

Expert Briefing: Priorities for international support to Ukraine, as Russia's war rages into its third year

In March 2024, the [Foreign Policy Centre](#) (FPC), together with the [APPG on Ukraine](#), and with support from the University of Birmingham, convened an off-the-record roundtable meeting in Parliament to discuss the ongoing situation on the ground in Ukraine and, as Russia's war entered its third year, priorities for ongoing international support.

The discussion was chaired by Susan Coughtrie, Director of the Foreign Policy Centre. The conversation was led by a panel of experts who shared their unique insights. These included: David H Dunn, Professor of International Politics at the University of Birmingham; Rachael Cox, Head of Policy at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (who updated on the humanitarian situation only); Elly Nott, CEO and Co-Founder of the David Nott Foundation; Tanya Mulesa, Director at Justice & Accountability for Ukraine (JAFUA); Tom Keatinge, founding Director of the Centre for Financial Crime and Security Studies (CFCS) at RUSI; and Olga Tokariuk, Chatham House OSUN Academy Fellow in the Ukraine Forum.

The panel discussed Ukraine's ongoing humanitarian, political and military needs. Experts also reflected on the impact of the international community's response to Russia's full-scale invasion and explored how this could shift in the future, particularly with US elections looming and engagement with the Global South still often overlooked. The panellists examined future prospects for the conflict, for the long-term reconstruction of Ukraine and legal accountability for Russia.

The international community, including the United Kingdom, has underlined its commitment to supporting Ukraine for 'as long as it takes'. Participating experts shared that this thinking should shift to guaranteeing support for Ukraine for as 'short as it takes', emphasising a commitment to supporting Ukraine to win the war as quickly as possible, rather than simply to survive. Parliamentarians and staffers were able to hear these insights directly and engage in discussion on how the UK could shape its future approach.

Key takeaways emerged from the conversation and are summarised in the following sections below:

- 1. Humanitarian need in Ukraine remains critical;**
- 2. The future response of the international community is unclear, but will have implications for Ukraine and globally;**
- 3. Countries must invest in Ukraine to protect its and their own security and interests, however ongoing support is not guaranteed;**
- 4. As the war continues the long-term challenges of conflict are coming into closer view; and**
- 5. Developing a shared mechanism for holding Russia legally and financially accountable for its illegal invasion of Ukraine is crucial.**

1. Humanitarian need in Ukraine remains critical:

- Entering the third year of the war, for many the focus has shifted toward reconstruction and recovery. However, the levels of humanitarian need in Ukraine remain acute, with 40 per cent of the population still requiring humanitarian assistance.
- Against this background, the Ukrainian healthcare system remains drastically under equipped to respond to the consequences of the ongoing conflict. Systems are not fit to handle mass casualty situations, including the demand for reconstructive care following amputations, which involves specialist surgery or orthopaedic care that is not traditionally offered in government-run hospitals. At the community level, some villages in Ukraine have been able to support a basic provision of healthcare, with a doctor visiting once a week or month or providing care online. However, the systems remain basic, and levels of care are dependent on the ability of community heads to bring support to their areas.
- Ukrainian hospitals have also been targeted, with over 1,000 attacks on the healthcare system verified by the World Health Organisation (WHO).¹
- Mental health support is also vitally needed for much of the Ukrainian population who are traumatised by their experiences living close to the frontline, being targeted in their homes, and by having missing family members that still cannot be located.
- The provision of health services - or lack-off - in Ukraine has broader implications for the country's ongoing resilience. If a population loses faith in the ability of the state to provide services for its people, the bond between citizen and state is weakened. This could result in many feeling as though they have no other option than to leave the country for their safety, thus creating broader challenges for the Ukrainian Government.
- Organisations and private individuals have supported the establishment of centres to provide care for amputees, however sustaining this support will be important to guarantee an ongoing continuity of care. International NGOs have also provided training for doctors in every major Ukrainian city to strengthen the response to casualties as a result of the conflict.
- Maintaining critical infrastructure in Ukraine is another priority. This is particularly important because often those who remain in Ukraine, particularly in frontline areas, are some of society's most vulnerable; either the elderly, disabled or children. In these frontline areas, due to ongoing bombardment, there is little point in using substantial materials to repair homes, which will almost certainly be subject to further damage. So, materials like blue sheeting are frequently seen replacing roofs for homes in areas where temperatures drop below freezing.
- Ensuring children continue to receive education is another challenge. Children can only gather in schools in Ukraine if there is a bomb shelter. This means that children living near frontlines are being educated entirely online with little to no socialisation. This has broader impacts, with children in these communities experiencing loneliness.

¹ Joint statement by Dr Jarno Habicht, WHO Representative in Ukraine, and Munir Mammadzade, UNICEF Representative to Ukraine, Ukraine witnessing increasing impact of attacks on health and education, World Health Organisation, February 2024, <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/07-02-2024-ukraine-witnessing-increasing-impact-of-attacks-on-health-and-education#:~:text=Kyiv%2C%207%20February%202024&text=Since%20February%202022%2C%20WHO%20has,patients%2C%20and%20injured%20many%20more>.

2. The future response of the international community is unclear, but will have implications for Ukraine and globally:

- Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has continued to highlight Europe's unpreparedness to meet the military, industrial and political challenges created by the conflict. Duplication, a lack of coordination and insufficient and divergent threat assessment has greatly hampered the effectiveness of Europe's response and unless there is a more synchronised effort, individual states will be forced to take action at the national level to support Ukraine.
- Europe alone is not going to be able to support Ukraine, meaning that US support is crucial for maintaining territory and Ukraine's resistance capability. However, the breakdown of the 75 year foreign policy consensus, and looming US elections mean that US support is unclear and cannot be relied upon. US foreign policy has already been impacted by this and will continue to affect Ukraine. Calls for a more independent US foreign policy approach in Gaza and Israel could be a broader signal toward the US disentangling itself from longstanding alliances and toward a more isolationist approach.
- The possibility of Trump's re-election as US President is both a real and dangerous threat, the repercussions of which have not been fully considered. Trump has shown no affinity for Ukraine and has made multiple concerning statements regarding Ukraine and NATO.² Trump securing a second term as President is predicted to have a devastating impact on US support for Ukraine. While, during Trump's first term, much of the administration was operated 'under his nose and behind his back', it is predicted that a future administration would be dominated by Trump supporters appointed to key positions. This is also predicted to have negative implications for the US approach to the conflict.
- Beyond Europe and the US, the differing approaches of countries in the Global North and Global South toward Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine are said to have been underpinned by a longstanding failure of countries in the Global North to recognise the needs and challenges of the Global South. Countries in the Global South feel as though conflicts in their region have been neglected and many therefore view support for Ukraine as not being in their interests. This has made a unified global response to Russia's aggression more challenging. In this vacuum, Russia has been able to weaponise food and energy security crisis as a result of Western sanctions rather than because of its own aggression, thereby bolstering its support among countries in the Global South.
- Long-term public, individual, bilateral and multilateral diplomacy is required to highlight the universal negative impacts of the invasion and the impact this will have globally. The imperialist nature of Russia's actions toward Ukraine must be highlighted by Global North countries looking to engage countries in the Global South to foster support for Ukraine.

² Angelique Chrisafis and Lili Bayer, Nato chief says Trump remarks may put US and EU lives at risk, The Guardian, February 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/11/nato-chief-jens-stoltenberg-promises-forceful-response-to-attack-as-trump-remarks-dismissed#:~:text=He%20said%20Nato%20remained%20%E2%80%9Cready,able%20to%20defend%20all%20allies%E2%80%9D.&text=Trump%20told%20a%20campaign%20rally,as%20%E2%80%9Cappalling%20and%20unhinged%E2%80%9D>.

3. Countries must invest in Ukraine to protect its and their own safety and interests, however ongoing support is not guaranteed:

- The tremendous strength of Ukrainian communities and civil society under astonishing pressure must be acknowledged. As is true in many conflict settings, first responders are local people who support their communities before international NGOs move in. In Ukraine, civil society has grown during the conflict, with the number of NGOs tripling to at least 450.
- Despite successes, massive challenges lie ahead, and the international community must guarantee its ongoing support for Ukraine with whatever funds are necessary, including the supply of weapons which are urgently needed.
- Developments in Washington and Brussels, however, have compounded concerns that support for Ukraine may wane as it has done in other conflict settings.³ Debate about utilising over 300 billion euros worth of Russian Central Bank assets held in Brussels are still ongoing. Arguments in opposition to utilising these funds have been made on the basis that using these assets would erode trust in the currency in which they are held.⁴ However, others note that if there were to be a market reaction, it would have been in March 2022 when the assets were originally frozen and that risk could and should be managed by banks to enable ongoing support for Ukraine.

4. As the war continues the long-term challenges of conflict are coming into closer view:

- It is estimated that approximately 4-8 million Ukrainians left the country at the beginning of Russia's illegal invasion. While one-third are now estimated to have returned, this still represents a huge demographic challenge for Ukraine which will have an impact on the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As time passes, families have become more settled in host countries and the challenge of encouraging their return is exacerbated. According to reports published by the Kyiv-based Centre for Economic Strategy (CES), in May 2023, 63 per cent of Ukrainian refugees polled reported a desire to return to Ukraine; this number reduced to 52 per cent by January 2024.⁵
- The Ukrainian Government is communicating with Ukrainians living overseas to encourage their return. However, many will not do so until the end of the war is on the horizon and the country is seen as safe. Experts argue that host countries should work with Ukraine to encourage refugees to engage with Ukraine's development, even when they are temporarily overseas. This could include engagement with re-qualification programmes to ensure that Ukrainians developed the skills required to support the country's reconstruction.

³ Ali Haj Suleiman and Husam Hezaber, World Food Programme to end general assistance in northwest Syria, Al Jazeera, December 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/7/world-food-programme-to-end-general-assistance-in-northwest-syria>

⁴ Sam Fleming, Martin Arnold and Philip Stafford, Why the EU is split over raiding Russian assets, Financial Times, June 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/b09dd675-6f76-48ed-aad5-c3a056f743f3>

⁵ Centre for Economic Strategy, Refugees from Ukraine: Who are they, how many are there, and how to return them, August 2023, <https://ces.org.ua/en/refugees-from-ukraine-final-report/>; and Centre for Economic Strategy, Ukrainian refugees. Future abroad and plans to return them, January 2024: <https://ces.org.ua/en/ukrainian-refugees-third-wave-research/>

- As the war continues, it will be important to emphasise that this crisis is not about Ukraine, but is about Russia and its role as an increasingly malign actor and capable threat willing to break every international agreement within the state system. This framing will be important moving forward to counter suggestions that may emerge in support of making concessions toward Russia to bring the conflict to a close.
- Russia's illegal invasion has also highlighted the ways in which warfare is changing. The threat of a great power war is now a reality that poses an existential challenge for Europe and the international system as a whole. However, the war is being fought in new domains and has been characterised by the use of drones. The conflict has also highlighted the need for greater industrial capacity in all European countries.

5. Developing a shared mechanism for holding Russia legally and financially accountable for its illegal invasion of Ukraine is crucial:

- Russia did not sign the Rome Statute meaning that the International Criminal Court cannot prosecute Russian leaders or the state for war crimes. Forty-four countries are currently examining ways in which a tribunal could be established to hold Russian leaders responsible for the illegal invasion and there are currently three proposals for a mechanism of accountability. The UK is currently supporting a 'hybrid' version of a tribunal which has been described as the 'wait and see' position that is an ineffective way to prosecute Russian leadership. Instead, the UK is encouraged to take a bold position and lead with the most effective solution, which is deemed to be an International Special Tribunal. Given the United Kingdom's historical leadership on similar matters and experts have urged the UK to continue on this course. Russia must also be held responsible for the cost of long-term reconstruction in Ukraine and, to date, there have been 470,000 damages cases registered in Ukraine, all of which the Russian state should be held accountable for paying. Currently there is no mechanism that could facilitate and oversee the transfer of Russian assets to cover the costs of the war, however this should be developed.

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