

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Event

“Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland: The Two-Year Anniversary of Russia's Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine”

DATE

Thursday, February 22, 2024 at 2:30 p.m. ET

FEATURING

Victoria Nuland

Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

CSIS EXPERTS

Max Bergmann

Director of the Europe, Russia, and Eurasia Program and the Stuart Center, CSIS

Transcript By

Superior Transcriptions LLC

www.superiortranscriptions.com

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Max Bergmann: Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for joining us. I am Max Bergmann, director of the Europe, Russia, Eurasia Program and the Stuart Center here at CSIS. Today it is my honor to introduce Ambassador Victoria Nuland. Ambassador Nuland is the undersecretary of state for political affairs and, as everyone knows here, she has a long and distinguished career as an American diplomat and foreign policy practitioner, including serving formerly as assistant secretary of state for European affairs. And she has worked with multiple U.S. presidents on both sides of the aisle.

And so today we are thrilled to have Ambassador Nuland with us to mark the two-year anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This Saturday, it will be two years since the world changed. On February 24th, 2022, Ukraine awoke to the shock and horror of Russian forces crossing into Ukrainian territory, initiating one of the most – initiating the most destructive conflict on European soil since World War Two. Two years on, a grinding conflict continues. But it is worth remembering today, as we reflect on the war, that Ukraine also continues. That Ukraine and its European dream did not perish with Russia's invasion. And this is due to the bravery of Ukraine, but also the result of support from the United States and its European allies.

And with the war now entering its third year, it is worth taking stock. And we could not have a better person to do that with us than Ambassador Nuland, who is without a doubt one of the leading Russia hands in the country, with a wealth of experience when it comes to engaging with Moscow and the post-Soviet region more broadly. So without further ado, please join me in welcoming Undersecretary Nuland. (Applause.)

Ambassador
Victoria Nuland: Thank you so much, Max. It is very good to be here with you at CSIS, and thanks to CSIS for decades of incisive research and recommendations for policymakers. I have been a beneficiary myself over many decades. And thanks to everybody who is joining us, both in person and virtually.

Well, as Max made clear, we all remember where we were two years ago in the months and days and hours leading up to Putin's February 24, 2022, full-scale invasion of Ukraine. U.S. intelligence and, indeed, CSIS's own reports had been warning for months about Putin's massive war plan and the terrible toll that could await Ukraine. Week after week in the winter of '21 and '22, we watched the Russian military take up positions on three sides of Ukraine. The U.S., as you'll remember, offered negotiations to try to avert Russia's planned invasion, but those negotiations sputtered very quickly because Putin had already made up his mind.

Yet at that time, many still hoped that the troop movements were just a pressure tactic. Even some Ukrainians believe that. But many of us feared that if Putin did order his troops in, Russia's massive military could roll over

Kyiv within a week, decapitate Ukraine's democratic government, and install puppets of Moscow. But that did not happen. Instead, Putin got Newton's third law – an equal and opposite reaction to everything he hoped to gain. Instead of fleeing, President Zelensky led. Instead of capitulating, Ukrainians fought, and so bravely. Instead of fracturing, the West united. And instead of shrinking, NATO grew.

The U.S. rallied the world to Ukraine's defense in those early hours, days, and weeks. And we've kept that global coalition of more than 50 nations united for these two years, standing strongly with Ukraine. To date, as you know the U.S. has provided \$75 billion in security, economic, and humanitarian assistance but Europe and our global partners have provided even more, 107 billion (dollars) in addition to hosting 4.5 million Ukrainian refugees in countries across Europe and the EU has just pledged an additional \$54 billion for Ukraine.

Today NATO is stronger, larger, and better resourced. Finland has joined our defensive alliance and we'll welcome Sweden very soon. Russia is globally isolated. Over 140 nations voted four times in the U.N. General Assembly to condemn Putin's brutal invasion and now Putin is reliant on countries like Iran and North Korea for weapons while he drives his country deeper and deeper into the economic and security arms of China.

Global sanctions, the oil price cap, the export controls that we've put in place, have weakened Russia's war machine and these restrictions will get significantly tighter in the coming days as we and our partners announce massive new sanctions packages designed, among other things, to strangle Russia's effort at sanctions evasion.

In less than two years Europe broke its dependency on Russian oil and the U.S. doubled liquefied natural gas exports across the Atlantic, helping European partners reduce their dependence on Russian gas from 40 percent of total consumption to just 13 percent today.

And despite all the immense challenges from Putin's vicious war machine Ukraine has survived. Ukraine has retaken more than 50 percent of the territory seized by Putin forces at the beginning of the invasion. It has pushed Russia's Black Sea Fleet out of Sevastopol and off Ukraine's coast, allowing Ukraine to restore grain exports to prewar levels and helping to feed the world once again.

And, remarkably, Ukraine's economy grew by 5 percent last year, albeit from a pretty low war-torn base. And in case Americans are still asking themselves if all of this is worth it for us let's remember without sending a single U.S. soldier into combat and investing less than one-tenth of one year's defense budget of the United States we have helped Ukraine destroy 50

percent of Russia's ground combat power – 50 percent – and 20 percent of its vaunted Black Sea Fleet.

Ukraine has taken off the battlefield 21 naval ships, 102 Russian aircraft, and 2,700 Russian tanks. By every measure Ukraine's bravery and strength, its resilience, has made the United States safer, too.

More broadly, our continued support for Ukraine tells tyrants and autocrats wherever they are that we will not stand by while the U.N. Charter is torn to shreds, that we will defend the rights of free people to determine their own future and to protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity, and that the world's democracies will defend the values and principles that keep us safe and strong.

But on Ukraine's front lines, unless and until the U.S. joins Europe in passing our supplemental funding request the situation will remain dire. Artillery men today are fighting with only 10-to-20 155-millimeter shells per day to defend themselves.

Ukraine, as we saw in the news, has been forced to withdraw from Avdiivka. Kharkiv, one of Ukraine's proudest – eastern city, a Russian-speaking city – is bombarded daily in an effort to disable it and Ukraine's economy is still fragile, with almost a hundred percent of tax revenues going to defense now.

Vladimir Putin, in addition to now – to planning anti-satellite weapons in space and bearing responsibility for the death of his most popular opponent Alexei Navalny, thinks he can wait Ukraine out and he thinks he can wait out all of us.

We need to prove him wrong. With the \$60 billion supplemental that the administration has requested of Congress, we can ensure that Ukraine not only survives but she thrives. With this support in 2024, we can help ensure Ukraine can continue to fight, to build, to recover, and to reform. With this money Ukraine will be able to fight back in the east, but it will also be able to accelerate the asymmetric warfare that has been most effective on the battlefield. And as I said in Kyiv three weeks ago, this supplemental funding will ensure Putin faces some nasty surprises on the battlefield this year.

Ukraine can also build. With this money, the U.S. will join 31 other nations in helping Ukraine build the highly-deterrent military that it needs to ensure that Putin can never come back and do this again. And it will also rebuild its indigenous industrial base and ensure that it can remain on the path to European integration. This support also ensures that Ukraine can begin to recover economically and strengthen its tax base by investing in clean energy, in grains and agriculture, steel, defense industry, and in getting internally-displaced people and refugees home to better jobs and safety.

One interesting thing is that Patriot weapon systems and other sophisticated air defenses not only provide battlefield protection but, as we've seen in Kyiv and Odesa, they create bubbles of safety under which citizens can life safety and Ukraine's economy can rejuvenate. They give people the confidence to come home.

This money also supports continued reform, strengthening governance, judiciary, graining the gray economy so Ukraine can attract foreign investment, and continuing progress on rule of law, accountability, anti-corruption – all the things the Ukrainian people have been demanding of their governments since the 2013 revolution of dignity and before. Our supplemental support will strengthen the Ukraine of today, but also put it on a more sustainable path for tomorrow.

And by the way, most of the support we are providing actually goes right back into the U.S. economy and defense industrial base, helping to modernize and scale our own vital defense infrastructure while creating American jobs and economic growth. In fact, the first \$75 billion package created good-paying American jobs in at least 40 states across the United States, and 90 percent of this next request will do the same.

In December of 2022, I was in Ukraine on one of the many trips I have made in the last couple of years, including four trips since the war began. I visited a center in Kyiv that the U.S. supports which helps Ukrainian children who've been displaced by the war. There I met a young boy from Kharkiv with bright eyes and a sweet smile who had just lost his home to Putin's barbarity. As part of a therapy session, he and a handful of other kids his age were making little knit dolls out of yellow and blue yarn. Before leaving, I asked him if I could keep one. "Da," he said – Kharkiv, Russian-speaking city. I then asked what the doll's name was. "Patriot," he answered. It was quite a moment, a child making a young doll who just lost his home thinking about patriotism. That's what war brings to Ukraine and around the world.

I now keep Patriot on my desk as a reminder that the support the United States provides is not abstract; it's often the difference between life and death for Ukrainians on the front lines of this fight and for the future of the free world. It's a reminder that when Putin launched this vicious campaign with its war crimes and nuclear blackmail, he not only shattered life for Ukrainians from Kharkiv to Kyiv to Kherson, from Dnipro to Donetsk, from Lviv to Odesa, but he laid bare the consequences of appeasing tyrants who are intent on conquest.

And here I will be blunt: We can't allow Putin to succeed in his plan to erase Ukraine from the map of free nations. And if Putin wins in Ukraine, he will not stop there. And autocrats everywhere will feel emboldened to change the

status quo by force. And for the U.S., the price of defending the free and open international order that we depend on will go up exponentially. Democracies everywhere will be imperiled. Support for Ukraine is not simply a nice to have. It's a vital strategic investment in our own future.

Thanks, Max. I look forward to our conversation. (Applause.)

Mr. Bergmann: Well, thank you. Thank you, Undersecretary Nuland. Maybe let me start by asking about how you see the state of the war right now with U.S. aid essentially having dried up, and with Ukraine facing a Russian offensive, having to cede territory, now running short on ammunition. How do you assess the current state? And how long do you – you know, if we are not able to provide aid, what is the outlook for Ukraine?

Amb. Nuland: Well, it's obviously difficult, you know, as I made clear and as we see on the battlefield. That said, even just in the last three, four, five months, Ukraine has had significant successes. Most of them have been in the asymmetric realm, the damage they've been able to do to the Black Sea fleet, surprise attacks in places where the Russians weren't expecting them, good use of some of the long-range fires that the U.K. and others have helped provide. So the question, I think, is whether – you know, with increased U.S. support, many are saying the war will look like it looked in '23.

I don't think so. I think with increased U.S. support, Ukraine can make significant strategic gains, not just in today's fight but, as I said, in building that highly deterrent military for the future. And they're getting far better at things like drone warfare and other asymmetric ways of fighting. And they now have the space to begin to rebuild their own defense industry. We have U.S. companies that are interested in joining in that, as well as Europeans. But it will be a far better picture with this money.

Mr. Bergmann: So if Congress doesn't act – I get this question often, about is there a Plan B? Is the administration thinking about how it could get aid to Ukraine? Is there a way to get aid to Ukraine without Congress actually allocating the funding to do so?

Amb. Nuland: Max, we're on Plan A. We're on Plan A. And, frankly, you know, the U.S. Senate just passed this bill with 70 votes. So that tells you that the American people strongly support continuing to help Ukraine, in Ukraine's interest but also in our own interest. So I think the question, as the House of Representatives goes out into its districts, what message are constituents giving to their members of Congress? And how are members of Congress understanding what the world looks like, and how they're going to have to answer if they don't support this funding? So I am an optimist on this front. I think we will get there. But I think the American people need to speak strongly to their members.

Mr. Bergmann: And are you hopeful – right now in Brussels there’s conversations about the EU doing more to support Ukraine with the European Peace Facility. Is the administration encouraging the EU to do more as well, and European partners to do more as well?

Amb. Nuland: Yeah, well, as you know, the EU just passed \$54 billion in new assistance. And, as I said in my remarks, they’re already – you know, not just Europe, but Europe and our global partners are well outstripping us, including on the economic support pieces of all of this. And you see a lot of money in Europe now going into building up their own defense industrial base – to replace what they sent to Ukraine, but also to help Ukraine. And you see joint ventures between Europeans and Ukrainians, and other countries and Ukrainians.

So, you know, I think Europe is doing a lot. Those who went to the Munich Security Conference know that there is a good amount of angst in Europe about whether we’re going to continue to do what we need to do. And, frankly, you know, we need to send that strong message, as I said, not just for Ukraine but for global peace around the world.

Mr. Bergmann: Maybe we could shift a little bit. And I’m curious for your thoughts on Russian objectives now. And what is Putin trying to get out of this war? Do you think his stated – his goals have shifted? You know, it began with essentially a regime change operation effort to take out Zelensky and change the regime, as you noted.

Do you think that’s – is that still his objective and are you nervous about his ability to achieve that given Russia is now in a war economy and it may mobilize more of its people?

Amb. Nuland: Well, as we have been saying, even as difficult as it is on the battlefield in Ukraine now Putin has already failed at his primary objective. I mean, he thought it was going to be a cakewalk.

As we just have discussed, he thought he’d be in Kyiv in a week. He thought that the people of the East in cities like Kharkiv would say, yes, we’d like to be Russian, you know, and none of that happened and now he’s in this grinding war of attrition. Looks like World War I all along the line of control, and the only reason that Ukraine hasn’t made more progress there is that Putin doesn’t care about human life including the life of his own citizens.

I mean, there have been weeks all winter long where he sent more than a thousand Russian young men into a meat grinder to die to hold places like Avdiivka. So, you know, I think this is – he will never admit it, of course, but this has been far different than he expected, far different than his captured

intelligence services led him to believe and that's why we hear him saying, sure, let's have peace talks, because his version of peace talks is, you know, what's mine is mine, what what's yours is negotiable, and I think if he could get a pause now to rest and refit he would take it.

That's, obviously, not in Ukraine's interest. Ukraine needs to be in a stronger position now. But I worry that as long as Putin is in power he will never give up the basic goal which is to subjugate Ukraine.

You know, when I dealt with this the first time, you dealt with this the first time in '13, '14, '15, and '16 we thought we could perhaps negotiate a high degree of sovereignty for the East and he would get out.

That's not where it went. It went the opposite way. So what is to stop him even if there were a pause now or a fake peace now to just come back for the rest when he is strong enough, which is also why in the supplemental we have the money for today's fight but we have the money along with our 31 other partners to help Ukraine build this highly-deterrent military so it will be even harder for him if he tries again.

Mr. Bergmann: There's been a lot of talk, as you noted, about negotiations and whether Ukraine should negotiate, and members of Congress and others have pointed to, well, don't we need a negotiated end to this war.

I'm curious what your take is on the process of negotiations and how do you even have negotiations at a moment like this. Do you think negotiations are possible now or possible in the future?

Amb. Nuland: Well, wars generally end in a negotiation of some kind but we're not going to pick that moment for Ukraine. Ukraine will make those decisions for itself. It needs to be in a strong position and Putin needs to see that this will just get worse for him before he will move at all at the table.

As I said, you know, his current offer is, I keep what I've got and we'll talk about the rest that's currently yours, and that's not sustainable. But I do think if we can continue to support Ukraine, if they can have a strong 2024 of asymmetric warfare, Putin will probably wait and see what politics brings him.

But there is certainly a negotiation to be had when Ukraine is in a stronger position and, you know, we've made clear that if our help is wanted we'll be there.

Mr. Bergmann: There's oftentimes been concern by the Ukrainians and others that, you know, Russia would want to negotiate over Ukraine's head with the United States. I guess I'd ask you if you or the U.S. government have gotten any

indications that the Russians are trying to engage the United States in back channel negotiations over the Ukrainians' head.

Amb. Nuland: That's always the Russian way – you know, everything about Ukraine without Ukraine. You know, I faced the same when I was in the UR (ph) negotiating with Putin's guys in '15 and '16.

You know, they think that this is about the much larger chessboard, and this is the narrative of grievance that Putin has woven to try to justify what he has done, that this is about European security, that this is about NATO which, after all is a defensive alliance and never intended to come anywhere near Russia unless it was attacked, you know. So he will always try that.

But we are resolute. And the Ukrainians are resolute that they lead in any discussions of this. And nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine.

Mr. Bergmann: Let me ask you about the death of Russian opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, last Friday. The president back in June of 2021 noted that there would be, I think, devastating consequences for Putin if Navalny were to die. He's now died in Russian captivity. Is the administration planning any action? Or has the United States essentially used up the sanctions bullets and other things that we would have to hit back at the Kremlin?

Amb. Nuland: Well, first of all, just to underscore what everybody knows, it is Vladimir Putin who is responsible for the death of Alexei Navalny, his most vocal and effective critic, first by poisoning him, then by locking him up, then by sending him to the Arctic. So there should be no mistake about that. We will have a crushing new package of sanctions, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of them, in the next couple of days. I'm going to wait and let the White House announced them. Some of them will be targeted at folks directly involved in Navalny's death. The vast majority of them, though, are designed to further attrit Putin's war machine to close gaps in the sanctions regime that he has been able to evade. But I anticipate that as time goes on, we will be able to put forward more and more sanctions on folks directly responsible for Navalny's death.

Mr. Bergmann: It's been part of the administration's policy that the United States does not have a regime-change strategy for Russia and has not been pursuing to change the leadership in the Kremlin. But it does strike me that the United States doesn't quite have a message to the Russian people. And I'm curious, what is the U.S. message to the Russian people? Do we see this war as being Putin's war? Do we see this war as being part of which the entire Russian populace is complicit, and therefore should be punished with future reparations? What is our broader message to the Russian public? Do we have one?

Amb. Nuland: So, Max, I disagree with the premise. I think we regularly speak directly to the Russian people. I do, the secretary does, the president does. You know, as horrific as this has been for Ukraine, Putin has also stolen the future for his own people. We talked about, you know, 350,000 killed or wounded. Think about how many families in Russia that touches. How does Putin explain sending so many young boys into this meat grinder, never coming home, a complete rejiggering of the economy so it is all about the war and not about education or technology or integration with the world?

Everybody else is investing – including the United States – in our future. And Putin is investing in death and destruction. And, you know, you’ve seen the, you know, 1 percent, Russia’s billionaires and hundred-millionaires have their own futures greatly curtailed. But you’re also – you know, I remember the years that I lived in Europe, we used to see, you know, hundreds and hundreds of middle-class Russians on the beaches of Europe and being able to enjoy a middle-class European life. No more. So that is what he has done.

And our message to the Russian people is that you too are victims of the choices that Putin has made. You didn’t choose this war. You didn’t choose this future. He’s denied you, you know, a free press, a free politics, economic opportunity, sanctions are curtailing your opportunity to go study and live abroad. And this is all the result of his imperial dream that you didn’t want, that doesn’t bring anything good for your life, but certainly denies you many good things.

Mr. Bergmann: Let me ask you about the sanctions, because there’s sort of a narrative now that the sanctions haven’t actually worked, that Russia’s defense industry is up and running again, is producing. I think you mentioned 2,700 tanks have been destroyed, but Russia’s defense industry is starting to ramp up. Russia’s on a war economy and able to find the parts and components, whether from China or through smuggling and through third countries. Have the sanctions worked as intended? Or how would you assess the overall sanctions effort?

Amb. Nuland: Well, again, we’re trying to prove a negative here.

Mr. Bergmann: Yeah.

Amb. Nuland: If we had not had the sanctions, how much more materiel, support, ability to take components and electronics and high technology from all over the world would Putin have had, which he would put – have put a hundred percent into the war machine? But you’re not wrong that he has – he and his tricksters have found a lot of ways to evade sanctions, which is why, when you see this package that we’re going to launch in a couple of days, it is very heavily focused on evasion – on nodes and networks and countries that help evade, willingly or otherwise; and on the banks and support and allow that kind of evasion; and some of the inputs for the weapons.

And again, you know, we should all be horrified that he is now getting drones made for him not only in Iran, but by Iranians in Russia; that he's cut some deal with Kim in the DPRK, and who knows what kind of technology Russia is trading to get 155(-millimeter) ammunition that it's using on the battlefield in Avdiivka, right? So this is massively destabilizing.

And further, to, you know, the question about the future that Putin is giving his own country, you can see week on week, month on month the greater economic integration and dependence that Russia has economically/strategically on China. Is that the future that they want?

Mr. Bergmann: There are reports that the Russians may be getting more advanced ballistic missiles from Iran. If so, what would the implications of that be, do you think, on the battlefield? And is there a response that the United States could do?

Amb. Nuland: Well, I'm not going to get into intelligence. I know you will – that you will understand that. But you know, obviously, the proliferation of Iranian missile technology has been something that we worry about all over the world, and Russia used to be part of our community trying to prevent that from happening because that kind of production could someday be aimed at Russia. But this is – this is the future that Putin has chosen for Russia, that it is dealing with pariah states on these kinds of issues. And, obviously, we have to watch every evolution on the battlefield and we have to help the Ukrainians counter it.

Mr. Bergmann: This is, of course, an election year in the United States.

Amb. Nuland: Including, by the way, having just found, you know, DPRK missile parts in parts of Ukraine, so.

Mr. Bergmann: Yeah. This is, of course, an election year in the United States. It's a big election year in Europe, with European parliamentary elections. There's elections all over the world. It seems in Europe in particular there's an increasing concern about Russian hybrid threats – about Russian active measures, the Russian intelligence services being quite active. A recent report from our friends and colleagues in London, RUSI, highlighted that Russia's intelligence services may be sort of back with a vengeance in Europe. Are you concerned about, A, the threats to elections; B, the undersea infrastructure or other targets that the Russians may pick out? And do you think we have an ability to really deter such, you know, maybe forceful Russian responses when we've – you know, are about to level a whole nother package of sanctions? Have we kind of shot all our arrows, I guess is the question? Do we have an ability to deter Russia short of kind of a military deterrence?

Amb. Nuland: So if you're talking about election disinformation and election interference, that is a whole nother front on which we and our allies and partners, since we saw this in – for the first time in the United States in 2016, have had to work on – and obviously, we all who – all of us who are having elections in 2024 have had to spin up our cooperation and our information sharing.

You know, I always like to say that sunshine is the best disinfectant. So what's most important is, as soon as we see this happening, whether it's from Russia or any other malign actors, we have to inform our publics. We have to educate them that they shouldn't be fooled by this stuff. But you know, it's harder when you have supporters of Putin's ideology inside the politics of some of our countries who are, you know, eager to help amplify that narrative. And then they have to think about, do they want our countries to be dependencies of Russia going forward?

Mr. Bergmann: Maybe I'll ask one or two more questions, then we'll take just a couple from the audience. We don't have a lot of time. But the situation in Ukraine itself, Zelensky just replaced his top general, Zaluzhnyi. This happens in warfare. But are you kind of – is there any concern that you have about the direction of politics in Ukraine, as we enter the third year? Are your interlocutors exhausted? What is the kind of mood that you get from your engagement with Ukrainian leaders?

Amb. Nuland: Well, of course, two years of bloody, awful war, with war crimes and the kinds of destruction of innocents and civilian infrastructure and all of that, takes a toll. I think I'm grayer.

Mr. Bergmann: (Laughs.)

Amb. Nuland: You know, certainly Zelensky is.

Mr. Bergmann: I also have – (laughter) –

Amb. Nuland: Exactly. Exactly. So, you know, that is partly why we try to visit and meet on a regular basis, is to give strength and give support, give – make sure that Ukraine knows that it's not alone. But as Ukrainian leaders led by Zelensky themselves say, their greatest strength in all of this from the beginning has been their unity. You know, when he chose not to leave the country, nobody else led the country – left the country. And they – you know, Ukraine over many decades has like many countries, our own included, had fractious politics. But this war has been uniting in a way I think Putin didn't expect. And, you know, Ukrainian leaders counsel their own. And they need to stay vigilant about that unity.

Mr. Bergmann: We'll go to questions from the audience. Let me ask you one more. There's been a critique of the administration throughout the conflict that has been

too cautious and too slow and providing weaponry to Ukraine. As someone who worked in the security assistance side, I'm quite impressed with the speed at which many of the weapons have gone out the door. But cautious on certain weapons systems that were seen as escalatory, and the administration was sort of self-deterred. Do you think that's a fair criticism? How would you – how do you view that narrative that's out there?

Amb. Nuland: Well, what we've tried to do week-on-week, month-on-month, now year-on-year, is calibrate what we're sending to the precise needs on the battlefield, to what we're hearing from Ukrainians, to what's available. As you've seen, it's been a massive effort to find particularly air defense systems, et cetera, around the world to meet all of the Ukrainian needs. And we will continue to do that. By the same token, it is important that we not trip this into a larger European war. Ukraine doesn't want that. We don't want that. And, you know, thank goodness so far that's been avoided. But you have to be careful with Putin.

Mr. Bergmann: Just on that, is there a concern about when Ukraine is starting to use its own weapons to strike Russian soil? Is that something that you're concerned about? Do you encourage it? Do you just dissuade it? Do you feel that that could escalate the conflict? Or is that sort of the nature of a war between two states?

Amb. Nuland: I'm obviously not going to talk about our private messages to Ukraine. I would simply say that when you see the asymmetric things that Ukraine is now able to do, it is matching things that Russia has already done, largely.

Mr. Bergmann: Mmm hmm. Great.

So, with that, let me see if there's any questions from the audience. Yes, sir. Right here. And we'll take that one. Wait for the microphone. And if you could introduce yourself, and keep it to a question.

Q: Sure. This is – I'm Miles Pomper from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies.

And following up on sort of Max's last point, there's a couple of things that the administration could do without additional funding from Congress that would help with weapons deliveries. They could allow the more modern ATACMS to be sent by allies, if not from the U.S. And the U.S. could allow its weapons to be used to strike Russian territory. And Secretary Stoltenberg actually had a comment on that today, about this should not be off limits. So I'd appreciate your response to that.

Amb. Nuland: Again, I'm not aware of the U.S. preventing allies from sending weapons to Ukraine. Maybe you can send me what you are concerned about. But, again,

I'm not going to comment on whether this – on choices that Ukraine makes about where it strikes or about the advice that we give them.

Mr. Bergmann: Right here.

Q: Thanks. So Michael Birnbaum from *The Washington Post*. Good to see you.

I have a question sort of thinking about how you've handled – or, how the administration has handled weapons deliveries over the last two years. To what extent you think the shape of the war and Ukraine's battlefield successes might have been different had you sent long-range fires earlier? To what extent they've been constrained by the U.S. caution that, you know, we've all been talking about here.

And then also, I was curious – I was also just in Munich. And, you know, you mentioned there's no Plan B. The U.S. focus on a Plan A, the very large CODEL in Munich, everybody – all the Americans saying: Don't worry, Europeans. We'll sort through our political issues here. Ultimately, the supplemental will somehow be passed. Wondering if that is, in your perspective, the best message to the Europeans, or if it would have been more helpful for Ukraine and for the Europeans to have a sort of American acknowledgement of political unpredictability here earlier, so that the Europeans could plan accordingly? Thanks a lot.

Amb. Nuland: I think the fact that the Europeans passed their own \$54 billion package, which was pretty massive by their standards, well before we were able to get even the Senate vote speaks to the fact that they wanted to lead, and they wanted to set an example, including for our own – for our own Congress. So that it would remove an excuse that we've heard a lot from members that, you know, the rest of the world is not doing enough. So I don't think there was any – there's been any question about the Europeans being concerned about where we might be going. And in fact, the steps they took, I think, were helpful in getting 70 senators to pass the full package in the Senate. And I hope made an impression, including on the House members who went to Munich.

Regarding the war, I'm not going to Monday morning quarterback if you'd done this or done that. I think what we see is that Russia had quite a bit of time to dig in World War One-style, as I've said a couple of times, with these awful trench lines. And because they don't value human life, and because the Ukrainians have to fight in a way that we would never fight – meaning with no aviation top cover – it's been a much different war than people have seen in a long time. And, you know, I'm hopeful that we are all learning from that. Certainly, the Ukrainians are in moving to more asymmetric tactics.

Mr. Bergmann: We have time for one more. We'll take back here.

Q: Hello. My name is Martin Mühleisen, nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council.

Regarding the future willingness of Europe to support Ukraine, I have two concerns. One is that there seems to be a sense in Europe right now that Ukraine may not be successful in continuing the war much longer and they may actually focus their attention more to defending themselves in the future against Russia at the borders.

And second, there will be European Commission – or, European Union elections and there are elections in many other countries where some of the parties may gain or win that have been skeptical about help for Ukraine in the first place. How do you assess that? And how do you assess the willingness of Europe in the future to help?

Amb. Nuland: Well, first, on Europe protecting itself, you know, all of us have to invest not only in Ukraine fight, but in rebuilding our own defense industrial bases because we have, you know, given so much to Ukraine and we've also understood that some of these systems that we thought we would never need – you know, 155(-millimeter) artillery – are clearly still part of the kit. So the fact that, as I said, with regard to our own package so much of it goes right back into the U.S. economy to replace and allow us to send other stuff to Ukraine, it serves a threefold purpose, right? It helps Ukraine, it provides jobs in the United States, and it serves as an economic stimulus. And I think countries like Germany are starting to see the same requirement. And so that's – that is a good thing.

And I think right now we haven't seen an either/or in Europe. We've seen a yes/and, including, again, countries like Germany looking at how you build weapons in Ukraine both for their market, for the global market, et cetera. So that is what we need to foster going forward. And I will tell you as somebody who works all around the world some of these really basic systems – you know, we make Cadillac of weapons, but some of the most basic stuff is needed by every – all over the place, by countries defending themselves against terrorism and other things.

So, you know, I think we just – we've learned a lot in the last year or two. And I think at the NATO summit here in Washington in July you'll see a big focus not only on Ukraine, but on investing in our own defense.

Mr. Bergmann: Maybe one final question from me. At the Munich Security Conference, there was a lot of pessimism. Are you pessimistic or are you optimistic about Ukraine's future and our continued support for Ukraine and where this war will go?

Amb. Nuland: I'm always an optimist, Max. I'm an optimist by nature, but I'm also paid to be an optimist. (Laughter.) That's what we do. We get up every morning and we try to make it better – better for Ukraine, but also better for the free world and for the United States.

Mr. Bergmann: Well, Undersecretary Nuland, thank you for your optimism. Thank you for what you do every day. And please join me in thanking Undersecretary Nuland. (Applause.)

(END.)