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Defence Committee

Oral evidence: Russia-Ukraine Crisis, HC 1064

Tuesday 8 February 2022

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 8 February 2022.

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Members present: Mr Tobias Ellwood (Chair); Stuart Anderson; Dave Doogan; Richard Drax; Mr Mark Francois; Gavin Robinson; John Spellar; Derek Twigg.

Questions 37 - 96

Witnesses

[I](#): Samuel Cranny-Evans, Research Analyst, Military Sciences, RUSI.

[II](#): Robert Lee, Fellow, Eurasia Program, Foreign Policy Research.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Samuel Cranny-Evans and Robert Lee.

Chair: Welcome to this Defence Select Committee hearing on Tuesday 8 February 2022. Today we will be looking at the Russia-Ukraine crisis. We are delighted to welcome Samuel Cranny-Evans, research analyst for military sciences at RUSI, and Robert Lee, who is a fellow in the Eurasia programme at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and is coming to us live from New York. Welcome to the pair of you; we are really pleased to talk to you today.

Things are clearly beginning to hot up. Who knows whether an invasion will take place. I think it is only one person, or maybe two—President Putin and possibly President Xi as well—but we will endeavour to explore where things are going to go. We will be focusing today on the military aspects of what is happening, so that we can get a better understanding of the hard power that may be put to use. With that, may I say thank you for joining us? We appreciate your time this afternoon, and I will turn to John Spellar to kick us off. John, over to you.

Q37 **John Spellar:** Thank you, Chair. In our last evidence session, James Sherr described Russia's military build-up in the spring of '21 as "a reconnaissance". What do you believe to be the purpose of Russia's more recent actions?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: I think we have to be quite careful about making assumptions about the assumptions that are being made in Russia. What we are seeing is a continuation of the spring build-up, as opposed to two separate events. This is much more in Rob's wheelhouse in terms of force monitoring, so he might be able to fill in the details, but a lot of the units that deployed in the spring never went home; their vehicles stayed where they were. The personnel might have moved around, but there were forces that disappeared into Crimea. We know that they entered Crimea on a train, and we have not seen them leave; we have not seen where they went. We are seeing a continuation of that. If it was a reconnaissance, it was an attempt to see what it takes to move that kind of man and matériel into the area and what snags there might be.

In terms of the present build-up, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that it is more about opening a dialogue between Russia and the US. There are obviously Russia's security concerns on Ukraine, but we know that a much bigger frustration for the Kremlin is the way in which it feels left out of some of the global discussions, whether that is right or wrong. That is not to excuse them, but my perception is that, for the Kremlin, this is much more about having a conversation with the big players around the table than it is about Ukraine. It is not that Ukraine does not matter, but that is the order of the goals. That would be my perspective.



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Robert Lee: I wrote an article about this, and I argued that the spring build-up was mostly about deterrence. It was about Russia trying to demonstrate to the new US presidential Administration, as well as to NATO members, that it was not happy with the status quo in a couple of areas. One relates to Ukraine, and the build-up of forces was a way of demonstrating to Washington and the other NATO members that Russia can make life difficult and potentially use military force. When we compare the spring with the fall, Russian officials made a number of claims in the spring and expressed a number of concerns, but they did not really make specific demands or have a timeline associated with them, so it was a little bit more vague, and they were more vague about the red lines that they mentioned. As Sam mentioned—

Chair: Robert, we are having a few problems hearing you. Will you bring your computer or your device slightly more in front of you? I don't know if our techies here can help out as well. We are just going to increase the volume a little. Sorry to interrupt; please continue.

Robert Lee: Sure. As Sam mentioned, equipment was moved from the Central Military District's 41st Combined Arms Army, which is based in Siberia. That was moved during the spring build-up, but it was left behind. Russian officials said that it would remain until the Zapad exercise in September, but it never left after that. That equipment is still there. So my argument was basically that the spring build-up was about deterrence, and there were a number of events over the summer that Russian officials were not happy about, and they switched from deterrence to a strategy of trying to compel NATO members, or Kyiv, to make concessions on certain things that they were not happy about, and to relent to those demands. The spring build-up was maybe an element of a reconnaissance phase, but I think there was something distinct, in that there were certain goals they wanted to achieve in the spring, I don't think they achieved them, and now this build-up is a way of trying to achieve them again.

Q38 **John Spellar:** On the build-up, what would be your assessment of the numbers and positioning of troops, fighter jets and missile air defence systems, including in Belarus? Do they signify that an invasion of Ukraine is now inevitable or imminent, in your judgment?

Robert Lee: I would not say inevitable; it is still open to interpretation what Russia is doing. Personally, I think that a military escalation is more likely than not, and I think that this month is the most likely time window for an escalation.

As for Belarus, as with much of the build-up, what they are doing in Belarus is unprecedented. Typically, every four years, they do a Zapad exercise, which is a joint exercise between Russia and Belarus. They just conducted one in the fall. Typically, it is the largest exercise that Russia does with Belarus, but they have already moved in far more equipment into Belarus this time than they have ever done for a Zapad exercise. They have maybe 10 or 15 BTGs—battalion tactical groups—of Russian military equipment, and most of that is from the Eastern Military District, including



units that are based 70 or 80 miles from North Korea; those are now based in western Belarus, at the border with Poland.

They also deployed a number of VDV airborne units and, in addition to that, they deployed two S-400 air defence battalions, a Su-35 fighter squadron, a Su-25SM ground attack squadron, and a number of really sophisticated electronic warfare systems—Krasukha-4. They have also deployed Iskander-M short-range missile systems into Belarus.

You can interpret that in a couple of ways. First, I do not think this is just an exercise, because they conducted Zapad in September; they do not need to conduct another training exercise to test their readiness—they have already tested that. These forces could be used if Russia intends to invade Ukraine, either from Belarus, or the other aspect is that it could be an element of trying to deter NATO involvement if Russia decides to invade Ukraine. Kaliningrad is always a security concern for Russia. Any time a potential crisis comes up with NATO, it is always concerned about how it defends Kaliningrad. With S-400 units and Su-35 fighters all based in Belarus, it is much easier for Russia to defend Kaliningrad right now than it would have been previously.

A lot of what we are seeing militarily—some of it is building up so that it can be used in an invasion of Ukraine; other aspects are more about deterrence of NATO. That includes a lot of the naval deployments that we are seeing in the Mediterranean and elsewhere.

John Spellar: Samuel, anything to add?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: No, I think Rob has covered that pretty well. An additional situation to consider is that in a lot of the Russian-Belarusian drills, they usually have some strange scenario where Poland and the Baltics have decided that they must go to war with Russia on their own. Potentially, in terms of Belarus's position—to reinforce what Rob said—those forces are well placed to prevent any reinforcements to Ukraine coming from that area and would have good abilities to interdict any assets flying over.

The Kremlin has probably asked for a military option; I do not think that it is certain that it will be used. The problem is that they are quite aware of what the consequences of this would be. We have sanctioned Russia a lot; they know how that proceeds and they know where they can be leveraged and where their potential weaknesses are. I do not think they are happy to take those risks unless they are sure that the rewards are there.

Q39 **John Spellar:** Given that, and irrespective of current possible intent, do the rising numbers of troops and matériel increase the risk of an accidental war being caused either by a local incident or by miscalculation, or indeed just by an error of judgment?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: I do not think there is a good body of historical evidence to suggest that wars happen accidentally. There has to be at least one willing partner. There is a lot of recent evidence of where a casus belli has been created and nothing has happened. We can look at the



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multiple downings of Russian aircraft in and around Syria by the Israelis, by the Turkish Air Force—they have had multiple causes to escalate to conflict. If that kind of thing were to happen, they have had the reasons to do it. They have had the reasons to press aggressively against the Ukrainians for their actions in Donbas, if they were going to do that type of thing.

I think you generally need more than one willing partner for a war to start. It is possible, given the forces they have in place, that they might look to create a pretext that would look accidental.

John Spellar: Anything to add on that, Robert?

Robert Lee: I agree for the most part. In one example, in the Nagorno-Karabakh war in the fall of 2020, at the very end, Azerbaijan shot down a Russian helicopter and killed a Russian soldier, but obviously Russia did not decide to escalate the situation, and it moved through the peace agreement.

I agree with Sam. Countries are not usually forced into wars like that. I think Putin has enough control over domestic approval that he would not be forced to escalate if something like that happened. The one concern, though, is that, if we look at the last 20 years, when Russia intervened in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014, one lesson that I think Russia took from that was that NATO and the US would not intervene militarily on behalf of either country. I think when Russia is looking at Ukraine right now, their assumption of the situation is that it is more than likely that NATO would not directly intervene in Ukraine if they decided to invade. If NATO did change policy, that might be somewhat unexpected and it could lead to a greater escalation than otherwise.

Russia has really significant forces in Belarus right now, and the strongest military posture in the European part of Russia since the end of the Cold War, but I do not think that really threatens the Baltic countries and NATO members too much. I do not think there is much intent from Russia to escalate anything there, because they typically do not want to test NATO's article 5 commitment.

Q40 **Chair:** We are going to turn now to how an invasion might play out, but before we do, I want to exhaust this point about the excuse—the pretext in which Russia could invade. Looking back, the civil war in Rwanda was triggered by an aircraft being blown out of the sky—potentially deliberately, but I am not sure that anybody knows. The first world war was all around the shooting of a duke. Panama, New Mexico—wars were created in order to gain territory. If you were advising Putin now, what would you be saying was the best way to justify some form of invasion from the east?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: There are fairly conventional aspects to this discussion. They could potentially seek to leverage the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine, which is significant. They could leverage any number of the historical grievances that they have used. But I think what



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we would be well advised to look out for are the opportunities for them to create a pretext or to intervene. What we saw in 2014 with the seizure of Crimea was an opportunistic grab. The military hallmark certainly suggested that it was not something that had been well planned and thoroughly rehearsed; it was a response to the developing political situation in Ukraine.

It may start as something that does not look like an escalation, if that makes sense. A bunch of Ukrainian soldiers storming into the Donbas and shooting Russian speakers would be a bit on the nose. They have a lot of political levers; they have a lot of other levers that they could use to create a pretext, so I think there are perhaps grounds to consider what other options there could be. How stable is the Zelensky regime? How calm and controlled is the Ukrainian population at present? Is there a high degree of organised crime and so on, which could be used to say, "There is this insecurity on Russia's border and we must do something about it"? A final scenario to consider is the Georgian one—that the Ukrainians give them a pretext. That would obviously put the Ukrainians in quite a challenging position.

Chair: Just elaborate on that for a second.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: In a very simple way, in the situation in Georgia in 2008, Russia made it very clear that any escalation or encroachment by Georgian forces would have disastrous results for the Georgian armed forces. Then, for some reason that we are not quite sure of, the Georgian armed forces did attack the Abkhazia region and things like that, which led to the Russian response. There is an argument that war optimism leads to war, so perhaps the Georgians thought that they would do quite well—they didn't—which led them to engage in a war that they could not win.

The Ukrainians probably have to tread quite carefully, given that the conflict is ongoing in Donbas. There are daily casualties, daily losses, daily fire engagements, and any one of them, if Russia wants, could be a pretext.

Chair: Okay. Robert?

Robert Lee: I agree with Sam. Much of the current tensions started after Ukraine conducted its first TB2 unmanned combat aerial vehicle strike in Donbas in October. TB2s are these Turkish UAVs that were used in Nagorno-Karabakh, Syria and elsewhere. Obviously, that is their own territory. The strike damaged a D-30 howitzer; it didn't really have that much military significance, but I think it had a lot of political significance, and it really angered Russian officials, because Ukraine also posted these high-def videos of the strike itself.

Since then, I have no doubt that if Ukraine conducted another TB2 strike in Donbas, that would lead to a military response from Russia. I agree with Sam; I think there are certain things that Ukraine could do that would lead to a response, with or without the pretext. I think Ukraine have been playing it pretty cool recently. I think they have deliberately not tried to



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provide any kind of pretext; they have deliberately not tried to move too many military forces around to look as though they are doing a build-up. They have been playing it smart, but the US press reported that the US intelligence community had uncovered a plan by Russia that there was going to be some kind of falsified attack, and that supposedly was going to be based on a TB2 strike.

All the time, Russian news mentions Ukrainian artillery strikes, civilian casualties—this kind of news is always pumped into Russia. It is not surprising that Russians overwhelmingly view the situation in Ukraine—they blame NATO or they blame Ukraine; they don't blame Russia itself. So the domestic approval already kind of points in that direction. There is certainly room for a pretext. It could be artillery strikes; it could be something along other lines. But the most important thing is for Ukraine not to play into that and not to provide a pretext for an escalation, and I think that so far they are playing it the right way.

Chair: Thank you; that is very helpful. It takes us up to a potential invasion itself. Richard, do you want to take us forward here?

Q41 **Richard Drax:** Thank you, Chair. Gentlemen, good afternoon. Does Russia currently have the necessary troops and equipment in place? If it does, how quickly could it launch an invasion? If it doesn't, what is missing and how soon could it potentially be in a position to carry out such an operation?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: The context for the build-up is that, back in the 1980s and 1990s, Russia had one of two responses to anything it didn't like. One was a massive conventional invasion, like in Hungary or Czechoslovakia, and the other was nuclear war. Neither option is great when you are trying to secure sanctions concessions, as you can imagine, so they have tried to build their ability to manage escalation. I think what we are seeing is actually the quite early stages of that, which is demonstrating force readiness.

Because the deployments in and of themselves have been quite obvious, it has been easy for us to track them with open sources. That suggests that that is a very clear messaging signal; it is the first part of deterrence: "This is the capability we have and we're moving it to your borders." They are doing it in what I would suggest is quite a slow and deliberate manner. The teeth of the army have come first—the tanks, the artillery and the infantry fighting vehicles. The air defences, the logistics and the electronic warfare followed, and now we are seeing the personnel. It has been an incremental form of escalation.

The next level will be readiness, at which point they may look to conduct drills, which we are already beginning to see—exercises showing that their forces have the readiness. It is about signalling intent—that they are not just moving vehicles around for fun, and they will use them if they have to.



If and when they choose to seek a military option, again, they have levels that they can use, because they want to minimise escalation. They want escalation dominance in this field. If something broadens out to a global war, they lose all dominance against NATO, so they want to confine and limit it. The things they have to do that are long-range cruise missiles—ground-based, air-based and sea-based. They have precision strike assets located throughout—

- Q42 **Richard Drax:** Samuel, forgive me; I am going to interrupt you and be very rude. We know what they've got—the question is, do they have the necessary troops and equipment in place now for such an invasion, were they to do it, not how they're getting to that point. With the 125,000 troops, the navy, the missiles and the artillery—we know that's all there—is that sufficient to launch an invasion, were they to do it, and if so, how quickly could they launch it?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: The point I was coming to is that the invasion would be the very last thing that they'd choose to do. There are military options against Ukraine before that, which are very rarely considered.

There are precision strikes against critical national infrastructure. They would perhaps, initially, be designed to cause irreversible damage; think of the Saudi Aramco oil facilities and how much disruption that caused. How much disruption do they cause by destroying a Ukrainian power station, and is it possible to achieve their political goals there? We are very focused on this worst-case scenario of an invasion, but there are a lot of things that might happen before that that would be military.

- Q43 **Richard Drax:** I understand that, but do they have those assets—whether they do a rocket strike or an aircraft strike before putting men on the ground, as such, in a conventional sense. Is that kit there now?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: It is, yes.

- Q44 **Richard Drax:** And if they wanted to launch it? I think the answer to that question then is that they could do it, if they wanted to, tomorrow.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: Yes. The key thing with the Russian targeting process is that it involves a lot of fixed infrastructure, which obviously doesn't move. We could all go on Google Maps on our phones, now, and get grid references that would be sufficient for a missile that the Russians have. They have the option to do that.

In terms of a conventional ground force invasion, they are moving towards being capable of doing that. I think it is a deliberately methodical process. Personally, I don't think they're at a place where they could do that yet, but all of the matériel is in place. It would be a case of bringing up the final personnel to make it all operational, and that could take days or hours.

- Q45 **Richard Drax:** Worryingly, in our report—I don't think you've seen it—we understand they have blood up there, obviously for surgery, and all of the medical support, which, of course, is crucial: if you're going to launch an invasion, you're going to have casualties. I'd have thought that really is



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almost the most worrying sign, in a sense—that really does mean business.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: It does mean business. That kind of thing tends to resonate specifically with western forces, because we can't move anywhere without the appropriate medical facilities. I think that is why that particular aspect of it particularly hits home.

Looking at their other capabilities, the electronic warfare moving in is worrying. The strategic communications assets moving in, which can relay and move vast tranches of data throughout a theatre, is quite worrying as well.

Richard Drax: Which they have done already.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: Which they have done already, yes.

Q46 **Richard Drax:** Thank you, Sam, very much. Robert, do you want to add any more to that?

Robert Lee: Sure. If Russia wants to go to war, even if they are going to rely on fire in airstrikes, they will want to have all the other capabilities in place first, just in case. That gives them flexibility and options—depending on how things go, it gives the political leadership different options on what they can achieve.

As Sam mentioned, almost all the heavy stuff is in place. That includes ballistic missile defences; amphibious ships from the northern and Baltic fleets are entering the Black sea today, as we speak, and tomorrow. Most of the heavy things—the very observable things—have already been moved.

The question is that a lot of the troops have not arrived, as far as we know. Some of the equipment from Siberia and elsewhere has been in pre-position near Ukraine for a long time. What we can tell from satellite photos elsewhere is that they did not have enough tents to house enough troops to man the equipment. The troops there are just conducting maintenance, but most of the troops are back at their permanent base. We are now seeing signs of those troops moving in.

One of the signs that is problematic is that we have seen a number of units from the Russian national guard, Rosgvardiya, deployed in areas near the border. Rosgvardiya are used for a few reasons, but one of them is that they want to ensure greater operational security before the final movement when they are put into operation. You expect Rosgvardiya to do that. They could set up checkpoints and they can prevent people from taking photos and posting them online—all the kind of stuff that Sam and I have been using to track Russian military movements. Deploying Rosgvardiya troops now is one way—and if a lot of them have been deployed, that is one step you might do right before you start airlifting in a lot of troops.



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The big issue is that all the slow and heavy equipment that takes time to move in—they have done that already. Now we are talking about bringing in troops. It is not a matter of weeks; it is a matter of days, if they want to escalate. On the key days that we are talking about, the first phase of the Allied Resolve exercise due in Belarus nominally ends tomorrow. During that phase is when the build-up is supposed to occur. The main phase goes from February 10th to 20th. They likely will continue to bring in equipment from elsewhere. Some of the big assembly yards at Yelnya and Pogonovo, we have seen it moving away from that and closer to the border. They are doing those steps.

The big thing to realise at this point is that we are at a point where if Putin made a decision to do a large-scale invasion, he could probably do so on a couple of days' or hours' notice. Especially by next week, pretty much everything should be in place, including the troops. The time window will be small and it will not necessarily be observable to us what those final steps are, because everything else has already been put in place.

Q47 **Richard Drax:** Sorry, the sound is terrible, Robert, but I think you are saying that they could be ready in days to launch a full-scale invasion. Is that right?

Robert Lee: That is correct.

Q48 **Chair:** Thank you. I wanted to explore the order, because you talked about taking out any critical national infrastructure. We have learnt the hard way—Iraq was the best example. You take out radio towers and critical national infrastructure, and days later you wonder why on earth you took out an electrical generator or radio tower that you then need.

If the Russians are hoping to invade and hold the ground and win over hearts and minds, blasting the infrastructure would not necessarily be the way that they will go about it. If Putin were to give the green light—I am trying to remember my Shrivvenham doctrine about the execution, the seize, the hold, the stabilise—the movements that take place now would be hybrid. It would be a cyber-attack on an immense scale, followed by air superiority. What would be the first things that happen to say that an attack is under way? I do not think it would be just tanks running over the horizon.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: It is difficult to say, as I am sure you can appreciate, because they have worked hard on having a lot of different options at their disposal. The reason for that is that tanks rolling over a border are quite predictable. They create tactical surprise but strategically you know they are there and you know what is coming. The cyber-attack element is interesting, because they have elevated and escalated that periodically ever since 2014, so they exert pressure through that. They would have the means to do that, but it only creates temporary windows.

In terms of the sequence of events, a cyber-attack would be nearly simultaneous to everything kinetic, because that window is so short. With good cyber-defence capabilities, it's relatively easy to patch cyber-attacks once they're detected. That cyber-attack is then no longer useful, and they



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have to move on to a different technique. It creates a short window of opportunity.

If we did see a massive cyber-attack, it's quite likely that it would be nearly simultaneous with a conventional move of some element. The opening phases would likely be not too dissimilar from what we saw in Nagorno-Karabakh in character. They would be looking for things that the Russians typically worry about: it would be the national infrastructure that enables the Ukrainian forces, the Ukrainian air defences and the Ukrainian artillery. They would look to make it more of a mopping-up operation for the Russian ground troops than a conventional fight. They would want that to be very uneven for the Ukrainians.

Q49 **Chair:** Thank you. Any comments, Robert?

Robert Lee: I agree with Sam. I think that they tried to integrate all those things at the same time. They are really trying to emphasise speed, orienting Ukraine and trying to make it as difficult as possible to prepare itself for any kind of invasion. I would expect cyber and electronic warfare, fires—all those things to go in hand in hand at the same time.

Some people underestimate how fast and lethal modern warfare is. It's extremely fast. Russia has very capable fires capabilities, which means it can inflict a lot of damage within the first 30 minutes. As Sam said, in the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Azerbaijani forces destroyed 60% of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic's air defences and 40% of its artillery in the first 30 to 40 minutes.

If you have the co-ordinates for those pieces of equipment, you can hit them with satellite-guided munitions. Russia has those. I have no doubt that a huge priority of the Russian intelligence agencies is to locate all the key targets of the Ukrainian military in case it escalates. Right away, we would see a very lethal and fast response. The objective would be to inflict as much damage as possible and basically try to convince the Ukrainians that it's not worth resisting—"We might as well just concede to Russia's demands."

Chair: Thank you. Let's now turn to the options of what Russia might do.

Q50 **Gavin Robinson:** Some of what I was going to ask you gentlemen has been covered in part by your answers. We have woven together mass physical invasion, attacks on critical national infrastructure and the hybrid warfare options. What do you think is most likely?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: I think it would probably be context-specific. It would depend on how in reach Russia felt its political and diplomatic aims were and how much pressure it really needed to exert. That is where the idea of the critical national infrastructure strikes come in. If the US and Ukraine start to doubt that Russia is serious about its intent, causing a bit of damage to a power station or a bridge or something signals that, "No—we are here to cause this. We are here to do this, and we can." The options are very broad. It has a lot of things it can do.



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Russia's goal is always its diplomatic aim, and the military options would be scaled up to that. If the diplomatic aim is removing Zelensky and replacing him with a Russian-preferred solution, we would have to ask whether that was viable with the current Ukrainian military in place.

If the current Ukrainian military isn't going to support a new President, the Ukrainian military would have to be destroyed, unless Russia can co-opt enough of the Ukrainian military to prevent them from fighting against a new President—that kind of thing. The diplomatic talks shape what the battlefield would be, if one were to happen.

Q51 **Gavin Robinson:** Thank you. Rob, do you agree with that contextual answer?

Robert Lee: I do. I think there are a variety of tiers of military force that are possible. The problem or concern is that if Russia is going to escalate, it probably has fairly ambitious political goals, which means it will probably need to use a good amount of military force to achieve them.

I think that Russia's primary goal or primary problem is that it does not like Ukraine's political orientation. It wants to use military force to shape that, or to implement the Minsk agreements or something even worse than that. Because the Minsk agreements are so politically unpalatable for any Ukrainian leader to implement, you have to use enough military force to change the cost-benefit analysis that shows it is preferable to force through this agreement than to keep taking the pain that the Russian military can inflict.

As Sam was saying, I think the focus will not necessarily be on occupation—at least in my opinion. I think the focus is on inflicting pain on the Ukrainian military, destroying military units, inflicting casualties, possibly taking POWs and degrading Ukraine's ability to defend in the future. That could mean destroying air defences, aviation, artillery and so on. Basically, trying to demonstrate that Ukraine cannot defend itself against the Russian military and that it is preferable to concede to Russia's political demands than to keep fighting.

If we look at Russia's superior capability in stand-off munitions, they can really inflict a lot of pain on Ukraine. The question becomes: how much force does Putin think he has to use to achieve his political objectives? I think it is really going to be focused on targeting the Ukrainian military.

As Sam mentioned, the problem becomes that, even if Russia uses a lot of military force, if Ukraine does not concede then an occupation of parts of Ukraine might become required to ensure implementation of any kind of political agreement.

I think Russia would try a more limited option. One might be just to use fires. It might just use artillery strikes and missiles strikes to inflict so many casualties that Ukraine concedes. If that does not do it, it may do a punitive ground operation. It could be one or two weeks long. It could look a bit like the 2008 war in Georgia, but more aggressive. If that does not achieve Russia's objectives, it might require some form of occupation



around Kyiv or some of the areas to implement and enforce those political agreements.

The concern is that there will be significant costs if Russia escalates. Russia knows that, so if it is going to escalate, it will try to achieve its ultimate objectives no matter what. That is the real concern when we look at Russia's view on the situation.

Q52 **Gavin Robinson:** Thank you. You and Sam have mentioned electronic warfare and other aspects of hybrid warfare. How proficient is Russia at the various aspects of hybrid warfare and, perhaps more importantly, how proficient would Ukraine be in preventing or defending against them?

Robert Lee: In terms of electronic warfare, it is very capable. Russia might be the most capable military in the world in terms of electronic warfare capabilities. We have seen some of that in Syria, where Russia has used EW systems against US and NATO aircraft. It has definitely been a problem.

We have never seen Russia use the full capabilities of its electronic warfare systems in a real conflict. There is a real concern that if it decides to escalate in Ukraine, it will likely use electronic warfare systems to disrupt both Ukraine communications and command and control, and also potentially NATO reconnaissance aircraft. That could have a really broad effect over Europe. It is somewhat hard to assess how problematic that would be for Europe in general, but I am highly confident that it would be able to significantly disrupt Ukrainian command and control communications and other systems.

In terms of other hybrid aspects, I think the big threat is conventional warfare. That is the real thing that we should focus on here. In 2014, Donbas tried a more hybrid approach where it used volunteers, special operations, intelligence officers, a mix of conventional and other arms of the military, but ultimately that failed. What saved Russia's intervention in August 2014 was the introduction of a division-strength Russian military force with conventional power. That was what saved it. I think if it intervenes this time, it will be overt and there will be an emphasis on that kind of conventional military power. I think the other things we talk about in terms of hybrid warfare are relevant, but I really think it is the conventional military power that is the important thing to focus on.

Q53 **Gavin Robinson:** Thank you for that. Sam, do you agree with that about the balance leaning to conventional warfare, as opposed to the use of hybrid tactics?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: Yes, and I would go further to emphasise what Rob has picked up there. The Russians only use the phrase "hybrid warfare" to refer to what the West does; they don't view it as a concept that they use. It's not something that they understand as a method of warfare; they just understand forms of escalation and forms of escalation control.



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What we would see as hybrid warfare, for them would just be, "Let's try this, and if that doesn't work, it's okay because the army is here." They have a cross-domain coercion element, which is where we see things like Wagner mercenaries building Russian influence in Africa deployed to Syria, because it is a light footprint, but it always, always falls down to conventional deterrence.

One of the problems in the west is that we have been looking for hybrid warfare—cyber-attacks and little green men—but Russia's modernisation since 2008 has been in conventional military and nuclear forces, and that is where their deterrence and compellence sits.

Q54 **Chair:** On hybrid warfare, are you suggesting, or perhaps implying, that the west allied forces need to advance our understanding of the character of the conflict? Are we behind? You want to say yes, I know.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: In some circles, yes. I think there is a need for a greater understanding of Russia and a greater appreciation of how Russia does business.

Q55 **Chair:** The amalgam of all these other capabilities, all used as one entity, including space, doctrine and so forth, all in one go?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: Exactly.

Chair: Interesting.

Q56 **Dave Doogan:** How much resistance would Ukraine forces be able to offer in the event of a limited or a full-scale invasion? Could they, for example, successfully defend Kyiv?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: I think the Russians would probably try to create multiple dilemmas, so there would be multiple axes of advance, which would make it very hard for the Ukrainians to defend Kyiv without leaving something else undefended.

Robert Lee: If we look at Russia's deployments right now, one of the things that they get from deploying a number of amphibious ships to the Black sea is that they force Ukrainians to defence the southern coasts; by deploying to Belarus they force Ukrainians to defend the northern border; and also they obviously site forces in Donbas and the north-east border with Russia.

By having these forces in position, even if Russia decides, "We're not going to do amphibious landings", which I don't expect, but even if they don't invade from Belarus, they still prevent Ukrainian forces from massing in one area to defend in one area. So it makes it much more difficult for them.

Wars are inherently unpredictable, so I don't ever want to say it is one way or the other, but if Russian forces do a punitive raid, avoid going into cities and only try to target the Ukrainian military, I think it would be very difficult for the Ukrainian military to defend against that, just because they



are at a serious disadvantage in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities and fires capabilities and things of that nature.

If Russia decides to go into cities and to occupy, that is where Ukraine could offer much more resistance, and that is where the risk in costs would go up for Russia. Personally, that is why I think Russian forces would likely try to avoid cities, avoid occupation as much as possible, because the risk in costs goes up dramatically for them and it would play into Ukraine's strengths and it would lessen their strengths, which is their superior conventional capabilities, especially in an environment where there would be fewer civilians in rural areas.

Q57 Dave Doogan: What specific Ukrainian capabilities might cause concern for Russia? I ask that in the context—I ask for your analysis of this assertion—that Ukraine is demonstrably, in terms of capability and of capacity and/or scale, very much not Georgia, Azerbaijan, Syria, Afghanistan or Chechnya. So would a significant conflict between Russia and Ukraine—we are all aware of the asymmetry between Russia and Ukraine; we get that, it is not at issue—but nevertheless, in terms of a determined foe, will Russia have at the back of its mind some serious concerns about the level of resistance that Ukraine could put up? Robert first, please.

Robert Lee: Yes, absolutely. I am not an expert in what areas of Ukraine would be most likely to resist, but I think the Russians know that western Ukraine would be the least favourable area for them to invade, whereas in eastern Ukraine I think they might expect more support. It is always worth keeping in mind that Putin may be exaggerating how much domestic support Russian forces might receive if they invade Ukraine.

Vladimir Putin has the most experience of any world leader in overseeing military conflicts, and he has been broadly successful. I would say that the 2014 intervention in Donbas is the one time where he really didn't achieve his aims. But in Georgia, Syria and the second Chechen war, mostly, he was successful.

I think Russian leaders pretty well understand using military force to achieve political goals, and not embracing or pursuing more extensive political goals than they can achieve. They are probably aware that there is significant risk if they invade and significant risk if they occupy. It will tie down the Russian military potentially for years, and it creates a lot of issues. They are probably aware of that, but they have significant advantages. If they decide to invade, I think they will try, as much as possible, to conduct a campaign that rests on their strengths and does not play into their weaknesses, if that makes sense.

Q58 Dave Doogan: It does, thank you.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: I can offer a tactical perspective to complement Rob's strategic one. The Ukrainian systems that would be of concern for the Russians would be things like their self-propelled artillery. If we look at the fighting in 2014-15, it was artillery-heavy on both sides. The Russians are an artillery army with a lot of tanks, so they would be looking to find



the artillery quite early on and destroy as much of it as possible. They would look for long-range air defence systems like the S-300s that the Ukrainians have. Unfortunately, that is likely to be made easier by the fact that those are not very mobile any more. They would look for the Ukrainian air force.

They would be looking to strike a lot of these things very early on, because they would create problems for the Russians, potentially, and they would create risks that the Russians would have to factor into their force assessments. Striking them very early on would demonstrate quite clearly what was about to follow, because those assets are the enablers that would allow the Ukrainian armed forces to fight efficiently. Without them, the Ukrainians would be quite aware of what was about to happen.

The final aspect is the resistance. There has been a lot of talk about Ukrainian resistance—a gun in every window. I hear that and I can empathise with the Ukrainians, but given that we have seen what Russian counter-insurgency looks like—we have seen what it looks like in Syria and in Chechnya—I think that that eventuality should be treated with some level of concern, because it would be potentially a humanitarian disaster. That is my opinion. If the Ukrainians do go into an insurgency that the Russians respond to, it would be catastrophic.

Q59 Dave Doogan: Robert, I want to go back to something you said and try to explore it a little bit further, in terms of the support that Russia might enjoy in the Donbas and other areas in the east.

How careful do we have to be about this distinction between Russian speakers and non-Russian speakers? It is my understanding that maybe not almost everybody, but a huge proportion of the Ukrainian population can speak Russian fluently. Within that, even though you may be bona fide ethnic Russian, living in the east, it still does not mean that you are pro-Putin or pro-Kremlin. It is a bit more muddled than some commentators make out. Is that fair?

Robert Lee: I think so. Let me emphasise that I am not an expert on this kind of element of Ukrainian identity, but when we look at first language, it is certainly not an entirely predictable indicator of political views or support. Especially since 2014, I think identity issues have changed in Ukraine somewhat, where even among Russian speakers, those who have Russian family members or supporters of Russia, I think there probably was a change in political views about what has happened.

One of the concerns, from my view, is that Russian leaders might be overestimating how many of these Ukrainians who are Russian speakers might support a Russian occupation or Russian military intervention. Obviously, any kind of escalation is going to kill Ukrainian soldiers and it is going to kill some of their family members, too. The risks are always there.

Of course, any war involves civilian casualties. You can try to mitigate and lessen them, but ultimately there are going to be civilian casualties, and ultimately there's no way you can conduct this kind of war without



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upsetting people and turning the populace against you even more. So I think that's always going to be a risk.

Dave Doogan: That's very helpful; thank you.

Chair: Derek wanted to come in here as well, but John, do you want to come in first?

Q60 **John Spellar:** You referenced Chechnya and Syria just now. Isn't there a significant difference? Our world communications have changed dramatically, even in that short period of time. Therefore this conflict would be live on world broadcasting, probably in real time. That may be something that the Russians are prepared to bear, but it would also be a very significant pressure around the world.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: It definitely would be for them, yes. It would bring significant pressure. I believe their conduct in Syria and Chechnya brought pressure as well.

Q61 **John Spellar:** But in a way, certainly in Chechnya, that was almost within a closed environment. This will be within a very transparent environment.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: Potentially in a transparent environment. The Russians are quite capable at things like GPS jamming. If that goes on long enough, it actually prevents national communications infrastructure from working, because it relies on the timing that GPS provides and things like that. They have the ability to do that kind of thing.

They have the ability to shut the Russian population off from the world wide web and fall back on a Russian-specific internet. There are questions over how capable and effective that is, but they test it and talk about it, so if we assume that it works as they say, they could potentially guard their population from a lot of that impact.

Yes, there would be global pressure, but they have been present whilst chemical weapons have been used in Syria and it has been impossible to moderate their behaviour or change the way they have acted there. That's something that the western countries have gone to war over in the past.

I accept your point; it is perfectly valid. There would be a lot of pressure on them. There would be pressure on them to end it as quickly as possible. But I still think we need to be cautious about what would happen in the event of an insurgency and what the Russians would be capable of, because we know they have no moral qualms about this type of thing.

Q62 **Derek Twigg:** You say they have no moral qualms. Are we talking a sort of second world war scenario of going in and destroying a town or village because it's full of insurgents? They would do that, you think?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: They have quite an interesting counter-insurgency theory. If you look at how they performed in Syria, you could argue that it was relatively effective, certainly compared with other counter-insurgency areas.



Q63 **Derek Twigg:** It was ruthless.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: It was ruthless, but the way they function tends to be quite methodical. It uses micro demonstrations of force and compellence to try to limit the amount of insurgent forces that they have to fight. I suppose that's my point: we risk seeing what has happened to Syrian and Iraqi towns and cities translated over to the European continent.

Q64 **Derek Twigg:** One of the intangibles, the things that are unknown, is that we don't actually know what sort of stomach the Ukrainians have for an insurgency war if the Russians invade, do we? It's not something we can put a measure on at this point in time.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: No. There are numerical indices. The Ukrainians have, reportedly, 80,000 volunteers, who spend a day each weekend training.

Q65 **Derek Twigg:** But the issue is actually doing it, isn't it?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: Yes, exactly.

Q66 **Derek Twigg:** This is to both of you, and I don't mind who starts—Samuel or Robert. Listening to you, we sort of think, "Well, why should the Ukrainians bother, really? Let's just say to the Russians, 'If you step over the border, there's not a lot we can do to stop you.'" I may have been a bit unfair on you there.

The question that I would like to put to you is this. Of course, if we look at the Russian Armed Forces, they massively outnumber the Ukrainians, but actually not all the Russian Armed Forces are going to be on the border with Ukraine, big as it is. So are the Ukrainians stupid enough to leave all their aircraft, armoured vehicles, self-propelled guns, armour and artillery and not move it around or try to hide it? I know it's difficult, with satellites and all the intelligence—obviously, there is any intelligence that the west is providing to them as well.

Is that just not a goer—they are where they are and the Russians are just going to hit them and that is it? Or is there some sort of intelligence strategy here? What I am trying to say to you is that we all know what the Russians are likely to do; so do the Ukrainians and so do the west. What is being done to counter this in your minds? What are the Ukraine and the west capable of doing? I do not mean putting troops in from the west, but in terms of the help we are giving them.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: I would break this down into two sections. In the short term, Ukraine has some ability to trade space for time, so it can gradually inflict losses and just prevent the Russians from achieving that quick victory that they want. Because what the Russians are trying to do is create this sense that time is an objective fact: that if we do not answer what they want, there will be a fait accompli and all of Ukraine will fall back into a Russian sphere of influence, or something like that, when actually that is an impression they have created through their actions.



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If the Ukrainians are able to slow down that temporal aspect, if they are able to bog the Russian forces down in any way possible by pulling back and trying to extend Russia's lines of logistics and support, and bring its air force into pop-up engagements with its air defences, in terms of an air campaign—my colleague Justin Bronk has written on this today—they can draw the Russian air assets into strikes deeper in Ukraine and try and expose them to risk. So they do have options and I think they will be considering them and how best to go about them.

In the long term, if Ukraine is able to hold Russia's reconnaissance and long-range strike assets at risk, that would significantly alter Russia's military calculus. So if they can engage things like Iskander ballistic missiles in Russian territory once they start firing on Ukraine—

Q67 Derek Twigg: So if they could take the fight to them, you mean?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: I think they would have to in the long term. I do not think Russia would respect anything else, but I open the floor to Robert. I spoke for a long time.

Q68 Derek Twigg: So go on the offensive, not just on the defensive. Robert.

Robert Lee: I think Sam is right. I think the first objective for Ukraine's forces, if the escalation occurs, is to try and protect as many of their units as possible during that initial campaign with fires.

First off, Russia is extremely capable in MRL systems and they have cluster munitions. If you have a large Ukrainian military formation and Russia can blanket an entire grid square over multiple kilometres, cluster munitions destroy a lot of equipment very quickly and relatively cheaply.

One of the objectives is to try and disperse Ukraine's military units enough that that might require precision-guided munitions, which Russia does not have in that many significant numbers. Two is going to be that at one point, Ukraine will move into cities. It is almost a given that you move into cities to try and defend or protect whatever kind of military assets you have. If you keep them out in the rural areas, where there is no risk of collateral damage, they are going to be struck right away. It is the same thing that has always happened when the US or NATO goes elsewhere—that is what countries do, and I think Ukraine will do the same thing. The big question is: how can Ukraine protect their military assets in a first phase so they can continue to use them later on?

In terms of striking, there are the Iskanders. It is going to be hard. They do not have those kind of long-range fires capabilities. They have one battery of Neptune. In their ship missiles, there is a ground attack option. They have Tochka-U ballistic missiles. Same as before, those are going to be a priority target for the Russian military.

I suspect that there are junior officers who just go around watching where those things are, ready to provide target details at any time. That is going to be one of the big priorities for Ukraine in the beginning: to try and protect as much of the military as possible during those initial strikes and



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make it as difficult and expensive as possible for Russia to actually destroy them.

I do not know how effective they will be. It is going to be difficult, but again, the one thing we need to say is that Russia has very capable precision-guided munitions, but they do not have enough of them to really use them in cities without inflicting a loss of civilian casualties.

One disagreement I had with Sam before is that we look at what Russia did in Syria or Chechnya. In Syria, they always had the Syrian air force and so if they had any kind of strikes to civilian targets, they could typically try and blame the Syrian air force or let Syrian soldiers typically do any of the kind of really brutal things in cities. Russia facilitated those things, but I think they were able to politically because it was Syria and not Ukraine.

In the case of Ukraine, Putin has essentially carte blanche in terms of domestic approval in Russia to strike Ukrainian military targets. I think most of the Russian population will support that and would not be that angry about it. I do think a significant restraint will be if the Russian military starts inflicting large numbers of Ukrainian civilian casualties, or starts destroying really historic cities that have a lot of Russian historical importance too, like Porokhi in Poltava and so on. I think that would be potentially a significant threat to Putin's approval if he carried out this type of military operation, especially if there is not a pretext such as you had with the apartment bombings in the second Chechnyan war. So I think that is a significant limitation.

They have BGMs, but do they have enough to really hit targets in cities that often, or that many times? Probably not. It would be expensive for them. On the Ukraine military, I do think there will be a limitation. If Russia tries to go into cities, there is no way you get around civilian casualties, and I think that will be a big restraint and problem for the Kremlin if they try to do that.

Chair: Thanks very much indeed. We have looked at Ukraine and Russia. Let's now turn to the other side.

Q69 **Mr Francois:** Is the military hardware that the west has provided so far to the Ukrainians likely to make any practical difference in the kind of conflict that we have been discussing this afternoon? Or should we accept that, effectively, they were political gestures that are unlikely to have any militarily significant outcome?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: It's a bit of both. They would provide some capability, but let's look at the context of that capability. NLAW, which the UK sent, has a typical engagement range of 600 metres to 800 metres. When I speak to infantrymen about that kind of thing, they say, "Yeah, you would have to be quite brave," because at that range you are well within range of attack. A tank has thermal images and everything, so, if they hit a tank, that's great. It is a very capable and effective weapon. But we are really talking very nitty-gritty close combat, where things tend to



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be decided by chance as much as technology. So, yes, they offer a capability in a close fight. The problem is that Russia fights deep before it fights close.

Q70 **Mr Francois:** Yes, because your infantry units might have been artilleried before the tanks get anywhere near them.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: Yes.

Q71 **Mr Francois:** There was a rumour that we were going to supply the Ukrainians with some models of our Ajax light tank, but then we decided it would be better to give them to the Russians in the hope that they would deafen their tank crews. So we have given NLAW. Is there much else that the west has provided that would be of any significance?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: The Javelin and Stinger missiles that are making their way into the Ukraine forces offer capabilities, but the range is still limited. Javelin can push close to 4 km, but at that range, especially if you are a dismounted infantryman and you are trading blows with a tank formation, that is quite a courageous move in my opinion. It is not to say that the Ukrainians will not do that and that it will not inflict losses, but just understanding that what is likely to have happened to them up to the point that they get to use that will have been disconcerting. It will have been very damaging. They would have lost contact with their officers, potentially. Their command and control will be gone. So those kinds of capabilities are useful because they offer them the ability to fire from within cover and they are very lethal, but we don't win wars through tactical engagements.

Q72 **Mr Francois:** What it boils down to, as a former infantryman many years ago, is that Javelin is a very capable system, but it is meant to be part of an all-arms battle. Isn't part of the problem that, while we are giving them infantry-deployed systems, they are really short of things like artillery and long-range fires, and the Russians would have almost complete dominance very quickly in those areas? So you come down to the conflict with pockets of infantry with a few surviving armoured vehicles against very heavy artillery and armoured mass.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: Potentially. Perhaps there is something to be said for providing them with ISTAR capabilities. Improving their ability to find, detect and locate Russian units would potentially be helpful. They have UAVs. They have provided their force with additional domestic UAVs, but the greater and more integrated your ISTAR capabilities are and the more of those capabilities that are passive—that is, not emitting any electronic signal—the greater the survivability.

Q73 **Mr Francois:** I get all of that, and I will ask Rob to come in. Improved ISTAR must give you an advantage rather than not having it, but you still have not got the systems to attack Russian formations in depth, have you? Even if you can locate them, you have got little to strike them with.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: No, not at operational depth, but if you can improve ISTAR and then provide the Ukrainians with sufficient ammunition



for their artillery, you can at least address some of the technical issues at the tactical level.

Q74 **Mr Francois:** Rob, what more could we practically give them that they could practically use?

Robert Lee: One of the reasons I think Russia is forcing this issue right now is that they think that Ukraine is a semi-permanently hostile country and they realise it has this advantage in long-range fires capabilities. They are very concerned that if Ukraine were to get longer-range missile systems and improve its conventional deterrents, any future Russian escalation would be more costly than it would be today, so that is part of the issue.

Part of the issue that we have been talking about is what kind of arms we could be providing. I agree with you; I don't think Javelins, Stingers and NLAWs will significantly alter the outcome of a conflict if Russia invades. It could raise costs, but it will not significantly deter Russia, and it would be most effective if Russia decides to go into cities and occupy terrain—not just punitive operations. The problem is that if we tried to deliver the really significant weapons that could change the balance of power, Russia would almost certainly pre-empt that delivery and try and escalate before then.

I think that one of the limitations, and something that Sam mentioned, is that we are talking about short-range anti guided missiles. There are longer-range systems available. The Israelis produced the Spike NLOS, and there is the 30-km-range ATGM. One truck with 10 of those missiles can take out an entire tank company at multiple times their maximum reach. That is a very effective system. And then you have loitering munitions. Loitering munitions are really the way to go because they are very easy to conceal. You can put them in small trucks. Loitering munitions often have a max range of hundreds of kilometres, so you can really increase the capabilities of small units, including units operating in a very distributed and dispersed manner.

Those are the kind of capabilities that would be most effective right now. The US military lacks a lot of those. I am not as sure about the UK. I know the UK is making drones a bigger focus, but those are the two things that would be most effective right now.

The other one is that because the US has a strong air force, it has neglected having very capable short and medium-range ground air defence systems. Those are really capable systems that would be very useful right now, but it is something that the US military currently lacks. There are certain systems that are available in the world that are not, I think, available in the US or some other countries that would be particularly useful, and I think something we should draw on for future potential cases of things that we could provide to our proxies or other countries to help—

Q75 **Mr Francois:** Rob, I am sorry to interrupt you, but we are slightly tight



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on time. I am going to hand back to the Chair, but I want to ask you one more question. If I heard you right about half an hour ago, you said words to the effect of "The Russians are almost certainly going to pursue this either diplomatically or militarily". If I heard you right, you gave the impression that one way or another, they are going to press this. Is that right? Did we hear you correctly or did I mishear you? The sound isn't perfect.

Robert Lee: I think it is most likely that either Russia will receive a political concession, or they will use military force to escalate to try and achieve those political concessions, so through diplomacy or through military force. But they are certainly signalling that they are not happy with what is happening—they are not happy with the status quo—and if the US, France and Germany will not force Kyiv to make political concessions or to implement Minsk, then they will do so by force; that is what they are signalling.

Mr Francois: That was very clear.

Chair: Thanks very much. Dave, back to you.

Q76 **Dave Doogan:** Very quickly, for you both, my understanding is that a lot of the challenges in terms of equipment for the Ukrainians are due not so much to the lack of capacity, but the age or lack of modernity of some of their equipment. It is my understanding that their principal objective acquisitions are modern electronic warfare defensive capabilities, modern anti-aircraft missiles and associated components, defensive naval weapons, modern artillery, and modern reconnaissance systems. Does that all fit with what you have just said in response to the most recent set of questions about equipment? Does that make sense to you—that shopping list of modern equipment?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: Yes, but I think there is an additional element to it, which is teaching the force to use it. You can provide a force with all of the gear in the world, but if it has no idea how to use it, then it is still not relatively effective.

Military capability is about the totality of the battlefield. Providing the equipment is one thing, but teaching the Ukrainians to use it in such a way that it becomes a problem for the Russians is another. They have had training and instruction on how to form NATO-compliant battalions, and they've had some limited exposure to NATO through exercises that they have participated in—which no doubt was valuable. But if they continue to fall back on Soviet practices, or on what they did in 2014-15, because, hey, they sort of succeeded then, that is an issue, because that is not what is happening right now, and that is not what will happen to them.

You need to build a whole-force capability, and that is a challenge for any force in the world—even the British Army is grappling with how it faces the challenges facing it right now. So, you can provide the equipment, but it needs to come with meaningful support, such as training.

Q77 **Chair:** Before we turn to some of the specifics of what might happen, I



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want to go back and follow on from Mark's point. If NATO were to make a decision and said, "Actually, NATO is about European security: don't forget it. Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and Bosnia weren't NATO members. We're actually going to lean into this; we're going to show some muscle and stand up to Putin; this is our Cuban missile crisis moment," what size force would be required, just to deter Putin—to make him think twice? Would it be a division? Would that be enough, to have enough international flags there, knowing that there's backup, to secure Ukraine as a democracy in eastern Europe?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: I suppose you'd need the clear communication that you have the intent to use what is being deployed, alongside the credibility of that force. I suppose you could argue, from one perspective, that because article 5 has not been triggered, the enhanced forward presence is relatively successful. You could make that argument.

I think that cost calculus for the Kremlin is that if it kills NATO troops, it dramatically escalates that conflict. It goes from being a local conflict to a regional or global one. The problem for Russia is that, on aggregate, its forces are not a match for NATO. The US has the ability to escalate the conflict horizontally anyway.

Chair: Sorry, Russian forces are not—

Samuel Cranny-Evans: Russian forces are not, on aggregate, a match for NATO. That is why they still have a nuclear deterrent.

Chair: I think NATO needs to remind itself of that.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: Yes, I think so. I think that—again, guessing at the assumptions being made in the Kremlin—potentially a small force, which is overtly there to fight, could potentially have a deterrence effect, because the ramifications of engaging that force would be article 5 being triggered, and a conflict that is no longer within Russia's control. That is from a purely theoretical stance. Rob might have more to offer.

Q78 **Chair:** Rob, your thoughts?

Robert Lee: It is hard to know, and hard to predict, exactly. I think, because the US and NATO did not become involved in 2008 or in 2014, Russia expects that neither will get involved this time, either, and that they have the ability to use force without the concern that NATO will get involved.

It is hard to predict exactly what NATO would have to do, but ultimately, as Sam was saying, you'd have to put NATO forces in positions where, if the Russian military wanted to invade, it would have to engage them. I don't know how large those would need to be. I think a small footprint might be possible as a deterrence—if you put forces based in Kyiv or other parts of the border—but it is very unpredictable how Russia would respond. They certainly would not predict that this is coming, and it would be a very escalatory and dangerous situation should it happen. It is something that would be very unpredictable, and it would be really hard to



predict what sort of force contingent would be necessary to deter Russia in that case.

Chair: It is something we have debated in this House; if Russia does invade even part of Ukraine, and that emboldens them, where might they go next? If you do not stop Russia here, what happens then?

Q79 **Stuart Anderson:** I know we have touched on this, and probably more on the measures to prevent it, but I want to go into a little bit more detail on Ukraine's air defences. We have talked of hybrid warfare, but let's look more at the hard power. How vulnerable is Ukraine to Russian airstrikes, and what could the UK and allies do in the time period we have to bolster this?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: The limitations are many. They have a Soviet-era air force that has received some avionics upgrades, but in terms of simple mathematics, the Russian radar-guided air-to-air missiles dramatically outrange what the Ukrainians can field. They have other weaknesses in terms of their early warning radar; they don't have an early warning look down capability—the western AWACS, that kind of thing. The Russians do have a capability in that field. It is very rarely seen, but it does exist, so they can provide look down intelligence and situational awareness for their own air assets.

The ground-based air defence is in a similar situation. It is very rare that we see the more capable systems—they are kind of wheeled out for parades, but it's not clear that any of them actually work, and even if they do, they are still firing Soviet-era missiles. One of the biggest problems that the Ukrainians had in 2014-15 was that the Russians knew which radio frequencies they were operating on and how they were encrypted, so they could listen to them. Broadly the same things apply to their missiles.

So the air defence situation is pretty dire for the Ukrainians. They do have an air force that could inflict losses, but if they took to the skies in an offensive counter-air operation as we would see in NATO, they would be very one-sided.

What can be provided in a short time that would be meaningful? MANPADS, the Stinger missiles, that kind of thing, which would provide their troops with at least some ability to hold rotary-wing and fixed-wing ground strike assets at risk, at least force them to fly higher, where they become less accurate.

You could provide radars, but again that would come with training; they would have to be taught to use them, they would have to be integrated into their air defence network, that kind of thing.

The final thing I would say is that the Russians obviously have vast integrated air and missile defence systems, but it is phenomenally difficult to deconflict that with your own air operations. Even in friendly, live fire exercises, the air tasking has to be so carefully arranged to stop friendly fire in training, and that is in the west.



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There are many historical examples of where the deconfliction of the air defence and friendly air goes poorly and they end up shooting down their own aircraft. The Russians would actually have to operate with some care in that regard, and it is possible that if that were explored fully, it would provide the Ukrainians with opportunities they could exploit.

I don't think that they could win air superiority, but they could prevent the Russian air force from operating. There are chinks in the armour that could be exploited.

Q80 Mr Francois: So what you are saying is that if we are going to supply the Ukrainians with some kind of even basic air defence system, we really should have done it months ago?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: Yes.

Mr Francois: Thank you.

Stuart Anderson: I think that would be similar to where I got to on that. Rob, is there anything you wanted to add?

Robert Lee: I think Sam knows the Ukrainian side much better than I do. One big concern is that even if the Russian air force doesn't fly into Ukrainian airspace that much, they can still do a lot of damage with their superior ground-based fires. I would expect that Russia would use UAVs very heavily to locate targets and use that to bring in multiple launch rocket systems, artillery fire, or Iskander-M short-range ballistic missiles. Even if Russian aviation are not flying into Ukrainian airspace—even if they are not racking up that much in the way of interdiction or close air support—it is still a very tough situation for Ukraine because of Russia's superior ground-based fires capability and the cruise missiles that the Black sea fleet is equipped with.

One issue when looking at equipping the Ukrainian military is that even if we provide them with very capable conventional weapons systems, if they get into a conventional fight with the Russian military, they are not going to win. A conventional fight is often going to be very lethal and very fast. We should be looking at how we can better equip Ukraine to fight unconventionally against the Russian military. That is why I think that loitering munitions could be quite useful: they are much more survivable, you can employ them in much smaller teams, and they still have a very significant range. It becomes much more difficult for the Russian military to counter them than, say, artillery, batteries, and local-launch rocket batteries, which are very easy to see and very hard to camouflage. That is the place to look at in the future for trying to arm a country at risk of a conventional invasion. That is the kind of weapons system we should be looking at.

Q81 Richard Drax: The Russians have not invaded, but these questions focus on the post-invasion, if you like. Should the UK consider providing weapons, such as small arms, or training to support a Ukrainian insurgency in the event of a successful Russian invasion?



Samuel Cranny-Evans: I will try to phase this delicately: that would potentially be quite a good scenario for NATO. If an insurgency did develop, it would tie down a significant body of Russian forces; it would potentially limit the risk to other NATO members; it would ease some of the current pressure to modernise; and it would enable different decisions to be made and different conversations. From a rational strategic perspective, that would be an advisable course of action, provided that it was seen to usefully tie down Russian forces.

Q82 **Richard Drax:** You said a second ago, Samuel, that assistance should be provided now rather than only if an invasion takes place. I think you implied that if we are going to do something, it should all be done now.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: I think if we are serious about providing protection to Ukraine, signalling support through arms deliveries has its own deterrence factor; it has its own political channels; it raises further avenues for conversation. I think that is useful in a political sense. They might not have to be militarily useful, but politically—

Richard Drax: Politically it could be useful—quite. Robert, anything to add?

Robert Lee: On small arms, I would assume that Ukraine already has quite a number of small arms to use. It is hard to predict exactly what would happen. I do not think the Russian military would try to occupy anything west of the Dnieper. I do not think they have that desire. I do not think they will really occupy much of Ukraine if they can achieve their goals through less than that.

However, I would say that any arming or equipping campaign will come with significant risks for NATO as well. I would suspect, if this kind of equipment was being provided, that Russia would also try to respond or deter NATO from those kinds of deliveries. Another thing to consider is where NATO is vulnerable; where Russia could push back against it. That could include cyber-attacks and a variety of other things that NATO has to be prepared to deal with if that was going to be the course of action that NATO took.

Q83 **Richard Drax:** Samuel, you said that were an invasion to take place, it would be catastrophic. Clearly, it would be—I think you used the words “humanitarian disaster”. I suppose my question is about the risk of spilling over.

Are the west and NATO likely to sit still, bearing in mind that public opinion would shift? As Mr Spellar suggested, it would be a very transparent war. I wonder what public opinion would do to NATO and the west, as we all sat here watching men, women and children being blown to shreds, and appalling pictures and stories of—no doubt—the war crimes that I am sure will be the result of the Russian invasion. I wonder how much longer we would sit here and watch, or would we be pressurised to do something more than just provide weapons, if we kept seeing, week after week and month after month, our fellow Europeans being slaughtered? Is there a risk that could push the west to do more?



Samuel Cranny-Evans: Potentially, but I think we would have to factor in that the Kremlin will be conscious of limiting it to a local conflict, as much as possible. If there were seen to be a potential risk of escalation horizontally—the involvement of NATO or public pressure to do more—the logic in our understanding of Russian concepts and perceptions suggests that they would pull back from that. They would try and limit the possibilities and the pretexts for the conflict to be expanded. It could potentially create an outcry, but we are all fairly used to conflict on a global scale, and it is very rare that they create any outcry. The situation in Myanmar, for instance, has been a humanitarian disaster for some time, and there is not a growing body of pressure to do something militarily about that—I appreciate that it is in a completely different area. I suppose my answer is that I am not sure of how it would impact public opinion or if it would create an outcry.

Q84 **Richard Drax:** Rob, the point is that these are Europeans. We got involved in the Serbian conflict. Public pressure, to a large extent, said that the west and NATO must do something—and we did. Do you think it could spill over into something bigger?

Robert Lee: It depends on what course of action Russia takes, for example, if it tries to occupy a lot of terrain, or if it didn't achieve its objectives with more limited use of force and had to escalate or expand. If it creates refugees, that creates a spillover effect right away—that immediately affects NATO or the EU. I don't think Russia will try and escalate it into any kind of conflict with NATO; I don't think they will try and do it in the Baltics and so on. However, the problem is that wars are inherently unpredictable; once one starts, Russian objectives could change, and they could become more or less ambitious depending on how it goes. It is easy to start a war, it is not always easy to know or predict how it will end—or if it will end on the terms that you want. If this happens, it will be a very dangerous event for everyone involved. It will be dangerous for Europe, for NATO, for Russia and for Ukraine. We should be taking every step possible to prevent war and deter it from even beginning.

In terms of popular opinion, I can certainly see that shifting. However, again, I think Russia is cognisant of this. I think it is cognisant of the fact that it cannot do in Ukraine what was done in Syria. Killing large numbers of Ukrainian civilians will likely cause a domestic blowback for Putin—if that happens. I think that is the biggest and most important constrain; that is where watching domestic approval comes into play. I think that popular opinion will be a problem not only for neighbouring countries but for Russia as well.

Q85 **Richard Drax:** Rob, is there a role for irregular forces such as militia or private contractors in any future conflict post invasion?

Robert Lee: Do you mean foreign private military contractors, or Ukrainian?

Richard Drax: The question implies some sort of foreign input, and I



suspect it is more applicable to private contractors outside the country. Maybe my Clerk, Mark, can help me here? Yes, we are referring to those outside the country rather than those inside.

Robert Lee: When we talk about private military contractors, the concern becomes if they are killed by Russian forces, how do you attribute that? Do you treat them as though they are British servicemen who have been killed, or people working on behalf of the British Government? Or are these civilians and they take the risk themselves? It becomes a concern if you start sending private military contractors and domestic anger begins if these individuals are killed but you're not treating it as though they are British servicemen who are being targeted. It's a very grey area, but it's a concerning place.

That was true in Syria when a mixed force of pro-Syrian regime and Wagner private military contractors attacked US forces in 2018. Fortunately, no US troops were wounded or killed. But there's a significant risk from, "How do we attribute this?" The US Government at the time decided not to blame the Russian Government; they decided to just say this was a mistake and so on. But again, it's one of those events where, if it is something you are going to plan on doing, you have to think through the secondary and tertiary effects, which could be quite significant and could escalate.

Richard Drax: Do you have anything to add, Sam?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: I suppose there's the question of how useful they would be to the Ukrainian forces. Again, private contractors do tend to be outmatched whenever they meet a conventional force. The final thing I would add is this. I think it was somebody from MI6 who said, "We can't fight Russia by behaving like Russia." There is a lot to be said for confronting this in a diplomatically open and defensible way. Using private contractors would be catnip for a Russian information—

Richard Drax: Like a movie.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: It would be leveraged heavily to portray how mendacious and awful we are.

Q86 **Dave Doogan:** What impact will an increased NATO presence in the region have, both in the short term as Russia considers its next move and in the longer term if a conflict does ignite? Samuel first.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: It signals NATO's intent. It signals that NATO is capable of meeting its article 5 obligations, or that it is at least willing to show that it is. I think an important part of this is that NATO is seen to be acting as a whole. At the moment, a lot of the events notionally that are branded as under a NATO banner are taking place bilaterally or trilaterally, with the US, UK and Ukraine. It is US and UK electronic intelligence aircraft that are flying over Ukraine and Belarus; it is those kinds of things. So I think the force presence would be good in terms of NATO's deterrence and its credibility, as long as it is seen to be a joint endeavour.



If it's seen that the UK or the US is bearing more than its fair share of that burden, that may not send the right messages, if that makes sense.

Q87 Dave Doogan: The article 5 commitment that you are talking about is in relation to the Baltic states and Poland. Some commentators have made the observation that Putin, by his actions towards Ukraine, or Russia, by their actions towards Ukraine, have increased the very thing they were seeking to push back on, which is increased NATO presence on their doorstep. It's quite hard to believe that is a miscalculation that Putin could have made. Do you agree?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: I would agree with that, yes. Again, we have to be careful about what assumptions they are making, but it's hard to imagine a scenario in which they didn't foresee an increased NATO troop presence on their border.

Dave Doogan: Rob, do you want to add anything on that first part of the question?

Robert Lee: If Russia goes into Ukraine, it means almost certainly they are going to have an enhanced military posture in the European part of Russia for months or longer. I think that as long as Russia have a significant force in Belarus, it affects the NATO defensive posture in the Baltics. Whereas previously it might have made sense to have the rotating light infantry battalions, NATO probably needs to consider deploying larger units there, at least as long as Russia have this enhanced presence in Belarus, right near the border, with some very elite tank, airborne and other kind of forces.

That is not to mention that it appears that Russia deployed a MiG-31K, with Kinzhal missiles, in Kaliningrad yesterday. I will have to confirm whether that actually occurred or not, but that, in between the Iskander deployments in Belarus, changes the situation. It certainly warrants a greater force posture on the eastern flank of NATO, whether or not in the Baltics, but at least in Germany or Poland. That certainly makes sense, and I think NATO could also make clear that any increase in force posture there is tied to the posture of Russian forces—so if Russia pulls its forces back, NATO can pull back along those lines, but as long as there is this huge imbalance right now, it probably does not make sense for NATO just to continue as it is without responding in some way or another. I think that needs to be considered.

I also think, in terms of some of the deterrence options, one of the things that Putin has mentioned is his concern that NATO will deploy long-range missiles to Ukraine which could target Moscow in a matter of minutes. The same concern could happen if those missiles were deployed into Estonia or some of the Baltics: they could also threaten those really important Russian areas. That is another deterrence step that might be worth looking at for NATO, saying that if Russia takes a very destabilising, escalatory decision to invade Ukraine, NATO might take a certain response to that kind of action. I think there are a few different military options that NATO should consider as long as Russia has changed its security posture



on its western border, which is obviously affecting NATO's security position as well.

Q88 Dave Doogan: Territorial integrity on land should be fairly clear, as it should be on the sea. The situation as regards Ukraine's Black sea coast is tense, to say the least, and one of the concerns that Ukraine has is its ability to receipt material past any potential Russian blockade. What is your assessment that any conflict would manifest itself on the sea as well as the land, and what would NATO's role be in ensuring that those international shipping lanes in and out to what is left of Ukraine's southern shores should be maintained?

Robert Lee: Russia right now has a very large naval deployment. Right now, in the Mediterranean and the Black sea, they deployed three of their Project 1164 missile cruisers, for the first time in a long time; the northern fleet, the Pacific fleet, and obviously the Black sea fleet as well. They have a substantial naval presence in the Mediterranean—they deployed Pacific fleet ships there as well. The Black sea has obviously been reinforced, so they have a very strong naval component.

There is some question about what they are going to do with that. I think it is mostly about deterring NATO involvement by saying that if NATO tries to get involved in Ukraine, Russia can respond in a variety of regions to counter NATO interests. A blockade of Ukraine is certainly a concern: if they try to invade, if they begin a war, they will certainly try to interdict further arms deliveries to Ukraine.

Again, I am not sure what the role of NATO is. Any direct NATO involvement in that, if you try to get around a blockade, risks a significant Russia-NATO conflict. Obviously, Russia is deploying forces to try and deter further NATO involvement. It might make more sense to look at a land route on Ukraine's western border to get aid in, or to fly equipment in, but any of these options incurs significant risk of a Russia-NATO escalation, as opposed to just a Russia-Ukraine escalation.

Dave Doogan: Samuel, anything to add to that?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: There are certainly indications that they are building their capabilities to interdict. There are also the Slava-class cruisers, which are pretty good in air defence and naval gunfire roles, so they could potentially support a blockade or an amphibious landing of Russian troops. We know that there are Russian marines moving in landing-craft in and around Crimea, so there is the potential for a number of naval options for Russia to pursue in the region.

Q89 Dave Doogan: Finally from me, Chair, there is clearly a clash of ideology and ownership of influence in this part of the world. What are your individual assessments of the idea that, should things deteriorate, it could descend into a prolonged and acrimonious proxy war between east and west?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: It already is a proxy war and it has been for eight years. I suppose the question is, really, whether or not it is



ideologically charged. I am not sure that there is clear evidence that that is the case. I think, potentially, the closest that it comes to ideology is perhaps that Putin is concerned about his legacy and how he is perceived. He is getting on in years—he can't be around for much longer. I think that is an element. I think there is an element that Russia feels that it has been ignored. Is there a risk of proxy war over and above what there already has been? Potentially, if it is fed, if it is maintained by both sides. But again, that would be counter to what the Russians are trying to achieve.

Q90 Dave Doogan: Robert, briefly—do you have anything to add on that?

Robert Lee: Not really. The one thing to emphasise is that the Russians have watched the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and they have basically decided, "We don't want to do anything like that. We don't want to occupy areas where there is going to be popular resistance. We don't want to occupy countries that have a neighbour on the side that is arming and equipping insurgency." I think they deliberately want to avoid that kind of thing. That is why I think an occupation of much of Ukraine is less likely. I don't think they want to risk that. I think they have deliberately avoided that in the past. They are cognisant of this and cognisant of the risk. If Russia decides to escalate, it will so significantly change global power and geopolitics—there will be so many effects. It will also make Russia much more dependent on China. It will significantly affect so many things. It is one of many things that they are considering, I think—that if they decide to do this, there are so many unpredictable things that occur and so many steps that could come out of this. I think that is one issue as well.

Q91 Chair: Can I turn to the north, and look at Belarus? What is its participation in this, if any, or is it just a convenient bit of territory that Russia can pretend to have war games on and then launch an attack?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: Lukashenko has said that the Belarusian armed forces would only provide missiles and that kind of thing in the event of a conflict, but I think that probably has to be balanced with the rest of his rhetoric, where he says that the west is waging a hybrid war against Belarus and his regime. There were recent meetings where they talked about arming the fire service and various other Government services, in order to defend the nation in the event of a war. The Belarusian armed forces are potentially one of the more confounding factors, because Lukashenko is quite unpredictable and his about-face since the contested elections has been a significant change in his past demeanour.

An additional thing to add, purely from a technical perspective, is that the Belarusian and Russian air defences in the area are networked and joined together.

Q92 Chair: They are networked. So you would not expect Belarusian forces to cross into Ukraine, but there could certainly be a supporting element that could back up, resupply and that sort of thing.

Samuel Cranny-Evans: From what they have said publicly, that is what we have to go on. They could commit to Ukraine, potentially, but it might



be the case that it would be more useful for the Russians for them to stay back.

Chair: Rob, any comments?

Robert Lee: I agree. I don't think the Belarusian military would take a direct role. I am also personally not sure that Russia would conduct kinetic strikes or invade from Belarusian territory, just because Russia already subsidises the Belarusian economy. I am not sure if the Belarusian economy is more vulnerable to western sanctions. I have a feeling that, if an invasion occurred from Belarus, the sanctions would be quite devastating, and I am not sure Russia wants to subsidise more of their economy as a result. I think that the more likely event is that, from Belarusian territory, Russia could use electronic warfare systems. They are much closer to Kyiv from there. They can really disrupt telecommunications. I think, the rest of it—the posturing in Belarus—is to help protect Kaliningrad and to kind of solve that Russian security issue they had before.

One of the big strategic changes that has happened in Europe over the last year is that, before those elections, there was an open question about how much Lukashenko would allow Russian forces on his territory. He consistently pushed back against that. After those contested elections, it is clear that he has very little ability to push back against Russia and that basically Belarusian territory is increasingly used for Russian forces.

I suspect some of the Russian forces deployed right now will remain behind—probably some of the air defence systems, maybe they will leave the squadron behind. Before the Zapad exercise, Russia deployed a couple of Su-30SM fighters. Those have been conducting aerial patrols over Belarus since September. They also deployed a new training centre for air defence systems. Lukashenko's asked for S-400s and other systems. It is likely he will receive them because he is giving Russia what they want. I think, really, the Belarus factor is partially about Ukraine and partially it helps Russia protect Kaliningrad in case of a NATO escalation. I think that is kind of a really significant change of posture there.

Q93 **Chair:** May I also go back to Gavin's question about the scale of an invasion that may take place? I want to crudely put this down into potential options that perhaps we in Parliament and in Britain can get our heads round. So if I just spell out three options and then you tell me whether they are plausible and whether it is right to then look at those and perhaps develop scenarios as to how we react.

The first one would simply be Russia taking over the Donetsk-Luhansk area; essentially, where the proxy support is now. That would be enough to warrant an invasion and say that they have stood up against NATO and created a permanent buffer zone preventing Ukraine, if it joined NATO and the EU, from that rubbing up right against Russia itself. The second would be some kind of land corridor down to the Crimea peninsula to link up with the Crimean effort there. The third might be to take you all the way to the Dnieper river, which of course, would then spell greater



control of the country. Then the fourth one might be taking over the entire country. On those four scenarios, would you agree that they are plausible ones? Clearly, we do not know what Putin might do, but are those ones that you have been considering as well? Rob, do you want to go first?

Robert Lee: Sure. The land bridge between Donbas and Crimea has been mentioned, basically, ever since 2015. I personally do not think it is that important for Russia. They have a bridge between Crimea and the rest of Russia now and I do not think it really solves that many issues for them.

In terms of the Donbas, if they decide to invade, I think it is certainly possible that they could expand the size of the Donbas under their control. I think just occupying it by itself does not really solve any of their big political goals. Their big problem with Ukraine is that they think it is basically semi-permanently hostile at this point. They do not think any Ukrainian leader would be able to make the concessions they want, in the Donbas or elsewhere. They think the political orientation continues to move away from Russia, that Russia is losing influence, and at the same time, that the Ukrainian military is increasing its defensive capabilities.

If Russia needs these military forces in the future, the one kind of tool it has left will be more costly in the future. So because the objectives are about political orientation and kind of more ambitious, I think it is more focused not necessarily on terrain but more on certain targets. So really going after the Ukraine military, inflicting pain and that is really the focus. If they try to occupy, the worst-case scenario is occupying everything east of the Dnieper. I do not think it is the most likely scenario. I think it is possible they could move to Kyiv and then try and have a lasting presence around Kyiv in order to implement the agreements or other agreements that they are forcing on Ukraine.

Ultimately, the most likely option is not enlarged occupation, because they know the costs and risks are high. So, the Donbas, they could certainly change—*[Inaudible]*—Donbas. I do not think an occupation is the most likely event. I do not think a land bridge is that likely. I do not think any occupation west of the Dnieper is that likely. I think it is more about attacking Ukrainian forces, with the one exception that they may move to Kyiv and try and make Zelensky's position more untenable by occupying terrain around Kyiv.

Q94 **Chair:** That's fascinating. I would agree with your assessment. I think any attack, though, may see strikes take place right across Ukraine, because this will be the one opportunity to diminish Ukrainian forces for some time, therefore you go big, but the terrain that you actually keep could be quite small and to the east. Samuel, any thoughts?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: I broadly agree with Rob's points. In terms of likely direction of advance, we could look for where the Ukrainian concentrations are, where they do have their more capable forces. We know that there are particular Ukrainian artillery units that are more capable than any of the others, partly because of their equipment and



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partly because of their heritage and training. We know that there are Ukrainian tank forces that are better equipped than some of the others because they have been modernised—again, their equipment, their heritage and their training—so it is possible that Russia would look specifically for those force concentration areas and either avoid them or head directly to them, depending on what the overall goal is.

Q95 Chair: Thank you very much; that is very helpful indeed. My final question is on China. How does China factor into all this? Has China just given the quiet green light for all this to happen? Are we waiting until the Olympics have completed? There is a pattern of behaviour here. After the 2008 Olympics, it was Georgia. In 2014, Crimea was taken over. Putin is overdue another pop during, around or just after the Olympics. Samuel, your thoughts?

Samuel Cranny-Evans: I think it's more about China's behaviour than Russia's. Xi has been quite careful to distance the Chinese Communist party from Russia's actions in Europe as part of its foreign policy. It has its own concerns with Europe and things like that. Perhaps one of the potentially interesting aspects to consider with China is that, if a sanctions regime is imposed, it would be beneficial to have China on board with that. The question is what China would expect in return for that. There are arguments for and against the idea that the relationship between China and Russia is strong enough that China would significantly side with Russia, and I tend to lean towards against. I do not think they are as closely intertwined as people think. Russia is probably a junior partner in that relationship in more ways than one. Increasingly it is a junior partner militarily, and it is obviously a junior partner financially. Any sanctions against Russia would ideally require Chinese support to make them work and to make them effective. The question would be what would have to be given in return, if anything.

Chair: Interesting. Rob?

Robert Lee: When we talk about Russia and China, the relationship is slowly evolving and slowly becoming closer. They have been brought together by a sheer distrust of or concern with NATO and the US. We talk about whether China is happy to see Russia invade Ukraine or whether Russia is happy to see an invasion of Taiwan, but I think they try to keep those issues sort of separate. They will not necessarily criticise the other one, but they are not necessarily supporting the other side taking those actions.

In the case of the Olympics, Russia waited until the Sochi Olympics ended before they started their operation in Crimea. In 2008, the actual timing was more chosen by Mikhail Saakashvili in Georgia, as opposed to Russia. Russia was doing coercive things, but the timing of the event was really chosen by Georgian forces. I don't think they deliberately did that.

Of course, in 2008, the Olympics were in Beijing, and it would be quite noticeable if Russia had another war during the second time China had an Olympics. But ultimately, the exercise in Belarus ends on the 20th—it ends



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the same day as the Olympics. Right now, we are in that window—basically, this month—where, if Russia are planning on escalating, it makes the most sense to do it this month at some point, whether before the end of the Olympics or right after. But ultimately, if Russia start to escalate, they are tacitly accepting greater co-operation with China, greater economic dependence on China and less dependence on, and co-operation with, Europe. That is a significant change to make, so it is one of the many things that are concerning.

A number of Indian officials are concerned about this as well, because Russia is such a significant arms supplier to India that the closer Russia gets to China—how does that affect their relationship? There are a number of elements to this, but it is certainly one of the big strategic questions. If Russia escalates, one of the implications is how this changes their relationship and our security posture overall.

- Q96 **Chair:** That's really interesting. Some argue that this is exactly what Putin wants to do. He has to prove to his own people—the Russian people—that it is worth, for a legacy, to pivot away from the west. He's angry with the west. I think he was a taxi driver, made to supplement his KGB allowance when the Berlin wall fell. He still blames the west for the fall of the Soviet Union, but he has to convince his own people to tilt towards China. What better way to do that than to encourage sanctions to be imposed on Russia by the west, by invading Ukraine. Would you agree with that, Rob?

Robert Lee: I know some people believe that Putin has always been very anti-NATO and anti-west. The normal conception is that when he came into office as Prime Minister in 1999, he was actually very supportive of the west. He sometimes got some pushback on domestic policy in Russia because of how close he was. I think his view has evolved. Obviously, he has been in charge for 22 years now. A number of events have occurred and his view of NATO, the US and Europe in general has changed, because of the colour revolutions, NATO expansion—so many events. Ultimately, until 2014, Russia's most important relationship was still with the US and the EU. That is still very important; they still care a lot about that.

Obviously, co-operation has increased with China, but many Russians still consider themselves closer to Europe than to China, depending on where they live. I am not sure how much he is trying to make that change. I think he would like to still have a relationship with the EU and US, but ultimately he has drawn some kind of line in the sand and said, "I expect these kinds of things to occur and these things not to occur, and ultimately, if you push past my red lines, we are a powerful country again and we will just go our own way. If that means deeper co-operation with China, so be it."

Chair: That may be geopolitical tipping point that we are seeing. This is the bigger picture. It is not just about Ukraine but where the next few decades play out.

Thank you very much indeed to Samuel Cranny-Evans and Robert Lee for



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your time this afternoon. We have explored an awful lot of terrain. Who knows where things will go, but you have certainly informed of us the options and helped educate us about how things may pan out. For that, we are very grateful. I thank my Committee and all the staff. That brings an end to this hearing on the crisis in Ukraine.