

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The situation in Ukraine, HC 1694

Monday 9 February 2026

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Members present: Emily Thornberry (Chair); Fleur Anderson; Alex Ballinger; Aphra Brandreth; Phil Brickell; Richard Foord; Edward Morello; Sir John Whittingdale.

Questions 1-21

Witness

I: Vitaliy Klitschko, Mayor of Kyiv.

Examination of witness

Witness: Vitaliy Klitschko.

Q1 **Chair:** Today we had hoped to be joined in person by Vitaliy Klitschko, the mayor of Kyiv. Given the situation in Kyiv, he has not been able to travel to the UK at this time, but we are able to do this virtually. We are very grateful to you, Mr Klitschko, for making time to speak to us.

I will begin with a general question. Could you tell us about the situation in Kyiv, and what conditions civilians are facing? We know that Russian attacks seem to be targeting Ukraine's energy supplies, and that the temperature is falling below minus 20°. I wondered whether you could explain exactly what life is like and how the city authorities are responding.

Vitaliy Klitschko: Good afternoon. I want to remind you that Kyiv is one of the largest cities in eastern Europe. The population of our home town is 3.5 million. The frontline is far from us, but every day we listen to air alarms, and every day Russians send kamikaze drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles to our home town. During the war—I am just talking about civilians—more than 300 people in our home town have been killed, including more than 30 children, and almost 2,000 apartment buildings have been destroyed. Right now, this winter is one of the coldest in the past 10 years, and we have an outside temperature of minus 20°C.

We have had massive attacks on our critical infrastructure. Putin announced that the main target would always be military forces, but for a long time Putin has declared one thing and done something totally different. What is his reason to destroy the life of civilians, to destroy the life of a peaceful city? I have found the explanation: his main point is to bring society into a depressed mood, to destroy its will to defend our home country and to destroy the resistance of Ukrainians. It is a very critical situation.

I want to say thank you very much to everyone who has helped Ukraine during the war, because a lot depends on your support. It is no secret that at the beginning of the war, world experts gave us a couple of days, maybe a couple of weeks.

Chair: You showed them.

Vitaliy Klitschko: But fighting against one of the strongest and biggest armies, the Russian army, we have successfully defended our homeland for four years already. It is a difficult fight. This fight has no rules. This fight is genocide.

Every month, I visit our military forces on the frontline. The frontline is more than 1,500 km long. The east of Ukraine is totally destroyed—the cities, the villages and a big part of our homeland are destroyed—but the main goal for Putin is Kyiv and the whole of Ukraine. For everything I have

seen and for the question, "What is Putin doing?", I have just one explanation: Putin needs property. Us Ukrainians he does not need.

That is why the main goal right now is to depress society and bring down the mood in our home town. Does everyone have to leave and make Ukraine empty, to give him an easy way? That is not just about Kyiv; I remind you of the sick vision of Putin, his goal to rebuild the Soviet empire. This means the Baltic countries, Poland, Czechoslovakia—Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

I have spent a big part of my life in Germany. I want to remind Germans that in Putin's sick vision, there is a part of Germany that also belongs to the Russian empire, which is where Putin worked for years as a KGB agent. That is why it is not just our war; it is a war for values and principles. It is not just for our homeland; it is also for the whole of Europe, because it is no secret that Ukraine is the largest country in Europe, and on the stability of Ukraine depends the stability of the whole region.

I am sorry: I wanted to be in London today, but to leave my city when the people need services, when it is freezing cold and when at every second Russian missiles can attack our home town would not have been right. It would not be right for me to be somewhere outside; it is very important for me as mayor to be present in my home town. That is why I want to say sorry. I will be very happy to spend time talking to you directly, without the internet—offline—but today I have to stay in Kyiv.

Q2 Chair: Of course you do. I certainly remember that during the second world war, when London was being so badly bombed, Londoners really appreciated the fact that the royal family stayed in London and suffered in the same way that Londoners did. The Queen Mother asked how she could possibly leave London, given everything that the east end was going through.

It is a very hard time. Is there any justification for bombarding Kyiv? Are there any military targets that could be used as justification for bombing a city of 3.5 million people?

Vitaliy Klitschko: The main target is every one of us—all Ukrainians. The easiest way is to put the city in a blackout: no water, no electricity and no heating. We are fighting to survive. At this critical time, I say thank you to everyone. Public transportation is working. Hospitals are working. Schools and pre-schools are working. We are showing our resistance. It is very important to be strong, because Russians always accept a strong position. They never, ever pay attention to weak countries. That is why we have to be strong—and we are stronger together with our partners. Great Britain, for a pretty long time, has supported Ukraine politically, economically and with defensive weapons. We never forget your support and help at this critical time. We very much appreciate it.

Q3 Chair: May I ask one more question before I ask Sir John to follow up? Are the Ukrainian air defences in Kyiv sufficient, and what else do you need from other countries?



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Vitaliy Klitschko: I am not an expert in air defence, but the Russians sent in many more drones this year. Can you imagine? They sent at the same time 500 drones and ballistic and cruise missiles. The air defences work pretty well and almost shoot down everything, but they cannot give a 100% guarantee of protection. That is why we have some damage. Air defence is very important.

It is very important to be together with Ukraine politically and economically. Right now, we need electricity generators, because we have a huge deficit in the whole country. We have a deficit of around 70% in the whole country and also in our home town. Can you imagine? We have just two, three or four hours of electricity per day. After that, people are told, "Sorry, we cannot give electricity to everyone, because there is a huge deficit." Thank you—we receive a lot of generators—but we need more.

Q4 **Sir John Whittingdale:** Mayor Klitschko, it is very good to see you. Can I say how much we admire you and the people of Kyiv for your extraordinary resilience?

About four weeks ago, you suggested that people who could leave Kyiv should do so. Is that still the position? How many people have left? Does it make it harder to look after and support the very elderly, let us say, who may not be able to leave, if the more mobile people are leaving the city?

Vitaliy Klitschko: Believe me, as mayor it is very difficult to say to people, "Leave the city." But my exact message is: if you have somewhere in the Kyiv region where you have friends, relatives or some people, and where you have basic services—heating and water—please use that chance to have a temporary place during this very cold period when we are not able to give services to everyone. First of all, it makes our lives much easier and puts less pressure on our infrastructure. That is one point. A lot of people have listened to that and moved.

Before the war, Kyiv had around 3.8 million people. Right now, it has 3.5 million people, and around 600,000 refugees from the east and south of Ukraine. Why do they come to Kyiv? First of all, safety is the main priority. Kyiv is better protected by air defence than other cities. For safety reasons, people are coming to Kyiv. The second point is that we provide the best services: medical care, education and a whole spectrum of services are important. Another main point is jobs: we provide jobs, and people need jobs.

Some people, if I ask them to leave the city, listen to me. There is a big group of people who move when they have a chance. But we see, through the cell phone traffic, that people spend the night with family outside the city, but during the day, they come back because they need to work. Jobs are very important. That is why the numbers during the day are 3.5 million; during the night, it is 500,000 less.

Q5 **Sir John Whittingdale:** President Zelensky has been critical of the city administration, in terms of resilience, but I think you have said that you have not spoken to him directly for something like four years. Is that still

the case? How do you respond?

Vitaliy Klitschko: Self-government is the base for democracy in every democratic country. Self-government was attacked by Russians: 55 mayors in Ukraine were kidnapped, one was killed and five mayors have disappeared somewhere in the prisons in Russia.

When we were beginning to build territorial defence, we were criticised: people said that war was not happening and we were panicking. But we had information, and we had to be prepared for this war. From the beginning of the war, we have been doing everything to support and help our army, and we are doing that today.

We do not have an easy relationship between self-government and central Government. That is not just my opinion; it is the opinion of many mayors. You can take information from different sources: if you do not believe me, talk to the others. I am more than sure that we have exactly the same information.

Regarding the relationship, we understand that being President during the war is not easy. The President is busy, and I don't want to complain. Unity inside the country without political games makes us much stronger. Sometimes there are examples of political competition. During the war, it is not smart. The President criticised us because we were not prepared. I am sorry: I am not responsible for air defence. I am sorry: we do everything we can. I told the President—I was totally open—that it is the agenda from the Russians. We have a couple of examples. Who is guilty? Self-government. Who is guilty? Central Government. Who is guilty? The company who delivered energy. We are fighting against each other, but nobody remembers Putin. Putin sent the rockets. Putin destroyed the lives of our civilians. I told the President, "Please don't follow the agenda of Putin. We have to be united. We have to support each other and fight together. Together we are much stronger."

Sir John Whittingdale: Absolutely.

Q6 **Alex Ballinger:** Mayor Klitschko, you have described some of the destruction that had been happening in Kyiv and the rest of the country as a result of the Russian invasion. We now know that many people require humanitarian assistance to get through the day. Could you tell us a little more about the type of humanitarian assistance you are providing to the residents of Kyiv, and what more the international community might be able to do to support you?

Vitaliy Klitschko: First of all, we built our hospitals to be totally independent with their own energy sources. We have water-powered electricity generators that can work during blackouts. They work as resilience islands for people. Almost every hospital can work on its own. A mobile heating system connects to houses where there are old people.

I am sorry for my English. It has been a pretty long time; I am out of practice and my vocabulary is reduced.

Chair: It is fantastic—and it is so much better than our Ukrainian.

Vitaliy Klitschko: We give support for people who have a problem with movement, and we connect with everyone. We have almost 30,000 people in Kyiv, and every day we are in contact providing medical care and food. We are preparing, right now, good places where people can spend this difficult time when outside it is cold. In apartments, it is also very cold. We evacuate people outside of the country and they spend time there, but people do not want to move. It is always better in an apartment. We provide as much electricity as possible so that people can use electrical heating. There is help and support, with warm clothes and a connection. We have opened 1,500 places close to the houses where people can spend the night or, during the day, receive food and take a shower. Drinks are provided. In some areas, the temperature is around 20°C, so it is pretty warm. Nobody died from cold in our home town—nobody. We care about that.

It is a difficult situation. It is very difficult. Our own municipal enterprises are working pretty hard to support everyone.

Q7 **Alex Ballinger:** If you could ask the international community for one thing in terms of humanitarian aid, what would you ask for?

Vitaliy Klitschko: First of all, the Russians tried to bring us to total blackout. Everything depends on air defence. That is the first point. The second point is that we are asking for powerful electricity generators to connect to the buildings and give people electricity, because the Russians destroyed communications from our nuclear power station to our home town. Local energy is very important for us.

We sent letters about what we need to our partners and received a lot of electricity generators. We have so many electricity generators right now that we use over 300 tonnes of diesel every day for generators. It is big. Right now, we have to care about all the electricity generators. We have enterprises that are responsible for services for every electricity generator—full services and filters. We have to care about every one. It is a very unusual job for us.

Alex Ballinger: Thank you.

Q8 **Phil Brickell:** Mr Mayor, there are more than 5 million Ukrainian refugees across Europe, including in the countries you mentioned in your opening remarks—Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic and elsewhere. What support do you think needs to continue to be provided by European countries for refugees in those countries, as we enter the fifth full year since the full-scale invasion?

Vitaliy Klitschko: Excuse me, but I want to correct that: over 10 million Ukrainians are outside of the country right now. We appreciate everyone who supports our refugees. That is very important to us. Our biggest challenge and our biggest worry is not the buildings, bridges and roads; our biggest worry is our citizens. It is very important to bring the citizens

back to our homeland when the war is stopped, but it will be a difficult challenge when, with peace, everyone comes back. That is the first point.

The second point is services, and the main point is jobs. We are responsible for that. The main point and challenge for us is to be successful after the war. A lot of politicians talk about the recovery of Ukraine, the rebuilding of Ukraine or a Marshall plan for Ukraine. I guess every one of you has listened to that many times. I have a question for any of you who has read the Marshall plan for Ukraine. Rebuilding Ukraine is not the buildings; it is not the roads and bridges. In rebuilding Ukraine, we have to provide reform—the European rule of law and European standards. We cannot make this plan without your assistance, and that is why we are counting down till when war will be stopped. It is very important to be successful. The success of Ukraine is the best answer for you, as our partners, and the success of Ukraine is the best answer to Putin.

- Q9 **Phil Brickell:** On your comments about the importance of the Ukrainian people, President Zelensky has recently amended the rules around young men in particular. At the moment, when you are 25 you get drafted into the military, but young men between the ages of 18 and 22 can now leave Ukraine, as I understand it, and then come back. Do you think that that change is the right step to take for the young people of Ukraine?

Vitaliy Klitschko: My personal opinion is that it will be very difficult to bring the people back. Young people very easily integrate into society and learn languages and build families. It will be very difficult for us to bring the people back to Ukraine. I guess that the population of Ukraine right now is less than 30 million. Just 20 years ago, it was double that. We need the young people to rebuild the country and make our economy strong. Maybe I am wrong, but in my personal opinion it will be difficult to bring the people back if you let everyone leave the country. I hope that they come back, but my prediction is that a lot of people who left the country—one third or maybe half of them—will stay if they spend a long time outside of the country, especially young people. They will have built families and businesses, and it will be difficult to bring them back.

- Q10 **Chair:** How can allied countries support the return of refugees? Do think that we should be supporting the return of refugees when the war ends?

Vitaliy Klitschko: We need support, and we appreciate the support for refugees. A couple of days ago I met a German delegation. A lot of refugees receive a lot of support, but many do not have a job. It is very important to be active and not stay passive and just receive money and support. Supporting refugees is very important, but under which condition? We are asking about help to propose that they come back to Ukraine. It will be difficult. It is a very difficult task, but it is the next task that we have in, I hope, the next year.

Chair: We hope so too.

- Q11 **Richard Foord:** Thank you very much, Vitaliy, for sharing your time with us today. You started by saying thank you, but the thanks are ours, as the



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Foreign Affairs Committee and on behalf of all British citizens, to you, for defending eastern Europe. I would like to take you back to the images that we saw on our TV screens and that you saw in the flesh of the early days of the full-scale invasion. Those images of Russian armoured columns heading for Kyiv. Could you describe those early days and how they played out from your perspective?

Vitaliy Klitschko: Can you repeat the question?

Q12 **Richard Foord:** Can you describe what it was like to live through the early days of the full-scale invasion in February 2022?

Vitaliy Klitschko: It could be a long speech. I have a lot of emotions. The city was empty. This time is difficult—the last four years. It is very difficult. I will explain to you a couple of emotional examples. As mayor, I have a very thankful job to make people's lives easy—to help the people. It is a very thankful job, and I enjoy it. It is very tough and has a lot of challenges. I had to go to the hospitals and see young kids—sometime the kids were a little bit older than 20 years old—without arms, legs or sometimes without eyes because of explosions where sand had huge power and destroyed their faces.

It is difficult psychologically to do that, but one part I hate is once a month I give medals to the parents of children who have paid the biggest price: their lives. It is difficult to find the words. I do not know what to say: "Thank you," or "We are proud." Last time I cried. Every parent cries and last time I also cried. A woman came to me, and as I gave the medals, she said, "Mr Mayor, you don't remember me. I am here for a second time. Last year, you gave me medal for my young son. This medal is for my oldest one, and I won't come any more because I don't have children any more." She cried and I also cried.

It is difficult to explain the emotion people have in our homeland. If you go up to anyone on the street and ask them their wish, everyone gives exactly the same one: "The war has to be stopped." We pay for our freedom with the biggest price: the lives of our heroes, children, young people, old people and citizens. That is why we are very thankful for support and help, and together we are many times stronger, and we can stop the Russians.

Q13 **Richard Foord:** It sounds absolutely awful to have to go and see residents of Kyiv in those circumstances; our hearts are very much with you. Fleur and I visited Kyiv in 2022, and we went on a visit to Hostomel airport. It would be interesting if you describe what it was like when you felt like the tide was turning around Kyiv, and when you were successfully fighting off the Russian forces and repelling them from Kyiv. Can you describe that, please?

Vitaliy Klitschko: Right now I am actually in the city council. The airport is 10 km away and we listened to an explosion. The city was empty, a group of Russians were already inside the city, and everyone prepared for street fights. That was at the beginning of the war in 2022. Almost 2,000 apartment buildings in this part of the town were destroyed. We rebuilt

the buildings, helped the people and built a rehabilitation centre for military forces.

Right now, there are so many challenges I never expected—we have so many big challenges—but it is very important to be strong: strong on the frontline and strong inside the country. We are many times stronger when we are together with our friends, and that is why message to every one of you is: stay with Ukraine and together we can stop Putin because Putin goes so far as we allow him to go. If Ukraine is not successful, Putin will definitely never stop with Ukraine. He will go so far as we allow him to go.

Richard Foord: Thank you for that.

- Q14 **Sir John Whittingdale:** Mayor Klitschko, we know that there have been reports of attempts to assassinate the President. I knew Andriy Parubiy, the former Speaker who was murdered, very well. You are in a very high-profile position. In your office, you are publicly visible. To what extent do you feel at risk, and how is that affecting your ability to run the city?

Vitaliy Klitschko: I am a former officer. I spent part of my life in the army, and I swore to give my life for my homeland. Of course, the Russians do a lot of bad things. They killed our figurehead, Andriy Parubiy, but I am strong. I am not an easy target, believe me.

Chair: Quite a large target, if you don't mind me saying so.

Vitaliy Klitschko: I spent a lot of time on the frontline. I don't care about myself. My mission is to care about my citizens. I think more of that. What about me? I don't think about me, and my younger brother is covering my back.

- Q15 **Aphra Brandreth:** I want to ask you about the thousands of Ukrainian children who have been forcibly abducted by Russia. Could you give your perspective or update about that? A small number of children have been returned. How are they being reintegrated into Ukrainian society, and what support is there?

Vitaliy Klitschko: My brother, Wladimir, is doing a lot of things to bring the children back. Russians kidnapped so many Ukrainian children. As I said already, one of the biggest issues is our citizens, especially our children. Wladimir is bringing a lot of them back, using his international contacts. He has been successful in that. We have not made the information official, but he is responsible for bringing the children back. Thousands of them were moved from Ukraine to Russia, and right now they are being educated with Russian narratives, preparing them to fight against Ukraine in the future.

- Q16 **Aphra Brandreth:** The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Putin and his children's commissioner, Maria Lvova-Belova. Do you think that is meaningful in any way? Do you see that being helpful, or do you feel it is merely symbolic?

Vitaliy Klitschko: I am sorry, but I am not ready to give you a clear answer to that, because I do not have much information on it.



Q17 **Aphra Brandreth:** Don't worry; that is totally understandable. Is there anything that we in the UK or other allies can do to support the work to bring the children back?

Vitaliy Klitschko: Yes, of course. We have to do everything we can, first, to support Ukraine, and secondly, to put pressure on Russia and Putin. Our children are our future. We are talking about the young generation. Our children and citizens are the most important thing we have.

Q18 **Fleur Anderson:** Can I ask you about justice and the crimes that are being committed now? As Richard mentioned, we travelled to Ukraine—to Kyiv—in the early months of the war and, even then, the desire for justice and the need for a peace to be built on justice was being talked about a lot. The UK Government have provided support for lawyers and to find out what crimes are being committed. What do you feel about what is being done now? What more support could you have for that aspect of the war—for speaking to victims, amassing evidence and seeking justice?

Vitaliy Klitschko: We can talk about human rights and justice a lot, and make a lot of discussion and explain our vision. Right now, enduring the war is a very unusual situation, in any direction. Of course, we have never forgotten what we are fighting for. We have never forgotten the reason for this senseless war. We want to be part of the European family and to build a democratic country. Putin said that Ukraine was always part of Russia and that we are not allowed to go into the European Union. They see Ukraine as a part of the Russian empire.

In any democratic country, justice is a main point, and we can talk about that for a pretty long time. We have a lot of good and bad examples, but rule of law in Ukraine is the main priority. We have to stop this war. Justice for Ukrainian people means a lot. I was part of our Revolution of Dignity in 2013 and 2014, and justice and the rule of law was a very important question for Ukraine, and it is still a very important question now.

Q19 **Fleur Anderson:** I would like to ask you about the peace talks that are happening, and the views of people in Kyiv and across Ukraine. Since August, there have been several rounds of peace talks, bilaterally and trilaterally, with the US. Can you see meaningful progress being made? Do you have hope? What peace terms would the people of Kyiv be willing to accept? Is there unity in what people want to see from the peace talks? How confident are you in them?

Vitaliy Klitschko: How long is the peace? The first point is that I am not involved in the peace negotiations. The second point is that it is very important to save our national interest, our territorial integrity and our independence. If we are talking about peace, we have many more questions than answers. First, what about our integrity? Secondly, what about a guarantee? Peace could be just a short break before Russia's next invasion or aggression. A guarantee from Russia or from our friends is very important for Ukraine, and the peace definitely cannot be capitulation in front of Russia.



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We have a lot of questions about what the peace looks like. The Russians thought, "Let's find a compromise." They occupied part of Ukraine and said that the compromise was for us to give up Ukrainian territory to them. They said that would be a compromise or a solution, but we do not think so. What about our territorial integrity, independence or a guarantee? Sorry, but right now we have many more questions than answers.

Chair: I understand that. Ed has some specific questions about what has happened in the peace talks.

Q20 **Edward Morello:** I am interested in your view of the language that President Trump has used about President Zelensky and the situation in Ukraine. Do you have a view on the type of support that Ukraine is currently getting from the US? Also, there has been a critical minerals deal to secure continued US support of any kind. Do you have a view on US support for Ukraine?

Vitaliy Klitschko: The US is a very important partner. We need the US on the Ukrainian side, and it is very important to have a good relationship and understanding with President Trump and the United States. If we are talking about the minerals deal, I ask whether an American soldier in second world war Europe would be looking at minerals. If we are talking about democracy and values, geopolitically, it is important to save democracy in Ukraine and to make Europe strong.

I support some messages from Trump; some messages I have heard from Trump have surprised me. It is not easy, but we need the United States on our side. Without the United States, this would be very difficult. It is critical for there to be a personal connection and personal discussions between President Trump and President Zelensky, because the future of our country and of Europe depends on their good relationship and good work. I can't say more.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am so sorry: I have a time pressure and, if you allow me to, I have to go. It was great to talk to you; I will be very happy to come to London in springtime, in much better conditions, and have a discussion offline, without the internet, to talk to you and answer many questions to explain the current situation in Ukraine. I hope that, in springtime, we will be much closer to peace in our homeland.

Please never underestimate your power. You can do a lot, and our future personally depends on every one of you. My message to every one of you is that the biggest mistake is some people thinking, "The war is far away from us; this war doesn't touch me personally." This war touched every Ukrainian, this war touched a lot of people in Europe, and this war can touch everyone in the world. Russia is very aggressive, Russia is dangerous, and Ukraine is a huge mission. We are fighting and defending not just our homeland; we are defending, honestly, every one of you.

Q21 **Chair:** We want to thank you as well, Dr Klitschko, for your time. We only had one last question, which was about the future. Perhaps it is better for us to talk about the future in the spring, when you are able to come.



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We wish you the very best, and I want to make it clear, on behalf of the British Parliament, that we are completely united in our support for Ukraine. As you approach the fourth anniversary of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, we are astounded by the resilience of the people of Ukraine, the people of Kyiv, and all the elected representatives who speak so well, who are such great representatives of the people and who show enormous leadership. We continue to stand with Ukraine. Slava Ukraini!

Vitaliy Klitschko: Thank you very much. If you are looking to the future, I have a dream. Many of you know me as a sportsman; nobody knows that I worked for years as a tourist guide in my hometown. I will be very happy in springtime—in a peaceful time—to invite every one of you to one of the most beautiful cities in the world. I promise you that everyone will be really surprised at how beautiful the city is and how peaceful the people living in our hometown are, and I promise unforgettable emotions from visiting our hometown. I have a dream: let's do our next meeting in my hometown, in peacetime, in Kyiv.

Chair: Excellent, Mr Mayor. We will hold you to that. Thank you very much.