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Press Release

Defender of Azovstal Kateryna "Ptashka" Polishchuk and Gen. Keith Kellogg honoured at the Warsaw Security Forum 2026

The second day of the Warsaw Security Forum 2026 opened with a ceremony honouring courage and service in the defence of freedom. Ukrainian paramedic and servicemember **Kateryna "Ptashka" Polishchuk** received **Lord Ashcroft's Award for Courage**, presented by its founder, **Lord Ashcroft**, with the laudation delivered by **Gen. David Petraeus**, former Director of the CIA. **Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Keith Kellogg**, former US Special Envoy for Ukraine, received the **Jack Strong Award 2026**.

The ceremony opened the second day of the Warsaw Security Forum 2026 on Tuesday, 13 October.

Lord Ashcroft's Award for Courage for the defender of Azovstal

Kateryna Polishchuk, "Ptashka", received the inaugural Lord Ashcroft Award for Courage at the Warsaw Security Forum

A musician by profession who trained her voice for the opera stage, Kateryna Polishchuk volunteered as a medic in eastern Ukraine in 2021. Russia's full-scale invasion found her in Mariupol, treating the wounded. After the hospital where she worked was destroyed, she continued as a paramedic in the bunkers of the Azovstal steelworks. Footage of her singing Ukrainian songs to wounded and exhausted defenders was seen around the world. Given the chance to leave the city, she chose to stay.

In May 2022 she was taken prisoner together with the remaining defenders of Azovstal and spent around four months in Russian captivity, including in Olenivka, before being freed in a prisoner exchange in September 2022. Awarded the Order for Courage by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, she returned to service and now serves in an unmanned systems unit of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. She speaks openly about the fear and pain that accompanied her at the front: "Strength is a choice and hard work. I was not born strong."

Presenting the award, Lord Ashcroft said: "There is one group of people who, in my view, exemplify that particular form of courage – combat medics. Because while the natural human instinct under fire is to seek safety, theirs is to move towards the wounded."

He described the kind of valour he believes Ukrainian medics embody as "cold courage": "You know the danger. You understand the consequences. You have time to consider what may happen to you. And you go anyway."

Reflecting on the modesty of those he has met, Lord Ashcroft observed: "The bravest people rarely describe themselves as brave." He added that courage creates an obligation

in those who witness it: “We have a duty to remember. We have a duty to tell these stories.”

Accepting the award at the Warsaw Security Forum, Kateryna Polishchuk spoke movingly about her experiences at war and called for partnership and support for Ukraine. Her inspiring message highlighted that she was honoured, and that to her, “the biggest award is preserving human lives.”

Her courage was lauded by Andrii Sybiha and Gen. David Petraeus, with Sybiha noting, “If Ptashka prevails, Ukraine will prevail as well.”

The Lord Ashcroft Award for Courage honours individuals whose personal bravery has served the defence of freedom. Founded by Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC, an international businessman, philanthropist and author long devoted to the study of valour, the award recognises courage shown not in theory but under fire, often at great personal cost. It is presented during the Warsaw Security Forum to bring that example before the transatlantic community gathered in Warsaw.

Jack Strong Award for Gen. Keith Kellogg

A veteran of the Vietnam War, where he served with the 101st Airborne Division and was awarded the Silver Star and the Bronze Star for valour, Keith Kellogg went on to command the 82nd Airborne Division and retired from the US Army in 2003 with the rank of lieutenant general. He later served as Chief Operating Officer of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad. From 2017 he held senior posts on the US National Security Council, including as acting National Security Advisor and, from 2018 to 2021, as National Security Advisor to Vice President Mike Pence. In 2025, as the US President’s Special Envoy for Ukraine, he was directly engaged in diplomatic efforts to end Russia’s war against Ukraine.

Speaking about the war, Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Keith Kellogg has said: *“There is a right and wrong today’s world here in Europe, and that wrong is Russia’s invasion, and what’s right is Ukraine fighting for their survival and doing a damn good job of it as well.”*

The Jack Strong Award honours outstanding individuals whose courage, leadership and commitment have made a lasting contribution to the security of the Euro-Atlantic community and the defence of freedom. Established by the Jack Strong Foundation in cooperation with the Casimir Pulaski Foundation, it is granted in memory of Gen. Ryszard Kukliński, codenamed “Jack Strong”. During the Cold War, at great personal risk, he passed tens of thousands of pages of secret Warsaw Pact documents to the United States, and Zbigniew Brzezinski called him “the first Polish officer in NATO”. Last year’s award went to Georgette Mosbacher, former US Ambassador to Poland.

About the Warsaw Security Forum

For more than a decade, the WSF has stood as one of Europe’s leading platforms dedicated to transatlantic cooperation and the development of shared responses to common security challenges. The Forum convenes over **3000 senior delegates** and **100 institutional partners** from more than **90 countries** each year. The 13th edition will be

held in close cooperation with the **Government of the Kingdom of Norway**, our Partner Nation for this year, and will feature a strong high-level Norwegian presence throughout the programme.

Notes to editors

The Warsaw Security Forum 2026 Annual Gathering takes place on 12–13 October 2026 in Warsaw. Further information is available at warsawsecurityforum.org.

The WSF Annual Report 2026 is available at warsawsecurityforum.org/wsf-2026/report/. Published by the Casimir Pulaski Foundation, Oleandrów 6, 00-629 Warsaw, www.pulaski.pl/en/.

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