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**CAROL  
SAIVETZ:**

Welcome. Good afternoon. I'm Carol Saivetz, Senior Advisor at the Security Studies Program at MIT, and I want to welcome you to today's Starr Forum that looks at the anniversary of the Ukraine-- the beginning of the Ukraine war. I guess anniversary's not a great term. And it's going to look at the domestic implications-- domestic for Russia and domestic for Ukraine-- of the years-long war.

We have two wonderful speakers today. The first speaker is going to be Olga Onuch, who is a senior lecturer in politics at the University of Manchester in England. She's been a visiting professor at the University of Toronto and a senior research associate, and she is the author, most recently-- co-author, I should say-- of *The Zelensky Effect*, which looks at how ordinary citizens are developing civil duty and civil identity in Ukraine today. And I might add she's quoted in today's *New York Times*.

And our second speaker is an old friend of ours, Yevgenia Albats, who is a Russian investigative journalist, political scientist, author, and radio host. She is the editor and owner of *Novoye Vremya*, *New Times*, a Moscow-based Russian language independent political weekly. She also hosts a show on Echo Moskvy, *The Echo of Moscow*, and she is currently in New York, having left Moscow very recently. So let me turn the floor over to Olga to start our conversation.

**OLGA ONUCH:**

Hello to everyone, and thank you so much, Carol, for the introduction and for the invitation to be with you here today. Before I start off with my prepared presentation, I just want to clarify some terms.

So I think for Ukrainians such as myself and my family and friends who are currently in Ukraine and some folks that are at the front, it's very important that we call the events of the last 24 months Russia's all out war against Ukraine and that we also acknowledge that this all out war phase that began on February 24, 2022, is a continuation of what is now a nine-year war of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

And these things are very important to us, precisely because in order to understand what is happening and to understand the roots of this war against Ukraine, we must understand what's been going on. Of course, this is part of a longer history of Russian aggression towards Ukraine, imperial colonialism of Ukraine and Ukrainians. But that's not what I'm going to talk to you about today.

Let's start off very quickly with going back to the future, if you will. February 24, 2022-- a date that is etched in the memory of every single Ukrainian, be they in Donetsk, Mariupol, Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odessa, Lviv, elsewhere, maybe in Warsaw, maybe like myself in Manchester, in England, maybe in Cambridge, or in New York or Toronto.

The day is etched in our memory. It is incredibly difficult to be talking to you today on the anniversary of this date and with the acknowledgment that Ukraine continues to face just devastating violence, that its civilian population is not only directly affected by the destruction of their homes and their cities, but also by the deaths that are now starting to pile up higher and higher with each day, including children. And, by estimates, we expect that it's anywhere between 7,000 and 50,000 civilian deaths so far.

And so with that, this February 24 has not stopped. It continues for us every day. The shock and the feelings that we felt on that morning, calling desperately our friends and family to make sure that they're OK, to make sure that they are awake, to find out what they are doing, and the action that everyone had to take in the days that followed.

We keep reliving those days. My friends and family who are currently in Kyiv, who are at the front, who are in Kharkiv, who are in Lviv, they relive this day every single minute and every single hour of day.

So just to give you a little bit of an idea of the extent of devastation that Ukraine has faced internally-- so we have more than eight million refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe as of February of this year.

More than five million people on top of that eight million are estimated to be displaced inside Ukraine. It is also estimated that 17.6 million people currently inside Ukraine are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Of this, we have millions of children who are particularly vulnerable, and specifically UNICEF and other organizations have noted just the extent of vulnerability, malnutrition, and basic care that children in Ukraine currently need.

It is estimated that this is about 7.1 million children that need this urgent support. In a recent conversation with psychologists, I found out that according to their studies, post-traumatic stress disorder is actually at much higher rates in the general civilian population than it is in the military population. And there could be a variety of reasons why this is happening, but already we know that the extent of post-traumatic stress disorder within Ukraine is quite high and growing amongst the civilian population.

The Kyiv School of Economics estimates that the total amount of losses caused to the infrastructure of Ukraine has increased to almost 136 billion as of November of last year. This includes 143,800 destroyed homes and apartment buildings. In Donetsk Oblast alone, this is 78,000 buildings or homes that have been destroyed. In Kyiv Oblast province, this is 22,800 homes or buildings.

And I can keep going, because, of course, we know that the Russian military has specifically targeted civilian populations and civilian infrastructure. So just in heat supply facilities alone, in the last few months, 592 of such facilities have been damaged. The one incredible statistic that I can give you that follows up this horrific news is that almost 300 of that-- so just over half-- have been already restored by the Ukrainian state and the various agencies working to do this.

We know that the attacking civilian infrastructure and targeting civilian populations are war crimes. We have heard the American government representatives, but also international scholars, call these acts crimes against humanity. But also, according to other scholars, potential genocidal acts.

But I want to tell you a little bit about how Ukrainians have resisted throughout this last year. You have undoubtedly seen Ukrainians and their tractors getting rid of military hardware from their fields. Perhaps you may have also seen Ukrainians try to stop tanks with their bare arms.

And of course, you saw from the very first days of occupation in localities such as Kherson, such as Zaporizhia, people going out in quite large numbers and really surprising numbers to protest against the occupation. And of course, one might think that this is just the positive story that Ukrainians want to put out into the world. But the reality is that this resistance continues to this very day.

So one of the things that we have been engaged in with my colleagues is to set up something called Data for Ukraine. You can check it out at [www.dataforukraine.com](http://www.dataforukraine.com). And we collect information using the Twitter API on four specific categories that are relevant to the ongoing war-- humanitarian needs across the whole country, human rights abuses across the whole of the country, civilian displacement across the whole of the country, and civilian resistance across the whole of the country. I'm not going to go into the details of how we do this, but I can answer that in Q&A.

And if you ever want to feel a glimmer of hope about Ukraine, its society, its citizens, take a look at this map. We have near live real-time information updated every three hours for each of the categories that I just outlined. And you can look at this map. You can take away the categories of human rights abuses, humanitarian support needs, and displacement, and you can just look for the civilian resistance.

And every single day, there will be a dot on the map. At times it is very small. At times it is a great deal larger. But every single day, including in the occupied territories, Ukrainians are resisting their aggressor.

And further data also highlight this fact. We've conducted surveys with Henry Hale over the course of this past year. I was hoping to bring you some fresh data today because we have a survey in the field, but it didn't work out. But we have data from May and July of this year and also in the fall.

And by our estimation, about 80% of the Ukrainian civilian population is engaged in the war effort in some way. Now, this can be the regular-- not just one off, but regular donating of funds, volunteering in their community, engaging in civil resistance actions, civil disobedience, marches, boycotts where they are possible or where they are needed, volunteering in the territorial defense, and engaging in armed resistance themselves.

Can you imagine 80% of the civilian population answers, yes, that they are directly themselves engaged in the war effort? And most of the time when social scientists ask these types of questions, multiple choice, we provide the options, we also always provide the option of "other." Typically we do not get very many "other" responses.

But Ukrainians are giving us now hundreds of individual responses trying to detail exactly how they are engaged in the war effort. Now, we write about this with Henry in our book, *The Zelensky Effect*, because we think it's incredibly powerful. I'm not saying this just to inspire you. I am trying to communicate to you the extent of civic duty amongst ordinary Ukrainians, civilian population in Ukraine, and how they want their personal engagement in the war effort to be recorded.

So amongst the hundreds of responses that we received-- and again, I've never seen something like this before, to be perfectly honest-- we have making Molotov cocktails, making camouflage, packing up medications, food stuffs, maybe some hacking even reported in the survey, which is rare, again, in a survey, but nonetheless. So these are the types of things we would have expected.

And then you have the very personal stories. And if you can imagine, these are people who insist that the surveyor record this action. So we have an elderly person in the southeast of Ukraine who notes that they make a hearty soup and they carry it over to the forest where the military is. That is exactly the statement that they ask to be recorded. "So that our boys and girls don't fight on empty stomachs."

Another individual said that they took out of the soil, all their potatoes, and carried it over, again, to make a donation. Another individual, again an elderly individual that was formerly in unoccupied territory, said that they milked their goatlings because goatling milk is particularly high in protein, and again, the army needs good high protein milk in order to be able to fight.

Now, these aren't just meant, as I said, to be inspirational stories. These are incredibly powerful acts of civic duty, but they also provide an incredible morale boost for the Ukrainian army. Oftentimes, when people try to analyze what is going on in Ukraine and its quite impressive military defeats or ability to defend certain cities and towns and villages, they focus on the military hardware and military tactics. And of course, those things are all important.

But the secret ingredient here, and perhaps Zelensky's secret weapon, are these ordinary citizens that are able not only to show the army that they are in it with them, but also provide them an incredible amount of moral support. And that does allow an army to do more, perhaps in harsh circumstances and perhaps without the right hardware.

The other thing I wanted to quickly mention to you is that the civic duty, this incredible sense of strong civic duty that we are seeing on display in Ukraine amongst the civilian population, is not something that has only developed since February 24. In fact, in multiple of our studies, we find over the last nine years that civic duty has been on the rise consistently and specifically since 2019.

Increasingly, ordinary citizens have sought their duty to engage in elections, to volunteer in civil society organizations, and to engage in protest. So we are seeing a little bit of a wartime rally happening amongst the Ukrainian population, but this is something that has been building over time.

Thus, it is also possibly something that is far more resilient, and for those folks who are looking at that first year of resistance and worrying about the potential resilience of this civic duty and engagement, they can be assured that this is not simply from a wartime rally. This has been ongoing for some time.

And connected to this is the continued rise in support for democracy amongst Ukrainians. So we saw a big spike in support for democracy amongst Ukrainians over the last three years between 2019 when Zelensky was elected as president and February 16, 2022, when we were serving our regular project surveys.

In 2019, about 41% of the Ukrainian population believed that democracy was the best system for the country. On the eve of Russia's assault, all out invasion of Ukraine, February 16, 2022, that number went to just under 16% of the population. In that three-year period, in the context of a pandemic, we have about just under a 20 percentage point rise. So folks in Ukraine that have lived through 30 years of transition and democratization that did not see democracy as the best system for Ukraine began to see it in 2019 as such.

And then we do see a wartime rally. Putin probably did the most important work for consolidating support for Ukrainian democracy than anyone else in Ukraine's history. By the time May 2022 comes around and July 2022, that number is in the high 70s of the population.

Who were the movers? And this ties into the story of engagement and civilian resistance. Over the period of 2019 to just before the all out invasion of Ukraine, the folks that moved were of two groups. They were those who believed that under some circumstances an authoritarian government is best for Ukraine, and they were those who believed that it was hard to say or they couldn't make their mind up. So authoritarians and those who just found it hard to say after 30 years of democratization moved sooner to supporting democracy in Ukraine.

Who moved after the all out invasion of Ukraine started? These were folks that believed, up until February 2022, that for people like them, it doesn't matter whether they live in a democratic or non-democratic regime. Having that democracy forcibly taken away from them, seeing their fellow citizens live under occupation, brought them to support democracy as the best system for Ukraine.

This is what is, I think, most important now when we look at the internal dynamics in Ukraine-- although, I think looking at military strategy, looking at the massive reconstruction that will be necessary in Ukraine, all these are incredibly important aspects. But Ukrainians not only have shown resilience and resistance, but they have doubled down on the things that are likely to be, if not just simply very important, then perhaps even the most important element of their fight for victory, this incredible sense of a collective action to protect values and rights that are dear to them.

I think that is really impressive. We would expect that there be portions of the population that would become more polarized, more polarizing, more ethnonationalist, and we're not actually seeing that develop in Ukraine at all. And this is both the secret weapon, as I said, that Zelensky has in his tool kit, but it's also potentially an Achilles heel for any politician that oversteps.

Ukrainians are not willing to negotiate. They're not willing to give up any of their territories. So Ukraine-- the general Ukrainian population-- we're talking about 80% to 90%-- would like to see the territorial integrity of Ukraine fully restored to its 1991 borders, inclusive of, obviously, Luhansk and Donetsk in full but also Crimea.

And this is where the potential problems for political elite arise. They cannot negotiate that which they cannot deliver, because Zelensky is not the one that is building the nation. He is not the one that's making the Democratic Ukrainian nation. In fact, the Democratic Ukrainian nation is what made him who he is today.

And without their support he simply will not be able to deliver on any negotiations, and this is why I think you see him taking such a hard and strong line on this. So I think I'll end my remarks there. An ongoing tragedy. Incredible resilience and resistance. And it's not really about the political elite and leaders, it's about the ordinary Ukrainian citizens that are willing to fight. Thank you.

**CAROL** Thank you so much. That was a great portrait of what's happening and the dynamics within Ukraine today.

**SAIVETZ:** Yevgenia, over to you.

**YEVGENIA** You cut me off? Yes, OK. Can you see me?

**ALBATS:**

**CAROL** Yep. Great. Thank you.

**SAIVETZ:**

**YEVGENIA** So thank you very much, MIT. Thank very much Carol and everyone involved. Thank you for inviting me to talk at this distinguished forum.

**ALBATS:**

But before I say anything else, let me say that I feel ashamed and sorry for what my country, Russia, of which I am a citizen of, has done to Ukraine, in Ukraine and to its people. I am truly sorry for that. I am ashamed of that, and I bear responsibility that Russian opposition failed to stop Putin before he went into this awful war and destruction of two countries at once.

Now, talking about-- I was asked to speak about the situation in Russia. 12 months after the war started, of course, the biggest suffering is in Ukraine, hundreds of thousands dead on both sides, cities destroyed, infrastructure destroyed, life destroyed.

In Russia the regime has turned into a regressive one, as it was expected. In fact, I just looked at the presentation I made at MIT right before you went under COVID restrictions, and it was a presentation about the development of Putin's regime right after Putin conducted coup d'etat after the fires they set in Latin America when he rewrote the Constitution in accordance with his own needs.

And the last slide was it will get worse before it will get better. And I think by then, in 2020, it became already clear that Putin was aiming at the war. And of course, he was aiming at the war in Ukraine. In fact, he used Syria as a place, as a polling call to prepare for that war. So what we have in Russia now is we have a dictatorship.

However, it's yet to become a Stalin-type of regime, though we should expect that it may evolve into worse forms of repressions. The latest numbers suggest that there were initiated 187 criminal cases on charges of so-called spreading of disinformation about the Russian army. That is the coverage of atrocities in Ukraine. Carol, you mentioned that I was the editor in all of *The New Times*. *The New Times* was blocked three days into the war.

I ran a talk show at Echo Moskvy, the only liberal station left by then for 19 straight years. It was called *Absolute Albats*, and this was closed 10 days into the war. *The New Times* kept working and keeps working, even though people in Russia should use VPN to hear us. And as a result, I was indicted on four counts for spreading misinformation about the Russian army.

That was the coverage of the war in Ukraine, specifically in the verdict it was written that we wrote about Russian army bombing Kharkiv and Luhansk and Dnipro and Odessa, and that was a part of the disinformation. We also were charged with disinformation about Russian army killing civilians all across Ukraine, and it was also assumed as disinformation. Why?

Because minister of defense never mentioned on its website that Russian army bombed those cities in Ukraine and never mentioned civilians also. Why minister of defense never mentioned? Because commander in chief said that it wasn't a war, it was a special military operation which aimed in preventing Ukraine to invade Russia.

So for that I was indicted and fined the amount of some 790,000 rubles, which is approximately \$14,000. And then later, in early August, I was pronounced a foreign agent working on behalf of Ukraine, believe it or not. And that's how I-- after that my lawyers, in no terms, told me that next was going to be jail time, so I left Russia.

However, some of my friends were not that lucky or decided to stay no matter what, as Ilya Yashin did, who got eight years and six months in penal colony for producing a video piece on crimes committed by the Russian troops in Bucha in the suburbs of Kyiv. And as we speak, he is in jail.

Another friend, Alexei Navalny, was sentenced to nine years at the maximum security penal colony for being a fierce critic of Putin. During all these months in jail, he made endless anti-war speeches. Navalny himself is half Ukrainian. His father is Ukrainian. And a lot of his family is spread all across Ukraine. And his imprisonment is turned into everyday torture.

20,000 people in Russia were arrested for their protest of the war in Ukraine. 6,000 Russians were accused on so-called administrative charges, like me. It's somewhat like misdemeanor in the United States.

149 different media organizations and media outlets were banned in the Russian Federation. 59 media organizations in Russia pronounced as foreign agents. Obviously, my *New Times* is one of them. 189 individuals were pronounced as foreign agents. As I said, I'm one of them. And as it was stated in the document that we received from the Ministry of Justice, all of us were working basically on behalf of Ukraine.

And so now Russia doesn't have any civil society left because as a result of-- or right after the beginning of the war, and then after September 21 when Putin announced mass mobilization, hundreds of thousands of Russians left. There are different estimates of how many Russians are now outside the country, and the numbers are all the way from one million to two million.

But those people who were able to leave, who have some means to survive outside their home country, who have money to rent, and who have some skills to sell on the market, so to get their bread and butter. So these are the people who most likely constituted the act of protest that existed in Russia until the war started.

The development-- also, each and every opposition media outlet got closed. Everything was substituted with a propaganda channel. However, it is also true that Russia became the second country after India in terms of the amount of VPN downloaded-- Virtual Private Networks-- which allow you to read what is prohibited inside Russia, which were downloaded inside Russia by Russian people.

To be honest with you, I'm still struggling to understand how the nation, which was 27 million people in the war with Nazi Germany, turned into aggressor state which conducts this genocidal war in the neighboring country Ukraine. 11 million Russians have their first degree relatives in Ukraine. Many of us have our roots in Ukraine. My grandmother was born in Khmelnytskyi district in Ukraine.

My father, Mark, fought Germans during the Nazi invasion in the city of Mykolaiv. I was there. So now Federal Republic of Germany provided tanks to fight Russian invaders in Ukraine. To cut this painful story short, there are lots for us to understand about the silence on the part of the Russian society.

I think one thing is clear cut, that this war was in the cards the minute Putin was chosen as a successor to Putin and the minute the KGB operator became the president of Russia. I've been doing tons of presentations all across the globe which was titled "Putin's Silent Coup," trying to convince that members of the graduates of the KGB, whom I call graduate members of this corporation, were taking all the most important positions in the Russian government and in the state-affiliated monopolists and corporations.

They got into their control all kind of most lucrative businesses which stuff the coffers, like oil and gas and money inflow and outflow, but they also use this money to rebuild Russian military industrial complex and prepare for the war. We do know that Putin first annexed 20% of territory of Georgia in 2008, and basically was just patted a little bit.

It was said that he shouldn't do this, but that was it. And he realized that he could do whatever he wanted in the so-called Russian sphere of interest. Next, of course, was the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and beginning of the war, which, of course, started in Donbas back in 2004.

Once again, all kind of sanctions were introduced against Russia and then they were dropped. Sanctions were dropped after the annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the war with Georgia. I don't want to say that it is the West to be blamed for this war. Of course, we, Russian citizens, who allowed for this regime to thrive are responsible first and foremost for what's going on.

However, I think it's also important-- it's also a failure on the part of political science and Russian field to see the dangers that came out of preserving the old institutions of the Soviet Union. This war was inevitable, and basically if we look in the history of this type of regimes, we do see that after all the fire, they usually go into wars. So I think I will stop here. I will be happy to answer your questions.

**ELIZABETH  
WOOD:**

Thank you so much, Yevgenia and Olga. These are fantastic presentations. So Carol and I will be taking questions. I'm Elizabeth Wood, professor of history at MIT. And we usually moderate the questions from the audience, but we often ask one question from ourselves to start with. And since we are at MIT, though, we have a much larger audience.

We have 379 people on this call. I'm curious if each of you can speak of what people at MIT can do to help. Olga, you mentioned especially this wonderful [dataforukraine.com](http://dataforukraine.com) and you talked about civilian resistance, but I would love it if you'd talk a little bit about humanitarian needs and civilian needs that we could be helping with at MIT. We have a new MIT Ukraine program that is mobilizing students and faculty to work on topics that are of interest.

We've had a question on the chat about dual use technologies that maybe could be used, and I think it would be very helpful for all of us to hear how can we help. Maybe it's donating. Maybe it's developing new technologies. I'd love to hear your perspective.

And then maybe, Yevgenia, you could also speak briefly. Can we do anything to help Russia? I'm obviously much more worried about Ukraine, but the question of what-- the Russian civil society is a mess, so how can we help? But Olga, maybe you can answer first.

**OLGA ONUCH:**

Thank you. Yes. So I think most importantly is not to replicate action, but to work collaboratively and complement. So there are already incredibly-- well, I mean, a variety of Ukrainian-organized, Ukrainian-led initiatives, and joining those, I think, is a good first step. So if you are a scholar that works on misinformation, disinformation, and uses big data, there is a strategic communications outlet in the army.

If you are so inclined to cooperate with the Ukrainian army, this is one place that you can work with and you can develop, like we have, using Twitter open API and open data sources also. There are multiple initiatives at institutions such as the Kyiv School of Economics that I would encourage people to check out.

I mean, they do everything from crunching numbers and analyzing things through the lens of economists, but also working with a variety of scientists on, at this moment, we are just providing-- the word just escaped my-- generators to schools. But what can we do outside of providing generators? Is there another technology that can be used? Is there something else that we can develop to support schools?



There are Ukrainian organizations that are also collaborating with Kyiv School of Economics but also directly with the president's administration on developing-- and this is awful to say-- but specialized bulletproof jackets for children because when you evacuate schools and children directly from the contact line or directly from a town that's engaged in very hot exchanges, we don't have things to put children in, and yet children are directly shot at. All right?

So these are the sorts of technologies that are being developed by scientists. There's so many that I can't list them all, but I would actually just encourage scholars and scientists to look at what is already being done. There's a team out of Stanford also doing a variety of things.

And to collaborate, not replicate necessarily, because I think that happened a little bit in the first few months where we were replicating a lot of our actions, and we're far stronger and better-- well, we reach better ends when we work together in specifically centering Ukrainian voices in the process. So you might have a skill set that is important, you might have a technology that is relevant, but looking to Ukrainian partners on how to develop that technology forward.

Just to give you an example of Data for Ukraine, it is a combination of scholars who some work on the region, some do not work on the region. Some are data scientists, some are not data scientists. But we combined our efforts, and without the Ukrainian speakers in the team, we wouldn't have been able to do this work. But without the data scientists and their labs, we also wouldn't be able to do the work. And this collaborative effort allowed four different projects, four different labs to do something that is being used by organizations including the OECD and others.

**CAROL  
SAIVETZ:**

Great. Yevgenia, I wanted to ask you-- well, let me put it this way. There's a great contrast between what Olga described and what you've described in terms of the activism of the Ukrainian population versus this description that we all see in the press every day of the passivity of the Russian population.

What is your sense-- not of the civil activists, yourself included. But what is your sense of the population, the average citizen of Russia's response to the war? Do more of them share your view that this is a crime but they're just afraid to express it, or is it really this picture of the propaganda is working and there's no hope of any kind of uprising or any kind of protest against the regime?

**YEVGENIA  
ALBATS:**

Again, I thank you for your question. Before the war, the last more or less coherent poll we had in Russia was in October of 2021. It suggested that Putin's popularity was about 30%. Since then we don't have any real polls. The response rate is 5%, so basically those who are afraid to answer and now it's a crime to say that you're against the war.

Again, I was indicted for using the word "war and invasion." They're both prohibited by Russian censorship. So you couldn't expect really people to say what they mean. Now, imagine for a sec, Carol, that you wake up each morning like I did for several months on the road. I kept my balcony opened and I was waking up each morning trying to figure out whether the car which stopped by my entrance, whether it was an FSB car which came to conduct a search and to arrest me or not.

And you live like that every day. Each evening you turn on all your computers and try to figure out where, if there's any possibility at least to save one phone somewhere. Can I put it underneath something? Or it's useless. Before Ilya Yashin was jailed in July of 2022, I asked him to come to my place, and we walked around my apartment and we were trying to figure out where can I put my laptops and my phones so when they come to search my house they wouldn't find them.

And then we came to the conclusion there was one place, and probably it was good only for one phone. And that's, Carol, how you live day after day. And you know that all your communications are taped. That whenever we have any guests, they're probably also taped. You never know who comes to your house. When you leave your house and get into the car, you are followed all around.

When they shut down the majority of independent websites in the regions, it became impossible to understand what was going on in the regions of the Russian Federation. So what I used to do, I would get into my car and I just drove to different places-- Krim, Pskov, Novgorod, all around Russia-- in order to-- and what I did? I went to the markets and asked people there and I tried to ask people on the streets.

I also tried to find some friends or colleagues to help me to meet with some people. When I came at some point to the city Novgorod-- beautiful city. And I didn't book my hotel ahead of time on purpose because I'm a very experienced person, right? So I went into this hotel, and in the evening I had a meeting with some person who lived in Bucha.

And he came in and said, Yevgenia, there is a [INAUDIBLE] car in front and they are making pictures of each and every one. And I'm sorry, they already fixed me, but I cannot ask my friends to come. And then the next three days that I was in Novgorod, this car was driving my car all around-- everywhere. It was done openly on purpose just to show me that don't dare-- and of course, you know, I was-- the number one rule for journalists, you don't put in danger your sources.

So that's why, Carol, it's not about passivity of Russian people. I will just ask you, imagine for a sec that you live in this kind of environment on a daily basis. You can say-- I can tell you that in my close bubble, those who left and those who are still in Russia for different reasons, every one, each and every one is against the war. What can we do?

If you go on the street, people were arrested for having just a white thing alone and having just white piece of paper. Nothing. Or having in their hand the Russian credit card called Mir. So it is a very repressive regime. But what is worse than that is that those who are capable to lead these possible protests-- Putin, he's a smart guy. He's a smart son of a bitch, and his KGB guys spend life developing skills and techniques how to deal with opposition.

That's why he tried to kill Navalny in 2020 and that's why the minute Navalny entered Russia, came back to Russia on January 14, 2021, he put him in jail. Precisely because people live by example. People need some leaders who can tell them, guys, I'm with you on the streets. Don't be afraid, or even if you're afraid, we should overcome this.

When Navalny came back to Russia, people came out-- even though it was very, very cold-- minus 28 degrees centigrade. People came on the streets in 193 cities all across Russia. And they traveled later on to different cities, to Volgograd, to Saratov, to Samara, and et cetera. And everywhere I was told, never before we saw so many people on the streets.

Navalny was seen as somebody who was capable to overcome. Putin tried to kill him and he survived. It was almost a biblical story. But they put him in jail. And they put Ilya Yashin-- who also, time and again-- Yashin was asked, are you going to leave, and Yashin kept saying, no, I'm not going to it.

They brought three misdemeanors against Ilya Yashin. He refused to leave. The interrogator-- his interrogator told him, we were telling you, leave, and you just decided to stay. And he decided to stay because he's a politician. That's his job description.

Yevgeny Roizman, a well known politician in Yekaterinburg, the city in the Ural mountains. Once again, shut down. There's a criminal case against him. He's under house arrest, no access to internet, no to anything. Now, you would say that my fellow citizens, they're cowards. They are. Apparently, these 30 years, first of turbulence, then of more or less a key life. Russians never lived that well as they lived before 2014.

They never received that amount of money, never in the history of Russia. They got sold out for this. Yeah. You're probably right. You probably are right. But given that I am now in the luxury of New York University facing the-- where there's a 19th Place and 8th Street, I wouldn't blame those who stay there because I myself packed my suitcase, got the most important of my books and left. And I lost, Carol, everything. I'm 64 years old.

I am homeless. I will be basically jobless. All my books are back there in Russia, and I have nothing left. It's not an easy life to be an immigrant, even with my PhD from Harvard and with everything else. So to cut the long story short, no. We know from the history of other regimes of that kind, other countries which had a similar regime, especially in Latin America, there are not going to be any popular uprising.

This is going to be elite politics, and sooner or later elites will realize the cost of prolonging this awful war have become unbearable to them. In this case, I don't know what they're going to do to Putin. Don't ask me to say this. But we know from the history of Russia that there were all kind of means and ways how to stop some czars from being czars.

So anyway, to cut a long story short, there will be some sort of a coup d'etat, though don't expect that this will bring Democratic politicians in power. But at least you know this-- it's very important because it will allow to break the spell of the all-powerful dictator. So that's my answer to you.

**CAROL** Thank you.

**SAIVETZ:**

**ELIZABETH WOOD:** Thank you. Thank you, Yevgenia. So let's turn to a question that's been much in the chat, and I'd like to ask Olga to comment. People are asking, how can the war end? What might be any terms that Ukrainians are willing to settle for?

Obviously, I know well that I have not yet met a single Ukrainian who is willing to give up any territory, but is there any way that you can see an end to the war? What would it mean and what would it take? And maybe you also want to respond to what Yevgenia was saying [INAUDIBLE].

**OLGA ONUCH:** Yeah, Elizabeth. I think it's really important. Yevgenia-- I just Ukrainianized your name, if you don't mind. But, in no way to disparage the work that you've done or that your colleagues have done, but you really cannot compare the repression against activists and opposition in Russia to the plight of Ukrainians.

And quite frankly, it's insulting to the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians that did show up on their own protest squares and were shot at by snipers to be told that it's Russia who is only the repressive state and this is why its citizens don't turn out onto the streets. In fact, just as many names as were mentioned-- and I think Navalny is not the most exceptional character because he has a checkered past on his comments when it comes to Ukraine's territorial integrity, although that has changed, indeed.

But certainly, I mean, Ukrainian-- even not talking about Ukrainian dissidents but just talking about independence era Ukraine, we have had some incredibly repressive periods. Just the things that you have described were the things that were occurring under Kuchma. Gongadze was not only killed but beheaded, in fact. So I think this is not-- it doesn't-- just because there is repression in Russia it doesn't excuse inaction.

And there are actual surveys that are being conducted-- problematic as they may be, there are experimental survey designs that are being used in Russia to get at maybe getting people to say their true preferences and not so much their falsified preferences or reporting what they think. And we still know that, using experimental designs, there is a large percentage of the population that simply sees this as a just war as well.

And whether that is 40% or 30% or 60%, this is a large proportion of ordinary Russians that sees Ukraine in a different hierarchical state to Russia, that sees Ukrainians as a people in a different hierarchical state to Russians, and that are OK with this. That are OK with an imperial vision.

And they are, in fact, supporting this, and we can't deny that. Furthermore, what happens to Russian opposition or those who have fled Russian repression but are now in London, in Berlin, in DC, in New York, in Toronto. Why haven't we seen large actions but rather very small actions? Berlin has a large Russian population but we have not actually seen large Russian-led anti-war demonstrations.

So I think the story is a little bit more complex than simply repression. And one thing I would like to note when it comes to Russia, Putin is one man. We do know that the siloviki have been divided. They have found unity over the past year. But we do know that there have been key differences of approaches throughout the period starting with Crimean annexation up until 2022.

There are different military strategies. There is disagreement. I think it's up to us in the West, those of us who study security, those of us who work in policy, those of us who have the capacity to engage in this debate, to find exactly where those weaknesses are amongst the siloviki on the military or the secret service side and expose them and actually make use of them. And I think that hasn't been done enough, perhaps, so far.

I think this was just really important for me to say out loud because it is really difficult to hear, especially when I have family members who have been dissidents for years, folks who have been sent to psychiatric hospitals. We knew other activists that are friends and family that, as I said, that have been killed, and they've done it nonetheless. And I really hope that more Russians will be able to do the same in Russia.

And if not, then I think Russians really need to do more, introspectively. What is wrong with their friends and family if they can allow the assault on children and innocent civilians on a daily basis? I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Elizabeth, that I did not get to your question, but I know we're running out of time.

Is there an end to the war? I think every Ukrainian would answer the question in the same manner. I think most policy analysts understand that if Russia stops fighting, the war ends tomorrow. That is simply the case. In terms of negotiations, I undoubtedly understand that there will be some. I cannot see them being fruitful anytime soon, not least because the military momentum is on Ukraine's side.

We all know Russia, strategically, militarily, has lost the war it set out to embark on in February. It has lost that version of the war. It has now changed tactics. We have seen more missiles, of course, aerial bombings, and we expect that to continue.

I do not-- a year ago on February 23, I was live on television. I was asked on BBC World News what do I expect the war to look like should it start? And I then believed that this would be a multi-year conflict that doesn't actually have an easy end, that doesn't end in a simple negotiation.

And even if Zelensky or a different leader would negotiate some kind of territorial agreement, there is enough of the proportion of the Ukrainian citizens that will not allow that to take place. There will be partisan fighting. There will be combat groups of various kinds. That, I think, is far more dangerous for the stability and security of the region, and so I just don't see this ending any time soon. But again, Russia could end the war tomorrow.

**CAROL**

Great. Yevgenia, can we ask you the same question? Can we ask you what might be acceptable to the Russian leadership if we get to a negotiation, or is this just war in perpetuity as long or until Putin is removed from power?

**SAIVETZ:**

**YEVGENIA**

I don't know, Carol. I'm thinking about what Olga said. I do understand that it's pretty easy to blame one Russian for what's happening back across the ocean.

**ALBATS:**

You know, Olga, I've been many, many times to Ukraine. I covered hell of a lot of stories from there. I traveled all around Ukraine in 2017, and my fellow Russians were like, Yevgenia, where are you going? And I kept writing, listen, I never had any bad eye anywhere here.

I can tell you that, of course, it's impossible just from the historical point of view, from the scholarly point of view, it's impossible to equalize Ukraine under Kuchma with regime of the KGB which exists in the contemporary Russian. Yes, of course, all of us, we know about the case of Gongadze. Of course, we know about that.

But the biggest difference from the political science view between Ukraine and Russia is that in Ukraine, Ukraine is a perfect case of weak state and strong society. And that's what really when we say why Ukraine is not Russia, rephrasing which one's [INAUDIBLE], which one's [INAUDIBLE], which one's [INAUDIBLE]. It is, I think the most important thing that Ukraine has a very strong society and quite weak central government.

The opposite in Russia. But of course, the problem of Russia is that the most repressive institution of the Soviet Union, the KGB, was brought into power in 2000 by a greedy and corrupted Russian elite. Everything else was the perfect outcome of that. You know, Olga, how many people in this country, the United States, kept telling me, oh, Yevgenia, you're so wise. You're wise here because you're writing about KGB your entire life. You're wise.

Putin said, listen, Russia needs a strong hand. Really, look, he's doing so well investing in infrastructure. He finally calmed down oligarchs and et cetera, et cetera. Do you know how many-- the wisest people in Washington DC, in Cambridge, and et cetera, were telling me that, no, no, Putin is exactly what Russian needs.

And they kept telling me, you just don't understand the nature of this issue. They are going to grow much, much worse, and they present-- he, Putin, presents a danger to the entire world. And of course, now everybody all of a sudden woke up and said, oh, god, you know, what a son of a bitch. But he was like that.

He made it clear in 2007 in Munich, and then in 2008 in Georgia, and then in 2013 when he supported Yanukovich, and then in 2014 when he annexed Crimea and started the war in Donbas. It was known. It was coming. So now, am I responsible for Russians? Yes. Probably yes, I'm responsible because this is my country. I am citizen of this country.

And I am a great supporter of Alexei Navalny, and if we have any hope in any leadership, then it is him. And if West can do any good for Russia it is to help to get him out of jail before they kill him.

So what's going to happen in the Russian polls? As I said, it's going to be-- I think, just judging-- because I teach autocratic regimes and now I teach in NYU. We see that that's what happened in many Latin American countries. They're all coup d'etats.

It's a regime of bureaucratic authoritarian-- bureaucratic military authoritarianism. People in republics, they do need expertise that comes from technocrats. However, it's a question of cost. So when costs become unbearable, elites will kick out Putin and will bring somebody, most likely it will be a coalition which will run Russia until something better happens. I don't expect anything to happen soon, but it's impossible. I don't know how to read the crystal ball.

**ELIZABETH WOOD:** Let me try one more question for Olga, and then we should probably start to wrap up. One of the questions in the chat was, do we know anything about the regions of Ukraine that are under Russian occupation-- Mariupol, Crimea, Donbas, Donetsk, Luhansk? How are people living? What's happening on the ground there? And then maybe we should have each of you give one final comment and begin to wrap up.

**OLGA ONUCH:** Yevgenia, I don't know if you know, but I'm actually an expert that compares Latin American and East European experiences, so you're speaking very much in my-- I agree that there is things that we can learn from Latin American authoritarianism, but rather on why people do and do not engage in protest in these different authoritarian states in Latin America compared to Russia.

On the question of folks that live-- and I don't know why I said folks now three times or four times throughout the presentation. It has caught somehow into my head. On people living in occupied territories, there's limited information. It does come through sometimes. There's certainly some communication between some individuals. This was the case in people living in Kherson, this was the case and people living in the occupied territories in Kharkiv.

Obviously what happens in the case of Bucha is that you all of a sudden have a period of time when there is no communication occurring, and that's obviously the most violent and repressive period, or a period where people are in basements and have no access to their mobile phones or do not have a way to get any electricity. We do have some information, and it's not positive, of course.

But we do also have information about continued partisan resistance, and there has been some actual scholarly research on partisan resistance in occupied territories. And what's actually happening is that the partisan resistance groups have a way of communicating with the Ukrainian state and military in different ways. I'm not necessarily privy to that information, but it's really surprisingly robust, and there are multiple different aggregations.

So in Donetsk there is a separate one to the one in Kherson, to the one in Zaporizhia. But nonetheless, they are finding ways to communicate with each other or between the state and themselves. And of course citizens are doing a variety of acts, so we do get every so often-- from occupied Kherson we get photos of somebody having painted the Ukrainian flag in different locations across a particular town, or posters coming up in Zaporizhia that say how many kilometers you have to go home back to Rostov-on-Don and these kinds of things.

So people are still finding ways to do that, and then to obviously send out images of those acts of resistance to us. So aside from the fact that we know people are being repressed, people are being watched, people are being controlled in many ways, people are being threatened, abused, tortured.

Nonetheless, there is some information that comes out. I have to say that when we collect data on repression, we do get some information from occupied territories and people do find ways to use encrypted mobile devices and VPNs and so on to get out a text and even do so on social media platforms, specifically Telegram.

**ELIZABETH  
WOOD:**

So I do think we said we would go to 3:15, so we should probably wrap up. Let's see. Yevgenia, do you want to have a last word and then Olga, you?

**YEVGENIA  
ALBATS:**

No, no. I'm very grateful for you inviting me. It's not extremely pleasant experience, but I guess that's what you get if you fail, and that's true. Russian opposition failed. We did. We lost. We fight very hard. By the way, Olga, no, I don't think that Russians see Ukrainians as inferior people.

Putin does, yes. Putin does, obviously. He's a fascist. That's clear cut. However, I think that, once again, there are 11 million Russians-- I mean, there are 11 million citizens of the Russian Federation who have first degree relatives in Ukraine. We're talking about 30, probably 40 million members of the families who have their relatives in Russia-- in Ukraine.

So no, there is no this upside down approach to Ukraine. That's a different thing. All this, it's more complicated than that. That's what I'm trying to say. And I just today had a conversation with somebody that Ruski is an adjective, right? Ukrainian is noun. Ruski is adjective. And you know, Russia has to-- Russia is facing a necessity to become a nation state in order to stop seeing itself as an empire.

Yes, for some Russians, especially in the impoverished regions of the Russian Federation, it's sort of compensation for their miserable life. Their life is awful, but at least they can survive. We are going to show all those everywhere that we are Russians. So what? Do I pity people? No.

I hate to blame ordinary people. I do believe that elites are responsible for what's happening, but people who live are trying to survive. How can we blame that? Anyway, but that's awful what happened, of course. I'm going to-- by the way, I'm flying to Ukraine hopefully. I'm flying to Ukraine this time--

**ELIZABETH WOOD:** Olga, one last word quickly and then we should probably wrap up and [INAUDIBLE].

**OLGA ONUCH:** I mean, I think it's obvious that you and I are on the same side of history, and obviously Yevgenia is an ally to Ukrainians. But at the same time, I do think that ordinary citizens who are engaged in the war effort currently on the Russian side who perpetrate acts that might be considered war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocidal acts are to blame themselves as well, and it's not simply just the elites that have put them in that place.

And this is where the complicated situation unfolds. There are ordinary Russians killing also ordinary Ukrainians, and perhaps it is merely because elites enacted or started this war nine years ago or earlier, or perhaps that's not just simply the case. And I have to say that, of course, those who give the orders under law, international law would be blamed for these atrocities, but so would those who perpetrate them. And I think that is uncomfortable, that is horrific, but that is the truth.

And I hope that in years from now we can have the same conversation end where my doubts about some ordinary Russians are, in fact, no longer there. But currently my experiences, also personally having traveled many times to Russia, are not necessarily those of yours. And I hope that in the future that we see more eye to eye on these things and that there is peace in Ukraine above all.

**ELIZABETH WOOD:** Yeah. So I think we should wrap up, but incredible thanks to both our speakers, Olga and Yevgenia, for a fascinating and very, very important conversation, debate, disagreement, heartfelt feelings. These are very, very difficult things, and let's hope for peace.

Let's hope for connection between the two nations, that someday in the future, both individuals and collectives. And let's also thank our sponsors to Starr Forum, [INAUDIBLE], who've done a fantastic job, all the audience for their questions, for coming. Stay in touch and we will see you the next time. All the best. Bye.

**YEVGENIA ALBATS:** I thank you.

[MUSIC PLAYING]