

Washington Square Citizens League

Discussion Group

7:00-8:30 pm, Monday, October 2, 2023

How the Ukraine War Could Reshape World Order

Lynn Miller, moderator

Russia's nearly two-year-old war on Ukraine is the most serious conflict in Europe since World War II. It was drawn the United States and other NATO countries to provide substantial military support to Ukraine, helping to stave off that nation's defeat while not yet assuring its ultimate success in driving out Russia. It now appears that the war may drag on for some time.

There is much for us to discuss. We may consider how possible outcomes could impact US Security policy, reshape the Western alliance, alter the place of Russia in world politics, and help determine the direction of European politics for years to come.

#1 The counter-offensive: Are Ukraine's tactics working?

The Economist, September 16, 2023

KYIV AND WASHINGTON, DC

Slow progress on the battlefield prompts quarrels over strategy

DMYTRO KULEBA, Ukraine's foreign minister, is a smooth and affable diplomat, unruffled by the trickiest questions. But on August 31st his patience snapped. "Criticising the slow pace of the counter-offensive equals...spitting into the face of the Ukrainian soldier who sacrifices his life every day," he told journalists. "I would recommend all critics to shut up, come to Ukraine and try to liberate one square centimetre by themselves." That outburst was prompted by weeks of stories in the American press, in which anonymous officials took issue with Ukraine's slow progress on the battlefield and questioned its military tactics. The row is unseemly. But is Ukraine's approach working?

Allied debates over strategy are hardly unusual. American and British officials worked closely with Ukraine in the months before it launched its counter-offensive in June. They gave intelligence and advice, conducted detailed war games to simulate how different attacks might play out, and helped design and train the brigades that received the lion's share of Western equipment. Even so, Ukraine - stung by a big leak of American intelligence documents unearthed in April - kept its own counsel. It delayed the start of the offensive and held plans close to its chest.

One big point of contention was Ukraine's earlier decision, over the first half of the year, to keep fighting for Bakhmut, a town in the eastern Donbas region that has limited strategic significance but became a symbol of resistance. Ukraine's decision to defend the town at all costs had a "big influence" on the subsequent counter-offensive, argues Konrad Muzyka of Roch.an Consulting, a firm that tracks the war. Ukraine burned through its stockpile of shells while Russia gained time to build up its formidable defences in the south - the so-called Surovikin line, named after a now-fired Russian general.

Quarrels persisted even after the counter-offensive began. American officials had encouraged Ukraine to concentrate its forces on the main axis of attack in the south, towards the Sea of Azov. Instead,

Ukraine split its forces with the aim of stretching the Russians over a longer front. The most experienced brigades, armed mostly with older gear, were kept in Bakhmut, where they are making modest progress on the town's flanks. One source says that politics is playing an unhelpful role in military strategy, with well-connected brigades around Bakhmut getting a larger share of scarce ammunition than military considerations alone might warrant.

Meanwhile Ukraine deployed less experienced brigades on the more important southern axis, armed with newer kit. They quickly became bogged down in dense minefields covered by Russian artillery, drones and helicopters. Untested commanders made a series of mistakes, such as running into friendly mines and mistiming attacks. "If more experienced Ukrainian brigades were given the new equipment, they may not have committed many of the errors the new brigades made," write Michael Kofman and Rob Lee, both experts on Russia's armed forces, in an essay for War on the Rocks, an online journal.

Some blame for early missteps lies with those who helped plan the counter-offensive. In a recent paper Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), a think-tank in London, argue that the assault relied in part on out-dated assumptions that did not take into account the threat from new sorts of sensors and drones. They conclude: "Much of the data supporting the tactics that Ukraine's international partners sought to train Ukrainian forces to adopt was based on operational analysis from the 20th century that did not contend with a range of technologies employed in Ukraine." Russian fortifications were also far more substantial than Western planners assumed.

Wherever the fault lies, it is clear that something went wrong. "It seems that Kyiv had no contingency plans that could be quickly implemented in case the attack stalled," notes Mr Muzyka. Eventually Ukrainian commanders decided to hold back their heavy armour and switch to a simpler approach. Groups of sappers, often crawling on their bellies, now clear minefields by hand. Platoons and companies, rather than brigades, fight tree line to tree line, advancing on foot so as to present a smaller target. This has helped limit losses of men and equipment, but allows only 700 to 1,200 metres of progress every five days, notes the RUSI paper, giving Russian troops time to "reset" their defences (the rate may have picked up a little of late).

That leads to two debates. One is whether Ukrainian commanders have been too risk-averse. Some Western officials argue that if Ukraine had stuck with bolder and larger-scale attacks, as planned, they would have taken higher casualties at first but had more luck breaking through Russian lines, shortening the offensive and reducing the overall toll. Ukrainian officials retort that this would only have led to more bloodshed, and that officers could not expect a heavily depleted citizen army to mimic Russian human-wave attacks.

A second debate is whether Ukraine should emulate a Western way of war or carve out its own path. Western armed forces prize the idea of combined-arms manoeuvre, in which armoured forces synchronise their movement with infantry, artillery, air defence and (increasingly) electronic and cyber-attacks. The five weeks of pre-offensive training given to Ukrainian troops in Germany was not nearly enough to make them proficient in this sort of warfare.

"The Ukrainians are still tied to Soviet doctrine," complains an American official. Heavy artillery barrages, in place of more judicious and precise attacks, are one source of tension, not least because America is playing the lead role in sourcing ammunition for Ukrainian guns. "It's going to take time for their mindset...and tactics to change," says the official.

In fact the Ukrainian approach is fit for purpose, says B.A. Friedman, a retired artillery officer in the US Marine Corps and author of a book on military tactics. In the spring of 1918, after years of stalemate

on the western front of the first world war, the German army realised that large units were too vulnerable to artillery fire. Their solution was smaller, nimbler and well- drilled "storm troopers" who could cross enemy lines and grab territory, with heavier units moving up later. "Since Ukraine doesn't have the ability to use air power on any kind of relevant scale, it makes total sense to solve the problem the way it was solved before air power matured," says Mr Friedman. Many European officers acknowledge that their own better trained and equipped armies would struggle to break the Surovikin line.

Fighting about fighting

American officials are not well placed to offer lessons on tactical best practice, says Mr Friedman. The bulk of their recent experience of combat has been in mountainous or desert areas where small units cannot take advantage of cover to advance in this way. The two main training centres for America's ground forces, the army's site at Fort Irwin and the marines' location at Twentynine Palms, are both in Californian desert environments, he points out. "us forces have very little experience facing anything like what Ukraine is facing, whether in combat or in training."

The problem is: nor does Ukraine. Mr Watling and Mr Reynolds argue that attrition of officers and the dramatic expansion of Ukraine's army over the past 18 months mean that it lacks sufficient junior leaders with expertise in offensive operations. The result, they say, is that decisions are thrown up to more senior officers, overwhelming brigade headquarters that already have a lot on their plate.

They give the example of a Ukrainian attack on the village of Rivnopil in Donetsk province earlier in the summer. Attackers are supposed to release smoke to cover their movement and confuse the enemy.

But only 3% of Ukraine's artillery fire missions involved smoke in part because senior commanders did not want to obscure their own view of the battle from drones circling overhead. The lesson is that Ukraine needs more junior officers who can be trusted to take the initiative even when their bosses cannot watch from afar.

The quality of training is important, too. Western training facilities are hobbled by a "safety culture in NATO", argue Mr Watling and Mr Reynolds. Drones are central to Ukraine's tactics, allowing artillery units to spot targets and infantry to perform reconnaissance. Yet most NATO training areas impose tight restrictions on when and how drones maybe flown, for fear they will veer off course. Safety rules also mean that artillery skills are typically taught later in courses. But in Ukraine "troops who are not prepared to deal with artillery are not prepared for the fight," write the RUSI analysts. Europe's health and safety rules are not a good fit for a war of national survival. Most of these issues will not be resolved during the current counteroffensive. Ukraine will eventually need to reintroduce mechanised and armoured forces if it is to exploit any breakthroughs. That could get easier: minefields are less dense beyond the first line of defence. It is thought to have enough ammunition to fight through the autumn. But on September 10th Mark Milley, America's top general, said that Ukraine probably had 30 to 45 days of combat left before rain and mud would make it too difficult for vehicles to advance.

In recent weeks Ukraine has made faster progress in the south by piercing the first of Russia's three defensive lines in Zaporizhia around the village of Robotyne, widening the resulting salient by pressing east to Verbove and then attacking towards the village of Novoprokopivka (see map). On September 13th it struck with missiles a shipyard in Crimea used by Russia's Black Sea fleet, setting vessels ablaze. Russia has had to commit reserves from its 76th air assault division; but it has been able to be- cause Ukraine threw in its own in August.

It is not clear how much fresh man- power either side has left. Rates of attrition appear to favour Ukraine

over Russia, but sources suggest that Russia can probably still scrape together enough reserves to plug holes. "Unless there is a collapse of Russian lines, the battles we have seen for the past three months are the ones we will likely continue to see over the next few months," concludes Mr Muzyka, who argues that only the deployment of larger formations, beyond Ukraine's capacity, would speed things up. Dozens of Western officials consulted by *The Economist* are also sceptical that a major breakthrough will come before winter. "We've got to extend our timeline," says one of them. "This could be a very long struggle."

#2 Assessing Ukraine's progress: The third line

The Economist, September 9, 2023

WASHINGTON, DC

A rare interview with America's Defence Intelligence Agency

AFTER THREE months of aching slow progress, Ukraine's counter-offensive is gaining some momentum. Near the southern village of Robotyne, Ukrainian troops have pierced the first of Russia's three defensive lines. They are now attacking the second. "Had we had this conversation two weeks ago, I would have been slightly more pessimistic," says Trent Maul, the director of analysis for America's Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA). "Their breakthrough on that second defensive belt...is actually pretty considerable." Can Ukraine breach it, and the third line beyond, before shells become scarce and winter beckons?

Mr Maul, whose DIA office on the Potomac river periodically shakes as *Marine One*, the presidential helicopter, shuttles to and fro from its heliport next door, is charged with answering such questions.

The job of his agency, which is less well known than the CIA, is to take the military measure of America's foes. That often requires quantitative judgments: the range of an Iranian missile or the size of China's fleet. An annual DIA report, "Soviet Military Power", was read avidly during the cold war. But intangibles are just as important. Mr Maul singles out the will to fight - and candidly acknowledges that his agency got it wrong in Iraq in 2014 and Afghanistan in 2021, where American-built armies crumbled almost overnight.

"We thought the Afghans would fight until the end of the calendar year and try to have a heroic defence of Kabul," says Mr Maul. Instead, "they basically folded pretty quickly." That experience, along with the evaporation of the Iraqi army in the face of the Islamic State group, led DIA to "over-correct" when judging how Ukraine would fare when Russia invaded last year. "We had a similar thought that they were just overwhelmed on paper." It has proved a teachable moment. Mr Maul brandishes a 40-page "tracraft note", published this January, which re-examines how the agency measures a country's will to fight.

The paper emphasises how national factors - for instance, Volodymyr Zelensky's insistence on staying in Kyiv, compared with Ashraf Ghani's decision to flee Kabul - can affect the battlefield. It points to the importance of leadership on the front lines, an army's esprit de corps, the strength of its command and control, and whether it enjoys sustained logistical and medical support. Such things were neglected because of the presumption that Ukraine's leadership would be outmatched and defeated quickly. It is to guard against that sort of error that DIA analysts now fill out a detailed worksheet to help them think through these factors and how they can interact in unexpected ways.

This methodology is crucial when it comes to assessing the coming weeks in Ukraine. Mr Maul says that the DIA will be watching for signs that Russia can keep up the flow of artillery ammunition to the front lines and maintain leadership at the local level. He concedes that American and Ukrainian officials

failed to appreciate the depth of Russia's defences and how difficult it would be for Ukraine to "smash through" them with armour. Ukrainian generals have told the *Guardian* newspaper that 80% of Russia's effort went into building its first and second lines. But Mr Maul cautions that the bulk of Russia's reinforcements remain at the third.

In recent weeks American officials have privately sniped at Ukrainian commanders over their military strategy - in particular the decision to deploy experienced units in the east around Bakhmut rather than on the key axis in the south. Mr Maul is more tactful. "It's open to debate whether the Ukrainians have deployed the sort of tactics that you would hope would have made more aggressive gains in a shorter time," he offers. More important are two critical variables: Ukraine's stockpile of ammunition, vital for sustaining the artillery barrages that enable progress, and the weather, which becomes wetter in the autumn.

One Biden administration official says that Ukraine has around six to seven weeks of combat left before its offensive culminates. There are private disagreements over how much progress can be made in that time. Some reckon that Ukraine's army, having thrown in most of its reserves prior to breaking the second line, and taking heavy casualties attempting to breach it, is unlikely to get far. "If you look at the battle-field in five years' time, it could look broadly similar," says a senior American intelligence official, emphasising that the quality of both Russian and Ukrainian forces is declining over time.

Mr Maul is somewhat less gloomy. He notes that Sergei Surovikin, the Russian general who built the defensive lines, and Yevgeny Prigozhin, whose Wagner Group mercenaries achieved Russia's most tangible gains of the past year, are both off the battlefield - the former sacked and the latter dead in a plane crash. Mr Maul, choosing his words with care, says that Ukraine's recent successes are "significant" and give its forces a "realistic possibility" - intel-speak for 40-50% probability-of breaking the remaining Russian lines by the end of the year. But he warns that limited ammunition and worsening weather will make this "very difficult".

Attention is already turning to the next fighting season. Even without a break-through this year, the DIA is moderately confident that if Ukraine can widen the salient around Robotyne, hold its positions and keep ammo flowing in, it will be well placed for a fresh push in 2024.

#3 Corruption in Ukraine: Zelensky's shuffle

The Economist, September 9, 2023, KYIV

The president removes his defence minister and goes after an oligarch

IN THE SPACE of two days last weekend, Ukraine saw two big corruption stories make the news. At face value they show the government wresting back the initiative on reform. On September 3rd President Volodymyr Zelensky said he would replace his defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, following months of corruption scandals at his department. A day earlier the SBU, Ukraine's domestic security service, had detained Ihor Kolomoisky, a controversial oligarch, on suspicion of fraud and money-laundering. There are questions about the timing and nature of both interventions.

Mr Zelensky focused on his minister's role as a brave and trusted comrade over 550 days of war. But in recognising the need for a change, the president was acknowledging that his record has been tarnished. Mr Reznikov was seen by many, including Western partners, as a charismatic and resourceful negotiator. He was in the inner core that stayed in Kyiv throughout the invasion, despite the huge dangers.

To his detractors, however, he will be remembered for two scandals, involving eggs and winter coats. The journalism of Yuriy Nikolov had exposed both. In February his investigations revealed that Mr Reznikov's ministry had been paying 17 hryvnia (46 cents) for eggs when the market price was just five. Mr Reznikov survived that scandal, only to be hit by another in August, which showed his ministry had bought military coats from Turkey, also apparently at a huge mark-up. Invoices in Turkey showed the coats had a value of \$29, rather than the \$86 paid by Ukraine.

Government insiders say Mr Reznikov does not appear to have had a direct hand in either of the contracts. He did not appoint the officials who signed the deals. But his poor handling of both scandals, including picking fights with journalists about irrelevant details, made his departure inevitable. "The defence minister had become a focus of jokes," says a source close to Ukrainian law enforcement. "That's not a good look at a time of war."

The presidential office also appears to have had an eye on the polls when taking on Mr Kolomoisky. Once one of Ukraine's most powerful men, the oligarch has been a much diminished figure since the nationalisation of his main banking assets following allegations of serious fraud. Mr Kolomoisky had at one point been close to Mr Zelensky, with the oligarch's 1+1 TV channel promoting first his comedy and then presidential ambitions, but the two have also slowly fallen out.

The role of the SSU, a service controlled by the president, in taking on Mr Kolomoisky has, however, raised eyebrows. The law-enforcement source says the more independent (and Western-backed) National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) had been planning to issue charges against the oligarch later this week. Some interpret the ssu's move as an attempt to steal the headlines from NABU - or even less charitably, as an attempt to disrupt the case and allow Mr Kolomoisky to avoid court.

The eventual resolution of both stories will go some way in determining how willing the West is to continue to underpin funding for Ukraine. But Mr Nikolov says that the renewed focus on corruption is positive: it can only help expose crooks in government. The price of a military egg is a good indicator of the effectiveness of his work. It's back down to seven hryvnia.

#4 Even on vacation, there's no escaping Vladimir Putin's murderous intentions

At a London theater, I was reminded what befalls those who misread Putin's long-term strategy, as President Biden is doing with Ukraine.

by [Trudy Rubin](#) | Columnist, The Philadelphia Inquirer, Published Sep. 6, 2023

I'm just back from a theater vacation in London and a week in Scotland, which were meant to help me recoup from a strenuous work trip to Ukraine.

Things didn't exactly work out that way.

The first London play I attended was *Patriots*, a powerful drama about Vladimir Putin's revenge on the onetime "godfather" of 1990s Russian politics, Boris Berezovsky, who had facilitated Putin's rise to power.

I interviewed Berezovsky in the mid-1990s at the Davos World Economic Forum, when he was at the peak of his power, and considered himself superior to Putin. He bragged that he and fellow Russian big

business oligarchs were the “robber barons” who would bring their country into the modern age “as the Rockefellers and Carnegies did in America’s 19th century.”

Putin never forgave Berezovsky’s superiority complex.

The Russian tycoon was found hanged on March 23, 2013, while living in forced exile in Britain. (The coroner was unable to conclude whether he committed suicide or was strangled.)

On Aug. 23, three days after I saw *Patriots* (on a day I also took in the violent power struggles of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* at the Globe Theatre), current events forced visions of Putin’s vendettas back onto my mind.

That was the day the private plane of onetime Putin pal — and Wagner private militia commander — Yevgeny Prigozhin exploded in midair over Russia.

Wagner won the only substantial victory for Moscow in Ukraine, and Prigozhin was hailed as a hero. But the plane explosion came two months after Prigozhin organized a brief, unsuccessful mutiny against Putin’s military chiefs, whom he believed were doing a bad job in Ukraine.

The militia leader apparently thought he was too important to be murdered.

Both Berezovsky and Prigozhin badly misread Putin. So, I fear, does the White House.

Indeed, these two oligarchs’ fates provide a flashing red-light warning about the incoherent U.S. strategy toward Ukraine, and the apparent White House failure to fully grasp what Putin is up to. Three points in particular come to mind.

First, Putin holds his grudges and will continue to seek revenge for what he regards as humiliation.

Berezovsky made the mistake of underestimating Putin’s determination to destroy those who challenged or betrayed him — no matter how long it took.

Prigozhin misconstrued the Kremlin leader’s initial indecision after the mutiny as weakness. But Putin used the next weeks to remove the mutineer’s control of his Wagner militia — then played on Prigozhin’s inflated ego to make him think he was impervious to assassination. Wrong.

In the case of Washington and the West, Putin made clear in his 2007 Munich speech that he fully blames them for the “tragedy” of the dissolution of the Soviet empire — the ultimate humiliation. He wants Washington’s recognition of his right to rebuild that empire under Moscow’s domination, with Ukraine as its heartland. He will not give up this aspiration unless he is militarily defeated.

Any U.S. or European misperception that Putin is willing to negotiate a compromise that recognizes Ukraine as a viable state is self-delusion as deep as that which doomed Berezovsky and Prigozhin.

Putin would only use negotiations with Kyiv — as he has done before — as an opportunity to rebuild his forces and restart the war.

Second, Putin plays a poor hand well, preying on Western weaknesses. With Berezovsky and Prigozhin, he played on their inflated egos, as he did with former President Donald Trump — and will do again if Trump wins in 2024.

With the Biden administration, Putin has cleverly played on its fear he will use nuclear weapons if Ukraine crosses his redlines. The goal is to persuade the West that it's too dangerous to give Ukraine the weapons it needs to retake Crimea, and actually defeat Russia.

Yet no matter how many redlines have been crossed, Putin refrains from using nukes. That is because he knows that will hurt him more than help him, losing the support of China and finally making him an international pariah. His major concern is keeping power, not committing political suicide. Russia's nukes are only valuable so long as Putin doesn't use them, and the Kremlin can tout them as a potent threat.

If the West continues to be intimidated by this threat, he will use it again and again, including against Western European nations. Who would then believe that NATO would go to war to save Estonia, or Finland?

Third, and most importantly, Putin is counting on Western nations to be as shortsighted about his intentions as were the two dead oligarchs. He is playing for time.

Just as he patiently waited to move against Berezovsky and Prigozhin, a long war plays to Putin's advantage. He knows manpower is precious to Ukraine, but he cares not how many men he loses, and is hoping for more weapons from North Korea.

He hopes to wait out the West's patience with supporting Ukraine financially and militarily. He is clearly hoping for a Trump victory that leads to a complete aid cutoff to Kyiv.

The White House, to Putin's probable delight, seems glued to a strategy that guarantees a long war, which Ukraine may not be able to sustain.

The Biden team hoped the current Ukrainian counterinsurgency would do enough damage in a short time to bring Putin to the negotiation table (a useless proposition unless the Russians are clearly defeated).

Yet Biden continues to refuse or delay the key systems — long range ATACMS missiles and F-16 warplanes — that would make faster Ukrainian progress possible. It refuses to recognize that only NATO membership for Ukraine will stop Putin's dreams of empire.

The longer the White House fails to recognize the Kremlin's goals and help Ukraine defeat them, the bigger the risk to Kyiv, to NATO, and to the West.

President Biden must stop misreading Putin before it is too late.

#5 Zelensky accuses U.N. of inaction on Russia's invasion of Ukraine

The Ukrainian leader called for suspending Moscow's U.N. Security Council veto power as it stymies the most punitive proposals in response to the invasion

By Michael Birnbaum and John Hudson, The Washington Post, September 20, 2023

UNITED NATIONS — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Wednesday denounced what he called U.N. Security Council inaction on Russia's invasion of his country, in a rare interaction with senior Russian policymakers inside the United Nations.

Clad in an olive-green military-style shirt, Zelensky demanded that countries that violate U.N. principles and unjustly invade other nations be suspended from their Security Council seats. He spoke just steps away from the fiery Russian ambassador to the United Nations, Vasily Nebenzya, who scrolled through his phone and stared ahead with apparent indifference as the Ukrainian leader delivered his address.

"Most of the world recognizes the truth about this war," Zelensky told the chamber. "We should recognize that the U.N. finds itself in a deadlock on the matters of aggression," he said. "World leaders are seeking new platforms and alliances that could reduce the disastrous scope of problems, the problems that are met here within these walls with rhetoric rather than real solutions, with aspirations to compromise with killers, rather than to protect lives."

Zelensky's appearance at a U.N. Security Council debate came a day before what U.S. and Ukrainian officials deem a series of crucial conversations in Washington. He is scheduled to start the day with meetings in Congress, visit the Pentagon to meet its top leadership and then visit the Oval Office in the afternoon.

Amid cracks in Republican support for continuing to fund Ukraine's war effort, Zelensky's Washington outreach received a boost Wednesday when House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) agreed to host a meeting with him and other House members Thursday morning. The development followed days of ambiguity from the Republican leader, who had refused to say whether he'd talk to Zelensky as certain members of his fractious caucus seek to curtail U.S. support for the war.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley on Wednesday evening briefed the Senate on recent developments in the Ukraine war and the need for continued U.S. assistance. Senators declined to describe any specifics of what they had learned in the classified briefing, but Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) said that assuring the administration's request for additional assistance was urgent.

"If we don't attach money to the [continuing resolution], there will be immediate supply chain issues for Ukraine," Murphy said in an interview. He said the briefing "confirmed" that urgency.

Zelensky's visit comes at a "critical time, as Russia is reaching out" to countries like North Korea and Iran, said White House spokesman John Kirby. Biden can get a "battlefield perspective from the Ukrainian commander in chief" as the counteroffensive aimed at retaking Russia-occupied territory grinds onward, Kirby said.

The Security Council debate was Zelensky's second appearance at the U.N. gathering, following his speech to the full assembly Tuesday. His address Wednesday was filled with specific proposals to

broaden Security Council representation and to suspend Russia's veto power over the body, which has stymied the most punitive U.N. proposals in response to the invasion.

But it was the proximity of Zelensky to the Russian delegation that held the most charge on Wednesday. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov skipped Zelensky's appearance.

Instead, it was Nebenzya in the Russian seat at the table. He only briefly glanced at the Ukrainian leader as Zelensky leveled complaints about the Russian "aggressor" and spoke of what he called the need for greater global representation among the permanent membership.

Zelensky left the Security Council following his remarks to the world body, declining a faceoff with Lavrov, as neither official appeared interested in dignifying the other with his presence.

Richard Gowan, a U.N. expert at the International Crisis Group, said in a text message that Zelensky's emphasis on Security Council reform was "both smart but a little idealistic."

"He will have struck a chord with a lot of UN members that think the Council needs a serious overhaul. But the obstacles to UN Charter reform are also very high," he said.

Zelensky's early departure also meant he missed the remarks of key Western allies, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who used his speaking slot to accuse Russia of demonstrating "contempt" for the U.N. system.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is "betting that if he keeps doubling down on the violence, that if he's willing to inflict enough suffering on enough people, the world will cave on its principles, and Ukraine will stop defending itself," Blinken said. "But Ukrainians are not giving up."

Lavrov, who arrived at the council shortly before delivering his remarks, assailed the United States for meddling in Ukraine, accusing Washington of buying off Ukrainian officials. He also attacked the Security Council for "selectively" respecting the U.N. Charter.

Other leaders who were in the chamber said that Lavrov's address left little hope for a resolution to the conflict anytime soon.

"With almost every country, including China, you can find some common ground," Czech President Petr Pavel said in an interview. "With Russia, it's like we move into parallel universes. Their vision of the world is, to a large extent, sometimes deliberately different from all the others."

"I don't see any chance on starting meaningful discussion," he said.

China's vice foreign minister, Ma Zhaoxu, touted China's efforts at facilitating negotiations in the conflict, saying his country has "played a positive and constructive role" in attempting to resolve the crisis through its [12-point peace plan](#). That document, which calls for ending hostilities and beginning peace talks, has drawn little criticism from most countries, but it has not gained traction since Beijing put it forward earlier this year.

As leaders and diplomats filed into the chamber ahead of the debate, no one appeared to want to talk to the Russians. As others mingled, Nebenzya sat alone at the curving table and occasionally turned around to exchange words with the other Russian diplomats behind him.

Then, as proceedings got underway, he interrupted the debate, attempting to use procedural rules to force the Ukrainians to speak after all the members of the Security Council, rather than at the outset.

“They’re trying to transform [the Security Council] into a one-man stand-up show,” Nebenzya said. Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, who is holding the council president’s chair this month, fired back, saying “there is a solution for this, if you agree. You stop the war, and President Zelensky will not take the floor.”

Russia’s veto “has paralyzed the council but has not reduced it to silence,” he said later in the debate.

U.N. Secretary General António Guterres also called for an end to the war, condemning Russian action that he said was endangering not only Ukrainians but also the entire world. “Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, in clear violation of the United Nations Charter and international law, is aggravating geopolitical tensions and divisions, threatening regional stability, increasing the nuclear threat, and creating deep fissures in our increasingly multipolar world,” he said.

Ukraine’s fiercest backers had hoped for a White House announcement during the Zelensky visit to deliver the long-range ATACMS, the Army Tactical Missile System, that Ukraine has said would help it target Russian headquarters and critical resupply routes that are located far from the front. But Kirby, the White House spokesman, appeared to suggest that the move was unlikely this week.

“ATACMS are not off the table. We continue to have discussions about that particular weapons system, but no decision has been made,” he said.

Wednesday’s U.N. diplomacy coincided with a high-level Chinese visit to Moscow, with Foreign Minister Wang Yi opting to skip New York in favor of meeting Putin. The Russian leader praised “the high level” of Moscow’s relationship with Beijing, underscoring how the nations found common ground against U.S. “hegemony.”

“As for international affairs, we stand here from a united position on the formation of a multipolar world, and not a world based on some rules that no one has seen and which change every day for the benefit of those who came up with this ridiculous formula,” Putin said.

#6 Russia’s kidnapping of Ukrainian children under the spotlight at the UN

President Joe Biden and Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky denounced Russia's deportation of Ukrainian children at the U.N. General Assembly.

By <u>Trudy Rubin</u> Columnist, The Philadelphia Inquirer Published Sep. 20, 2023, 5:00 a.m. ET

When President Joe Biden urged world leaders on Tuesday not to diminish support for Ukraine, he used a phrase whose importance you may have missed. Speaking at the U.N. General Assembly, Biden charged (correctly) that Russia’s price for peace is “Ukraine’s capitulation, Ukraine’s territory, and *Ukraine’s children*.”

I’ve added italics to those last two words because of Moscow’s policy of illegally transferring tens of thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia proper, or Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine, and trying to transform them into good little Ukraine-hating Russians.

In his own speech to the United Nations, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky also denounced Russia's seizure of his country's children as "purely a genocide." That Russian war crime goes to the heart of why Ukraine believes it must win this war.

According to official data from the Ukrainian government, at least 19,546 children have been transferred illegally to Russian control since the war began. However, those numbers only include cases reported by a parent or guardian. The real figures are probably much higher, and there is no record of whether those children have been adopted or sent to Russian orphanages. Only 386 have been returned.

In a war where bombing civilians is central to Russian military strategy, no war crime seems too heinous to Moscow — from bombing schools, markets, and hospitals to torture, rape, and murder in Russian-occupied cities.

Yet there is something especially evil about kidnapping children, which relates directly to Vladimir Putin's belief that there is no such thing as a Ukrainian nationality and that the state has no right to exist.

According to this thinking, deporting Ukrainian children makes sense: All Ukrainian youngsters should ultimately be "reeducated" to love the Russian motherland and despise the Ukrainian "Nazis."

"Forced deportation and adoption of Ukrainian children is one of the elements of a war of genocide," Ukrainian Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin told me when I visited Kyiv in July. "This is a matter of intentional policy."

That is why the International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Putin and his commissioner for children's rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, alleging their responsibility for the war crime of unlawful deportation of children from occupied areas of Ukraine.

Russia has weaponized food (blocking Ukrainian grain exports) and energy (making threats to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, which it occupies), as Zelensky pointed out. It has also weaponized ecology, blowing up the Nova Kakhovka dam, which flooded cities, farmlands, and animal life. As if this was insufficient, Putin has even weaponized Ukrainian kids.

"The Russians use different ways to take the children out of Ukraine," Kostin related, "not only taking them from orphanages but from families."

In some cases, parents in occupied Ukraine were encouraged to send their children for "rest and recuperation" to camps in Crimea that sought to reeducate them. Many kids were bused there directly from school without parental permission. Many never returned.

During the Russian destruction and occupation of Mariupol and other cities, many thousands of children from orphanages, boarding schools, shelters, and hospitals were taken to Russian-controlled areas, even though they might have had family members elsewhere in Ukraine. Children weren't allowed to call friends or relatives, who had no way to find them. Phones were taken away. Young children were put up for adoption.

Often, children were in shelters because their families had been killed by Russian bombing, as in Mariupol, where Russia flattened the city and refused to permit a humanitarian corridor to let civilians exit.

Moscow has made propaganda out of kidnapped children, filming youngsters being given toys and candy and being “happily” adopted. “Children are a sacred cause. We took them out of the conflict zone, saving their lives and health,” said the utterly cynical Putin in June. Naturally, he never mentions that most of the children were displaced or orphaned by Russian bombs.

A recent documentary called *Uprooted*, produced by the Kyiv Independent newspaper and available on YouTube, interviews some of the few children who were rescued by incredibly brave relatives or guardians.

I interviewed one of those relatives featured in the film, Valentina Yermachkova, who was a 19-year-old student in Dnipro when the war started. Her mother and brother were killed by a Russian shell as they sought food after the Russians invaded Mariupol. Her two younger sisters were moved to a hospital in occupied Donetsk, but not allowed to contact relatives. Fourteen-year-old Sofiia had hidden her brother’s phone and eventually managed to sneak a call to her older sister.

Yermachkova, on her own, took buses through Poland, Lithuania, across Russia, and back into occupied Donetsk, and demanded the return of her siblings. “I was afraid, but I knew I had no choice,” she told me when I met her and her sisters in Dnipro. “Now I realize I might have gotten stuck there, too.” She now studies law in the hopes she can work on efforts to rescue other Ukrainian kids.

Rescuing children is one main reason why Prosecutor General Kostin will arrive in Washington, D.C., this week to discuss the issue with top U.S. officials; it will also be raised at side meetings during the U.N. General Assembly. “Bringing our children back is a priority,” Kostin told me, “for us as a state and for the civilized world.”

“Countries in the global south that suffered in the past from violations of basic human rights need to understand that this evil will return if they put their short-term interests higher than their values,” Kostin insisted. He was referring to countries such as South Africa, which maintains close ties with Russia and isn’t supporting Ukraine.

Whether Ukraine can retrieve its stolen children is a huge question mark, and U.S. officials should offer any help requested. But public focus on the issue is rightly aimed at those leaders worldwide, and in this country, who still seek to shake Putin’s hand.

#7 Zelensky blitzes Washington in urgent effort to bolster support

Ukrainian president visits Congress, Pentagon and White House amid signs of flagging GOP enthusiasm for aid to Kyiv

By Tyler Pager, Abigail Hauslohner, Alexandra Heal and John Hudson

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When Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky last visited Washington, it was a top-secret journey and his first trip outside his country since Russia invaded Ukraine. He received a hero's welcome at the White House and on Capitol Hill that day in December, evoking comparisons to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's wartime visit to Washington in 1941.

Zelensky returned here on Thursday to dramatically different circumstances. A growing number of Republicans are vowing to reject additional aid for Ukraine as a U.S. government shutdown looms. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) denied the Ukrainian leader's request to address a joint meeting of Congress, and Zelensky was unable to tout any major breakthroughs in his military's current counteroffensive against Russia.

For Zelensky, the immediate challenge on Thursday was to cajole lawmakers to support the Biden administration's latest request for \$24 billion in military and humanitarian aid for Ukraine. "I am in Washington to strengthen Ukraine's position to defend our children, our families, our homes, freedom and democracy in the world," Zelensky said at the start of his meeting with President Biden in the Oval Office.

In private, his request was even more dire: "If we don't get the aid, we will lose the war," Zelensky told members of the Senate in a closed-door meeting, according to Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.).

Perhaps the most high-stakes meeting of Zelensky's trip to Washington was with McCarthy, who is navigating a right-wing rebellion among House Republicans on spending for Ukraine and other matters. Instead of convening a large forum for Zelensky to appeal to House lawmakers — as Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) did in his chamber — McCarthy met privately with the Ukrainian leader and peppered him with questions related to accountability, strategy and tactics, said people familiar with the meeting, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive exchange.

McCarthy zeroed in specifically on how open-ended the conflict might be and whether Ukraine's military is using U.S.-provided weapons in a responsible manner, the people said.

The Ukrainians did not view McCarthy's tough questioning as isolationist or politicized, the people familiar with the meeting said. Kyiv views McCarthy as a sympathetic, albeit embattled, figure whose speakership is under tremendous strain. Both sides felt the meeting was productive despite Ukraine's trepidation about a collapse of support among House Republicans, the people said.

McCarthy on Thursday signaled appreciation for Zelensky's leadership, applauding his efforts to root out corruption by replacing his defense minister and removing other officials working in defense procurement, changes that McCarthy suggested had been "requested." And some of McCarthy's allies suggested he was favorably inclined toward providing Ukraine with more weapons.

“The speaker, like me, has shown strong support,” Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Tex.), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, told reporters after meeting with Zelensky. “But we’re frustrated with the administration’s slowness in [providing] the weapons.”

He said that McCarthy’s “takeaway” was that Ukraine needs ATACMS missiles — a type of long-range precision artillery that many hawks in Congress have been pushing for — as well as F-16 warplanes, and needs these things “yesterday.”

Biden announced a new package of military assistance for Ukraine that includes artillery, ammunition and air defense capabilities. White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said that ATACMS missiles were not part of this package but that Biden has not taken them “off the table in the future.”

Ukraine has promised it will not use Western weapons to strike targets inside Russia, preferring instead to strike at arms depots and logistic centers in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.

But while Democrats have lined up behind Biden’s proposed aid package, Republican hard-liners want to see the flow of assistance cut off entirely, and McCarthy has declined to publicly support more Ukraine funding. At times, the speaker has echoed the skepticism from some of his conference’s most conservative members, raising concerns about a lack of accountability around the funding and arguing that Ukraine lacks a “plan to win.”

McCarthy, who has spent the week struggling to calm a tumultuous dispute among House Republicans over funding the U.S. government, rejected Zelensky’s request to deliver a joint address to Congress because of “what we’re in the middle of.” Zelensky gave such an address when he visited Washington last year, receiving rapturous applause from both sides of the aisle.

McCarthy on Thursday also was conspicuously absent from Zelensky’s photo ops on Capitol Hill, which were joined by other congressional leaders, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.).

Biden, in contrast, has remained unequivocal in his support for Ukraine, arguing that if the world’s democracies abandon Ukraine, it would have devastating consequences and encourage other autocrats to invade neighboring countries. At the United Nations this week, the president sought to rally the world to continue supporting Ukraine, despite the economic pain some countries are feeling as a result.

At the White House on Thursday, Biden said the United States is committed to “supporting a just and lasting peace, one that respects Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

“No nation can be truly secure in the world if, in fact, we don’t stand up and defend the freedom of Ukraine from the face of this aggression, brutality and aggression,” Biden said.

For Zelensky, the visit to Washington came just after Russia launched its biggest missile attacks against Ukraine in weeks, increasing the urgency of his plea for additional funding. Sullivan said Zelensky is keenly aware of the U.S. political climate as Ukraine aid hangs in the balance while Congress remains mired in spending battles.

“President Zelensky is not coming here like a babe in the woods, not having any understanding that, you know, we have to work through as we approach the end of the fiscal year funding for the government going forward,” Sullivan said. “He recognizes that that’s going to be contested, that there are different perspectives.”

Still, Sullivan said, the White House remains confident Congress will end up passing the additional funding for Kyiv.

“There is a vocal, quite small minority of members who are raising questions,” he said. “There is a very strong, overwhelming majority of members, both Democrats and Republicans, who want to see aid continue, and I believe that’s where the American people are as well. So I believe that will shine through.”

But in the end, despite the White House’s ardent support for Ukraine, U.S. officials have made clear their ability to help Kyiv will be severely restricted if Congress does not approve the White House’s aid package. The future of that funding remains unclear, especially as the House Republicans’ disarray seems to be bringing a U.S. government shutdown closer.

“I am counting on the good judgment of the United States Congress,” Biden said. “There is no alternative.”

For the second time this week, House Republicans lost a vote Thursday to move forward a Defense Department appropriations bill, part of a wider battle between the party’s far-right and moderate factions over funding the government.

Republican leaders are also struggling to move forward on a stopgap bill that would fund the U.S. government beyond the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30. That bill would continue providing funding for the Ukrainian war effort at current levels, which is opposed by some hard-line conservatives who want to end U.S. support for Kyiv altogether.

After meeting with lawmakers, Zelensky told reporters he’d had “frank and constructive dialogue” on Capitol Hill. In the Senate, members of both parties described the gathering as respectful — Sen. John Fetterman (D-Pa.) said the Ukrainian leader displayed “a lot of gravitas” — but said Zelensky’s message also conveyed a sense of urgency.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) said senators did not shy away from asking Zelensky difficult questions during the closed-door meeting.

“What would you say to my constituents who question whether we should be spending all this money?” Blumenthal said, giving an example of the types of questions that were asked. “And, of course, the answer is, ‘They’re on the front lines against Putin, and he will keep going if he’s not stopped there.’”

Sen. Angus King (I-Maine), who asked Zelensky what Ukraine most urgently needs, said the Ukrainian leader reiterated his pleas for air defense.

“Not only for their military, but to protect their energy system, their water and electricity,” said King. “And that’s something I think we need to keep working on, and we need to work with our allies.”

During his day in Washington, Zelensky, who was joined by his wife, Olena Zelenska, visited the Pentagon and laid flowers at the National 9/11 Pentagon Memorial. He also met with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin; Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and other military leaders.