovich tried to proclaim himself an elected President.

So, you know, we are different.

MAY: I want to play Devil's advocate a little bit. Apologists, I would say, for Putin and people I would call isolationists -- they may call themselves restrainers or -- they say "look, Putin was threatened because NATO was getting close to his borders, because Ukraine hadn't been accepted into NATO but there was talk that it would, and he felt that was threatening to Russia to have NATO so close to his borders, NATO enlarging, NATO expanding." Talk about why that's nonsense.

MARKAROVA: Well, there are a couple -- there are several elements of that.

First, NATO was never -- in our region, was never expanding. It was always the individual countries that wanted to join NATO. And I think we all should start using the enlargement of NATO or -- or expansion of NATO because look at any

country that became members during the previous 30 years. All of them wanted to join, the people wanted to join, and it was a very great, safe decision for them to become members of the same family with the same values.

Second, Putin was never threatened by that. This is -- this is even -- it's actually vice versa, you know, because Ukraine wanted to join NATO. Of course, you know, we -- that was very clear in -- our leadership, since 2004, has been very clear on that.

Unfortunately, our leadership before that was not very clear on that because after we broke out from the Soviet Union, the first people in Ukraine, the first leaders of Ukraine have been the previous Soviet Ukrainian leaders who became Ukrainian leaders, but essentially, we did not build our own institutions right from the start. All of them have been hand -- hand-me-downs from the Soviet Union.

And again, talking about the historical perspective here, as a country that has been occupied for such a long time, centuries, power and government was not always something Ukrainian, you know? So it was always Russians who dominated in -- in -- in those.

But, you know, since 2004, it was very clear to us that the situation is very black and white, you're either part of the civilized world or you're occupied by Russia.

So we started working towards it, but we did -- we were still neutral. We were neutral in our Constitution that was written. And we were not part of NATO, together with Georgia. So it's actually when we were not part of NATO that emboldened Putin, and he attacked Georgia in 2008, he attacked us in 2014. And he again re-invaded us in 2022.

But we only formalized, so to say, our desire to join NATO in 2018 when we included that into our Constitution, because more than 60% of Ukrainians are in favor of that now. Before that, we cooperated with NATO, of course, we became in 2020, the EOP partner in NATO, but that all actually happened after Russia attacked us in 2014.

And look at Finland, look at Sweden, they push for them, from their people to join NATO came as a response of Russia attack. So it's actually vice versa. It's not Putin was threatened, it's us, all of us democratic states that are threatened by Russia. And that's why we want to stick together.

And again, I think we listened sometimes too much to Putin's explanations of why he did something, you know. Sometimes it's NATO. Sometimes it's Ukraine that was going to attack him. Sometimes that say, you know, there are all kinds of lies, literally lies, and we have to just call them that.

And the truth is very simple, he just wants to attack neighboring countries. He does that on a regular basis. That's the only way for him, I guess, to consolidate the power inside the country and stay president. And we have to stop it.

MAY: I would add this. He's -- he is not stupid. He never, for a minute, thought that German troops, and Hungarian troops, and Turkish troops, are going to come and try to take over Moscow. That way, he knows better than that. Anyway...

MARKAROVA: Who would want that?

MAY: Who would want that? What he does -- but there is something else he -- that I think does scare him. I was an election observer for the last -- the parliamentary -- last parliamentary elections in Ukraine for the International Republican Institute.

He sees people being free, he sees people voting. He was very -- what struck me as an election observer is the extent to which Ukrainians were very proud, we're doing this. And let me show you this, like, we're doing it right.

MARKAROVA: Yes.

MAY: Let me show you -- let me show you how -- and by the way, they were pro -- there was -- there were pro-Russian parties in that election. I think they won maybe 13% of the vote. I talked to people from those parties because it was free too. Some of them were more pro-Russians. Some said don't poke the bear, whatever. People could vote freely. For Russians to see that just across the border, I think Putin saw that as a threat.

MARKAROVA: Absolutely.

MAY: All right.

MARKAROVA: Free, democratic, and prosperous Ukraine.

MAY: Right.

MARKAROVA: This is a threat to Russia.

MAY: This is a threat.

MARKAROVA: Because this is a bad example for his people.

MAY: I think. OK. People are talking about a spring offensive. It could be a summer offensive at this point. So what's -- it's a wet spring, it's muddy, I understand, in Ukraine right now. There's only so much you can probably tell us. People are making predictions, including a number of people who I -- we think a lot of: Ben Hodges, for example, retired lieutenant general. He thinks that these -- that there could be some serious successes in this. I know Mark Milley talked about Ukraine could significantly and has significantly enhanced capabilities to conduct offensive operations.

Tell us what you can tell us about planning and what you hope to achieve because I think it's important -- I think we can agree on this -- the world, the United States, Americans, if they see Ukrainians making progress, that's important. If they see a stalemate, you know what they're going to say -- "well, we have to push for negotiations cause this is like World War I, we're getting -- no one's getting anywhere."

MARKAROVA: Well, first of all, Russians attacked our land. They are committing horrible crimes and atrocities everywhere. And after we were able to liberate Kyiv Oblast and after we were able to liberate Kharkiv Oblast and Kherson, we have seen what happens in the territories where Russians occupy them -- they are killing people, they are torturing people, they are raping people, they are stealing our children and -- and forcefully deporting them to Russia. Even the scale of this -- and -- and they're simply destroying the cities. Look at Mariupol, you know, look at the recent video -- videos and -- and shots -- the Google shots that are available. Literally, the city doesn't exist, you know, the -- it's, like, more than 90 percent of the city is destroyed.

So for us, it's not a question of, you know, when the counter-offensive and how many. The overall goal is to defend our country and liberate all of Ukraine within internationally recognized borders. Whether it will take one counter-offensive or many, whether it will take days or months or weeks or years, it doesn't matter for us because the goal is very clear -- to restore territorial integrity and to save as many Ukrainians as we can.

Now, that goal was there since 2014. We have been forced to enter into Minsk Accords because there was no other, unfortunately, alternative. We didn't have, after the country was robbed blind by Russians and by Russian government, before 2013, after they -- our Armed Forces were completely, you know, destroyed by the Russian -- Russian Minister of Defense, after our Secret Services also were severely damaged by the Russian national who led the Secret Service, it was -- it was just -- you know, when they attacked us the first time in 2014, it came at a -- at a time when we -- it was very difficult for us to fight back the way we should have, you know, and the way we have done in 2022.

But right now -- and we spent eight years -- also very important, because I think people sometimes forget it, that we spent eight years working on a diplomatic solution to restore our territorial integrity. Even though the Minsk Accords were not fair to us, we tried to implement them to the "T" and we did everything possible and sometimes impossible in order to actually get back our country and get back illegally imprisoned people by means of diplomacy, and Russia used all that time to attack us.

So I'm very -- it's very clear to us now that there is no alternative to us fighting for every inch of our territory and for every Ukrainian, to save them.

Now, during this 436 days, we already have seen a couple of counter-offensives, successful ones. We did not allow Russians to take over Kyiv and then we liberated all of Kyiv Oblast. We did not -- we liberated Kharkiv Oblast. We liberated Kherson, you know, one of the few large cities that they were able to occupy and -- during this time.

Of course, right now, you know, everyone is focusing on the counter-offensive but, you know, again, we trust our military command. You know, everyone from -- of course, from the Supreme Commander Zelenskyy to our Chief Commander Zaluzhnyi and others, they know when and where we could do it the most -- in the most effective way.

Also, we are fighting on our territory. So the way our military is planning the operations is also very -- in a very responsible way. Like, if you look at how we will liberate in Kherson, you will see that -- you know, military people will tell you that they were doing it in a very careful way to save as many Ukrainians, you know, the civilians, because it's our people who are being held hostages there essentially.

But I can only say that we all pray for all the -- all our counter-offensives to be successful and I can only say that, you know, we still need more weapons. This is the main objective now, that regardless of when it starts, regardless of how many counter-offensives we will have, we'll also need to build an enduring strength for the future, because after we liberate all Ukraine -- and we believe we will -- and I think it's -- it's not only in the interest of Ukraine, it's in the interest of all of us -- we have to clearly show that it's not OK in the 21st century to violate the border of a sovereign country through their -- through the brutal force.

But after we do that, Russia will not move anywhere. They will still be on our border, they will still be a threat to all democratic world, and not only democratic world because the food security threats, the energy security threats that they are creating.

So right now, we are, you know, one of the largest and definitely most capable armies in Europe. We are defending, of course, and liberating ourselves but we are also defending other European countries, and we will continue to do so going forward and hopefully in the future as the member of NATO.

MAY: And this brief commercial announcement -- we agree with this and -- under John Hardie and a group of military analysts here at FDD we have a new report out called "Advance U.S. interests by giving Ukraine the weapons it needs now," and it specifies what we think, based on our analysis, you need in order to prevail in this, and I'd just commend it to everybody who's listening.

You mentioned diplomacy, I want to get back to that because there are a -- any number of commentators and analysts on the left and on the right in the U.S. and in Europe, and what they keep saying is "well -- well, we have to do -- we have to push both sides to negotiate." And I understand how you can push Ukrainians to negotiate. What I don't understand and I've never seen explained is how do you push Putin to negotiate? You threaten him with sanctions? No, we're doing that. Do you give weapons to the -- no, we are doing that. How do you -- I -- have we seen any indication -- have you seen, through Macron, through Scholz, that Putin thinks "OK, I want to negotiate, I want to compromise, I want to find a way to end this"? Have you -- is there any indication that he is, in any way, open to what people like to call a "diplomatic solution"?

MARKAROVA: Well, first of all, I think you can only negotiate if two sides are ready to negotiate. Russia never wanted to negotiate. They wanted to occupy, attack, destroy and kill us. And right now, we definitely are not in a position to negotiate with indicted criminals, you know, until they leave our country.

Second, you can only negotiate at the -- around the table what you can achieve at the battlefield. So they will only negotiate with us if we are definitely winning everything and liberating all of our territories. Until then, I don't think it's -- we should expect even Russia to negotiate.

When Russia talks about negotiations, what they are actually -- or whatever, the peace -- what actually they need is the operational force. We clearly see it from the -- Prigozhin's video from yesterday and others. So they -- they want a pause in order to get their resources together to attack us even -- even better. Why would we give them an operational pause in their military objectives?

And if you ask any people who study war, you know, there is always like three elements of -- of that, the intent, the window of opportunity, and the capabilities in order to be able to -- to complete that. Russia's intent didn't change. It was there since Putin became the president, to restore this empire and to occupy and destroy us. And it's still there during all these years; they still want to either occupy us or kill us, or you see with everything they're doing, all the war crimes is actually a genocide of Ukrainian people.

The window of opportunity that they saw, they had it in 2022, that's why probably attacked us, but they still think that they can do it. They can outlast us. They can outlast the West. They are trying to drive the wedge between us, you know, through whatever means possible. So, they -- they think, you know, because they can endure more, or they have more weapons, or the people are less, you know, active and will not be able to -- to go and say then demonstrate, you know, against this unfair war, that they can do that. But, you know, again, I don't think we can change that.

I think the only influence we all can have on is their capacity and capability to fight. That's why more weapons to us and more sanctions to Russia is the greatest tool in order to bring peace faster.

MAY: So, Zelenskyy recently had a conversation with Xi Jinping, China's Supreme Leader, as it were. And he said it was a long and meaningful conversation. It's kind of hard for you to answer, but because you want to be diplomatic. I can be less so. I think Xi Jinping is thinking, what's in my interests? He's not -- it's not about peace, it's not about saving Ukrainian lives. He's thinking well, what's in the interest of China right now? Do you think he's going to be helpful in any way? Or is it just impossible to say?

MARKAROVA: Let me -- it's very easy for me to answer from the standpoint what our president's goal is in this. He has been very clear, and you have seen a very detailed readout of that call that our administration put out very clear about what this war is about, that it's Russia that attacked us, that we are not ready for any concessions. And there is a peace plan on the table, Ukraine's peace plan, President Zelenskyy's peace plan, which he presented as early as last October, during the U.N. discussions, and it's a 10-step peace plan, which is very clear, about how to restore peace, how to restore it, and how to reach the just and lasting peace.

And we are ready to cooperate with anyone who's ready to help us. When we presented this peace formula, we said, you know, any countries like the U.S. or other strategic partners who are ready to work on us on all of it were welcome. Any countries that are ready to work on some of this, of the steps, welcome.

So if China would find in them, you know, to actually send a clear message to -- to Russia that would China publicly says they believe in, like territorial integrity like sovereignty, like the U.N. charter being a sacred document, well, Russia has violated the U.N. charter repeatedly. And there is a binding court decision from 15th or 16th of March last year when the court actually mandated Russia to stop this military operation. And Russia, which is the Security Council's member of European Union -- of U.N., just ignored it.

Now, why they are members of the Security Council? That's another big question. And why they are members of the U.N.? It's a big question. Because they were never the cofounders of it, and they never went through the proper procedures to actually join the U.N.

MAY: Another charge made by critics of Ukraine is that there are Nazis or neo-Nazis within the military. It's particularly interesting because Bernard Henri Levy has an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal, and of all things he's talking about the Azov Brigade, which has been particularly criticized, and inside it he says, you know, I've met with these people, they're really -- they're like the Jews in Masada. They're modeling themselves on that.

I wanted you to just respond to that criticism that there are these terrible neo-Nazis within the military, in Ukraine, and that's why we shouldn't be supporting Ukraine. You've heard this.

MARKAROVA: Well, this is one of the most pathetic, I think, and really in Ukraine even difficult to understand claims of Russians and Russian leaders.

First, let's look at the facts. Ukraine, and the tolerance to [inaudible] First of all, there are so many different nationalities living in Ukraine. Historically, you know, we are on the crossroads of everything, of Europe, Asia, East West, you know, it was such an amalgamation of different people living together.

Second, look at the figures that Yad Vashem has and other organizations which are measuring the antisemitism. Ukraine always had a very low numbers actually, even compared to some European countries of, you know -- we are

number four, I think in the list of the righteous who were saving the Jews during the World War Two and during Nazis horrible crimes that they have committed.

Now to accuse our president, who is Jewish Ukrainian himself, of being a Nazi, that's another level of I think, you know, this idiosyncrasy that the Russians have on that.

But it's clear to me why they try to label the Azov regiment of the National Guard as such, because these are the boys and girls who stopped Putin and did not allow him to take Mariupol in 2015. And that was very clear and that was very personal.

So, they would manufacture anything. It was interesting, because we were researching that as well, and studying some of the footage and videos they were putting out excessively through their propaganda, especially in like 2015-16, trying to -- to attack the, you know, with like swastikas and others, the majority of those we were able to trace actually to Russian neo-Nazi organizations or not even so they would show a Ukrainian national guardsmen of Azov regiment in the uniform, and then they would show the swastika and we even refuted that saying, OK, here is this guy here, we're, like, he undresses, there is nothing like that on him. But it was a big part of the propaganda, trying to actually reach the people in either European Union or in the U.S. to make it, you know, difficult to support Ukraine, you know, and for some time, especially when they engaged in this propaganda heavily before this, 2022.

You know, unfortunately, it worked somewhere, you know, it -- they put massive resources into it, together with their cyber interventions everywhere, together with their mis -- you know, malign influence through the social media, it worked in some areas.

But again, the truth is the only instrument against that. So you know, we're so grateful to all the journalists who are in Ukraine now who are on the front lines, who are in Kyiv, who have been in Irpin. We unfortunately lost so many, you know, Ukrainian and international journalists during this war, but it's because of them that we have seen the truth.

Similar about this issue. You know, it's them who shot at Babyn Yar at the beginning of this. It's them who attacked Mariupol, and we unfortunately could not save all the Greeks and all the Jews and all the other Ukrainians, you know, that we -- we had in Mariupol. And there was one woman who died who survived Holocaust as a girl. She was one of the -- she was nine and she saw her parents being killed, and she lived in Mariupol, and she had to spend two months in the -- in the -- in the basement of her residential building, and she died in her mid-90s from Russian attack. It's -- it's just, you know...

But we just have to share the news, share the truth, explain, explain, explain about that. And it's actually Russians who have to fight with their xenophobia and -- and you know, the xenophobia, really, what it is.

MAY: Yeah. I have many more questions, but I'm only going to ask one more, but -- and while I do, and I'm just going to go -- we questions coming from our -- our guests here. We'll go to them. So I'll ask you this question. It's a big question, but try to answer as quickly as you can, because I want to leave as much time as I can.

MARKAROVA: Yes.

MAY: And that's -- I think there are those who also -- who think that, look, if Putin takes Ukraine, ah, it's over. I don't think it's over; I think it'll have an impact on other expansionist regimes, and I also think -- and I think you agree

with me -- if Putin should win in Ukraine, should -- if he should prevail there, he has other goals, other ambitions, other countries on his list, and it -- maybe address that very quickly, and while you...

And then hold hands. Erin will come and we'll find you.

MARKAROVA: I'll answer it very quickly. It's very much a 1939 moment. We just have to listen to what he says. It's not only about Ukraine. We can stop him in Ukraine, and then it's over if we liberate Ukraine and if Ukraine wins. But if, God forbid, Ukraine falls, then it's -- he's going to be all over the place, and he himself named the countries that he believes are the enemies of his autocratic rules, starting from Baltic states, to Poland, to a number of countries, including in -- in -- in central Asia. So no, it's actually more than Ukraine, and the implication of that...

MARKAROVA: ... is much larger than just Russia-Ukraine.

MAY: Good and pithy answer.

Identify yourself, if you would, and then ask your question, or...

QUESTION: Hi. Vivian Salama from the Wall Street Journal. Always good to see you. I wanted to -- I'll try to get two questions in, if you'll indulge me. The first one -- you touched upon the role that China could potentially play if they are sincere in bringing Russia to the table. I'm curious if you feel that there's a changing appetite, maybe a growing appetite in Washington maybe recognizing that there -- there are certain limitations to them dealing with Moscow, and so the fact that maybe China can play a constructive role at least in getting Russia to the table, convincing them to come to the table in a genuine way to support whatever Ukraine is trying to get on the table. That's my first question.

The second question -- I just wanted you to kind of talk to us about the state of Ukrainian air defenses, how those conversations are going with the U.S. and with NATO allies in general, whether you feel there's progress being made at this stage to support the counter -- upcoming counteroffensive, particularly with regard to the strain on air defenses. Thank you.

MARKAROVA: Thank you. On the first question, I think we should focus -- and that's our goal -- on not how to bring Russia to the table, but how to get them out of Ukraine. So for that, every country can play a role, and we actually talk to everyone unless, of course, they are supporting Russia like Iran or -- or Belarus, you know, and participating in this concern directly by supplying weapons to them and or as -- or allowing them to use their countries as the...

So again, the priorities from us didn't change: weapons, support to us and sanctions, and maximum isolation to Russia. I think it is premature to talk about the negotiations now because you know, it's -- there are no two sides to this. It's not like we attacked each other. It's not like the Russ -- there is war that is happening on Ukraine and Russian soil. It's a very clear, brutal aggression of a sort -- of aggressive country against a sovereign country, and we, I think, have to focus on how to get them out. So whatever any country can do to motivate them either to support -- support us or to send clear messages to them or to stop buying oil that Russia -- or gas or other, or to stop supplying them with other -- so we will engage with everyone trying to, A, explain what is it about, to give them the information because in some countries, the Russian propaganda is still strong, and in some countries, the media environment is so controlled that there is not the information. So I think that direct engagements, especially from the president, our president, who from the beginning of this phase of the war, has become a communicator directly with people, very unconventional for the leaders of the state, but you know -- just to tell them what is it about so that they would stop, actually, telling us to -- you know,

what concessions you are ready to make in order to get peace, you know. That's not -- it -- it's the other way around. Let's all talk, what can we do in order to make Russia and whether it's by direct help to us or anything -- anything else.

And I'm sorry. I forgot the...

QUESTION: The air defenses.

MARKAROVA: The air defense -- very important. You know, you have seen during the -- well, first of all, since the beginning of this war the indiscreet air attacks from -- from Russia have been their signature kind of war crime, whether it's the Iranian shahed drones or the different types of missiles or the ground systems that for example they are killing literally civilians in Kherson on a daily basis with and there is definitely a big need in air defense and this is, as you have seen, a priority for the discussions and the previous several -- we call them Ramstein meetings, you know, the Ukraine Contact Group meetings. This is not something that is readily available in the store to buy as many as you want to, but it has been remarkable how the -- Secretary Austin personally and his team engaged with now, more than 50 countries, and you have seen the capabilities that we have on the ground now, including U.S. Patriots, which a year ago seemed like, you know, too-sophisticated capability, you know, to some people, so don't even ask for.

But we have always been clear that we need all the capabilities. It will take a village to win this war, and the air defense, and especially be -- because again, since last Octo -- October, when Russia engaged in targeted destruction of our energy system, the air defense, again, became a number-one priority that remains so.

And when I say air defense, I do not mean just, you know, this capabilities to protect our cities, but essentially, what the Air Force calls their air defense, like, all of it, you know, from all the capabilities that would constitute the integrated air defense. We understand all the difficulties to do it during the -- during the active war phase, but I think, again, during these 436 days, Ukrainians have shown that we can train much faster, we can deploy it in a -- in a very creative ways, and we can do it.

So this is a priority and I -- I -- I -- without, of course, disclosing too many details but I can say that the majority of our partners understand that it's a priority and there is active work in order to get it into Ukraine.

QUESTION: Hi. Ellen Knickmeyer with the AP. Thank you for doing this, Ambassador. You -- you said very flatly that Ukraine had nothing to do with the -- the drone on the Kremlin. Can you say the same for Ukrainians? Do you -- is there any indication that you've seen or can you rule out that private Ukrainians or Ukrainian groups did the drone launching?

And I wanted to ask you also about, after the leaks, is -- -- are the Ukrainian leaders having to be more cautious about sharing operational plans for spring offensives with the U.S. right now, just -- in their -- in the interest of their own...

MARKAROVA: Well, on the first one, I can only repeat that we had nothing to do with it. So that's -- we saw it on TV but we didn't -- we did -- neither we -- and we heard clearly from the United States and -- you know, there is no point in that for us, and we have discussed it repeatedly when Russia falsely claimed that something happened in Russia because of us.

We are defending our country, we are defending our territory. Of course, according to the UN statute, we have the right to defend it, including, you know, suppressing the areas which shoot at us, you know, but, you know, there is no point in even, you know, doing what you -- what you saw with this. But again, Ukraine had nothing to do with it.

With regard to the leaks or whatever, first, we always look with a great -- want to say it's, like, distrust at anything that Russians are putting out. Whether it was leaked or stolen or -- or created by them, it doesn't matter, you know. Whatever they put out and whatever they produce and manufacture from the leaks is definitely not in the interest of Ukraine, definitely not in the interest of anyone else.

So with -- that -- with that particular situation, you know, we just saw what happened, you know, and it's clear to us what Russia is trying to do.

Now, with regard to our -- our communication and cooperation with the U.S., I don't think we ever had that level of communication and trust between us and -- and U.S. And of course, I will not go into detail of what we're sharing with each other but we are very happy with our cooperation and I think it will only increase.

QUESTION: Thank you. This is Jay Solomon from Semafor Media. I just wanted to draw you out a little more on China. The Chinese said they're also appointing a Special Envoy who's going to start visiting other countries to sort of promote their idea of a peace plan. Is Ukraine comfortable with the Chinese playing this role? And I guess a question I have -- do you think they're an honest broker or -- I think this Special Envoy might have even been based in Moscow at some point. So the main question is do you think they're an honest broker?

MARKAROVA: First of all, I don't think -- I think we are calling or -- or looking -- we don't need a broker. Nobody needs a broker for Russia to get out from Ukraine, you know? So there is a peace plan, President Zelenskyy's peace plan, and as we said, we are ready for any country to work with us on either the whole 10 steps or some of the steps, and we would gladly meet with any ambassadors, envoys when they come, and we will be very honest with them by delivering the information -- what happens on the ground and -- and what our objective is.

But again, I think right now, the goal remains the same -- for us to liberate our country. Whoever can help us with it, really help us to liberate the country, of course we would -- we would talk and -- and -- and work with them, but I think it's -- it's too early to -- to call someone a broker or something else. I mean...

QUESTION: Thank you, Ambassador. Dave Lawler from Axios. You've touched on this a bit but I wanted to ask specifically -- yesterday, John Kirby at the White House said Ukraine had received 98 percent of what it had requested for the purposes of this counter-offensive and that the U.S. had done everything in its power to put Ukraine in a position to succeed. I guess I -- given the things that you've talked about that you still need, I wonder would you agree that you've received 98 percent of what you've asked for? And, you know, what is the two percent or whatever percent -- what's the most urgent things that you haven't received that you're still looking for? Thanks.

MARKAROVA: Well, I will not talk in terms of the percentages -- and again, I will leave to the military people to discuss it -- but the goal is to win today, to win tomorrow, and to build an enduring strength. And, you know, for the war, nobody can predict how anything will happen. We have seen counter-offensives like in Kharkiv Oblast, which happened in six days. We have seen very difficult battles when we were liberating Kherson. We don't know but we trust our military commanders, we trust that they will do it in the most efficient way, and we just have to be prepared for any type of offensives or the actions of the Russians.

And there is still a lot of ground to liberate. And, as I said, after we do it, after we completely liberate all country, we need to continue building our capabilities and our enduring strength in order to be able to stop any other attacks from Russia in the future. So that's why, when we are talking about our cooperation, we're discussing a very large list of the capabilities that we need.

And I want to just go back to -- I think, you know, we all are focused, of course, on this full-fledged war phase, but in 2001 [2021], when President Zelenskyy came to Washington, we also, on that day, signed a very important framework agreement between our Minister of Defense and DOD on -- and it's a five year plan -- strategic framework on defense cooperation, and the -- a lot of areas in which we should work together in order to -- to advance both of our countries' strategic objectives in -- in that. Ukraine is not only important for Ukraine to win now but we all don't want, right, Black Sea to be the Russian lake, you know. It's -- it's such an important element of the security in -- not only in our region but globally. And we can go on and on and on in a number of areas.

And there was a discussion about some particular operation and the percentages -- like -- like, I don't know, I wouldn't want to, and -- and again, I would leave to our military people to comment on it, but we clearly know and our partners clearly know that, you know... what the needs are and we are discussing all of them.

QUESTION: Well, Ambassador, Max Castroparedes from Harvard's Belfer Center. The Ukraine Prosecutor General, and DOJ have been working together on war crimes accountability. One question for you -- and maybe you could speak a little bit more about this, but also how it relates to reconstruction. What will Ukraine do on the environmental war crimes? There's been a total destruction of the area so if you could tell us a little more about that and then second, where do you see the U.S. and maybe the private sector engaging in this effort.

MARKAROVA: Thank you. Wow, there -- there's, like, three questions for the next hour I think, you know.

(LAUGHTER)

First, justice, and coming back to the -- President Zelenskyy's peace formula, justice is such an important element of peace. So we have, in that area -- and -- and general prosecutor is working really literally daily with the counterparts from -- from the U.S. We are now using pretty much everything in the justice domain, all the instrument that are available to us. We have more than 80,000 cases of war crimes or crimes related to war crimes in Ukraine that are opened by our investigators, prosecuted. We are doing it as -- as we speak, and our courts are also hearing this either Russians which were captured and prisoners of war or in absentia, and our legislation allows us to do so. But we're doing it in a strict accordance to the due process of law.

Now, we have now more than 24 countries that opened also their own criminal investigations on the Russian war crimes in Ukraine, and we are cooperating fully with them providing the evidence, and we're asking for more support there because again, can you imagine how much additional strength -- you know, stress for the -- for the whole system in addition to the other investigations, to do that? So we were very glad that a number of countries, dozens, actually, are doing that.

We filed our cases with all three courts, international courts, that are available to us: International Criminal Court, International Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights. And you know, one of those, you know, that's where Mr. Putin and Lvova-Belova, the two known criminals for forcible deportation of Ukrainian children, have already been not only investigated, but there is an arrest warrant for them.

So the -- in that landscape, only one thing is missing: the tribunal for the crime of aggression. We have in Ukraine the case on the crime of aggression, but of course, within the national legislation, we cannot prosecute the Troika, you know, the -- Putin, Lavrov and others. But the -- we -- we -- we need this tribunal in order to prosecute the mother of this crime -- not only what they've done on the ground as the result of it, but the fact that they decided -- they made the decision.

So this is where we are discussing. As you know, there is a core group of countries that together with us are discussing the modalities of this crime of -- of this tribunal. Now, we really hope that we will all end up agreeing that's going to be the international tribunal, ad hoc tribunal, and that we will move ahead with it.

So justice is a very important component, and U.S. is helping us a lot with individual, like, investigations with providing support to our investigators, to our prosecutors. There is a lot of evidence collection. How do you do it? How do you process it come -- you know, how do you interview victims? I mean, it's a very, very difficult part, you know, a lot of NGOs also involved in that. How -- how to do it not to re-victimize also them, because what people went through, especially, you know, after -- you know, I -- I -- my home was under occupation for 32 days, but I can only imagine how is it when people were under occupation for a year.

So justice is a very important element of that, as well as reconstruction of Ukraine. Again, if you look at President Zelenskyy's peace formula, rebuilding Ukraine is also a -- a -- an element of the enduring peace. And of course, you know, it has -- like, we -- we are working on it actively. We have already a platform, international platform of G7-plus, all the IFIs countries that got together and kind of, you know -- as then we have a -- a contact group Ramstein, on the defense cooperation. We have the energy platform for -- with G7 countries. And now, we are starting this big coordinating platform on the future reconstruction because again, it will take a village to do that. But it's not something the other countries have to do -- for us. This is where we can do it together in a very beneficial way for all of us, because we built Ukraine, especially the way we see it, we want to leapfrog into the innovative Ukraine. We want to not just rebuild what it was before, but actually open it to all the new technologies in -- in energy, in agra -- in everything else, and Ukraine can be a solution to so many global problems that Russia has created now with all the rare earth materials that we have, with, again, agricultural sector. I mean, we can double, triple the productivity very easily.

So this -- this rebuilding and reconstruction is very important. But of course, what is going to be the source for that? First, the -- the Russian money. That's why confiscating Russian sovereign funds which are now either arrested or frozen, or in many countries, is so -- is very important. Confiscating Russian oligarchs' money and all the money that they have stolen from their people, but they're using in order to fight this war. And I think we have, when the prosecutor general was here together with the attorney general, they started the -- the first case of -- what's his name? Malofeyev, the Russian oligarch. He's just \$5.4 million, but it's a start, you know. That system of DOJ confiscating it through the court decision, of course; transfer it to Department of State to be then used for the development programs in Ukraine is a -- is a great start.

So this should be, and also, business. You know, that's why, during this difficult times, we are not only fighting for our homes and loved ones, but we are continuing the reforms. And I know this is not something that is talked about a lot, but our European integration and the reforms that we are -- that we are continuing to do in creating the rule of law in Ukraine, in continuing reform in our judicial system, in strengthening our anticorruption infrastructure, in actually reforming the tax administration and others because we also want, right after we win, but even now, because some businesses are even now expanding in Ukraine, to create this level playing field and to attract as many businesses into Ukraine.

So business, answering your third question, will be a -- a -- a very important element of the future success of Ukraine. Thank you.

MAY: We promised the ambassador that we'd keep this conversation to an hour. I think it was a very interesting, edifying conversation. If you agree with me, let's give a round of applause...

(APPLAUSE)

... to the ambassador. Thank you so much.

MARKAROVA: Thank you.

MAY: And thank you all for taking the time to join us here today. Thanks to our online audience. Thanks to our CSPAN audience. For more information, FDD, our Russia program, visit FDD.org. Hope to see you again very soon. Thank you again.

MARKAROVA: Thank you

MAY: And thank you again.

MARKAROVA: Thank you.

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