



The Ukraine List #504

compiled by Dominique Arel (darel@uottawa.ca)
Chair of Ukrainian Studies, U of Ottawa
www.chairukr.com
www.danyliwseminar.com
Twitter: @darelasn
16 March 2022

First UKL in 16 months, as Ukraine is facing an existential threat. The amount of information generated in multiple languages is unprecedented, making it impossible for anyone to process in real time. UKL can only offer a sample of contributions, leaving the up-to-the-minute factual and visual reports to social media. In Chair-related news, the Danyliw Seminar, on Covid-induced hiatus for more than two years (there haven't been in-person events on my campus in two years, almost to the day) is set to make a comeback. Watch for an announcement fairly soon. The program of the 2022 ASN World Convention (4-7 May, still on Zoom due to Columbia regulations) will also be announced soon (after a delay caused by the Russian attack of Ukraine) and will include 24 Ukraine and 24 Russia panels, as well as war-themed special events –DA

1-The War on Socia Media (Twitter)

2-A 24hr “Marathon” Online Event with 96 Scholars (starting at noon today)

3-Upcoming Webinars on the War in Ukraine This Week

4-38 Webinars on the War in Ukraine Held Since February 24 with an Online Link

****Carnage and War Crimes****

5-The Guardian, Isobel Koshiw: Tanks, Bombs, Shootings in Kyiv’s Villages

6-Globe & Mail: Mariupol ‘On the Edge of Total Desperation

7-WSJ: In the Rubble of Kharkiv: Nobody Wants the Russians

8-NYT: I’m Not Scared of Anything’: Death and Defiance in Besieged Mykolaiv

9-WSJ: Russian Forces Kill Civilians, Loot for Supplies in Occupied Ukraine

10-Intercept: Putin Made a Last-Minute Decision to Invade Ukraine

11-The Times: Which Countries Are Supporting Russia and Won’t Back Ukraine

12-National Post: How Canada Gave Ukrainian Army a Fighting Chance Against Russia

- 13-Dominique Arel: Putin is Waging War on Eastern Ukraine
- 14-Samuel Charap: How Russia's War in Ukraine Could Escalate
- 15-Lawrence Freedman: What Kind of Peace Could Russia Afford?
- 16-Samuel Greene: Is Putin Coup-Proof?
- 17-Stathis Kalyvas: How We Got Putin So Wrong: Taking Putin at his Word
- 18-Stephen Kotkin: The Weakness of the Despot
- 19-Serhiy Kudelia: Occupied Towns Are Facing a Tough Choice: Collaborate or Resist?
- 20-Maria Popova, Oxana Shevel: Putin Cannot Erase Ukraine
- 21-Olga Tokarev: Ukraine Won't Surrender

#1

The War on Social Media

If the Orange Revolution was reported on email (UKL came out daily, sometimes twice a day, for 35 days straight), Maidan took place largely on Facebook and YouTube. This time, the Russian Invasion of Ukraine is taking place on Twitter and, especially in Russia/Ukraine, on Telegram. (Of course, Twitter was around in 2014, and articles were written about it, but relatively few people in Ukrainian Studies were active users).

Twitter has been an absolute torrent since the war began. Even for the most devoted – and so many, if not the entire field, have been mobilized on Ukraine round-the-clock – only a fragment of important information and analysis reaches us daily. Again, I will not attempt to offer a comprehensive landscape. In English, the basic sources in Ukraine are Kyiv Independent (@KyivIndependent) and Hromadske International (@Hromadske), and in Russia (but based in Latvia, @meduza_en). In Ukrainian, Ukrainska Pravda (@ukrpravda_news) and Hromadske (@Hromadske_UA). The entire staff of Kyiv Independent is worth following on Twitter, starting with Illia Ponomarenko (@IAPonomarenko). For Hromadske, Nataliya Gumenyuk (@ngumenyuk). Look also for Euromaidanpress (@Euromaidanpress), Olga Tokariuk (@olgatokariuk) and Oksana Pokalchuk (@OPokalchuk).

In terms of scholars active on Twitter, I can only provide here a most preliminary and subjective list, by no means comprehensive: Steven Seegel (@steven_seegel, who is seeking to compile a digital archive), Oxana Shevel (@oxanashevel), Maria Popova (@PopovaProf), Olga Onuch (@oonuch), Serhiy Kudelia (@skudelia), Volodymyr Ishchenko (@volod_ishchenko), Anton Shekhovtsov (@a_shekhovtsov), David Marples (@dmarples), Taras Kuzio (@TarasKuzio), Timofiy Brik (@brik_t), Timofiy Mylovanov (@Mylovanov), Volodymyr Dubovyk (@VolodymDubovyk), Olexiy Haran (@o_haran), Mariia Shuvalova (@mareverborum), Andreas Umland (@UmlandAndreas), Gerard Toal (@Toal_CritGeo), Gwendolyn Sasse (@GwendolynSasse), Juliet Johnson (@excubs), Tim Frye (@timothymfrye), Grigore Pop-Eleches (@grigopop), Dmitry Gorenburg (@rusmil), Eugene Finkel (@eugene_finkel), Olesya Khromeychuk (@Okhromeychuk), Serhii Plokhyy (@SPlokhyy), Elise Giuliano (@gegs32), Marta Dyczok (@mdyczok), Emily Channell-Justice (@channelljustice), Erik Herron (@erikherron), Nikolaus von Twickel (@niktwick), Sam

Greene (@samagreene), Fabian Burkhardt (@fa_burkhardt), Sam Charap (@scharap), Tweets from Russia at War (Anders Ostlund, @andersostlund) and on military matters Michael Kofman (@KofmanMichael) and Rob Lee (@RALee 85). Me (@darelasn). And for those who can read French, Anna Colin Lebedev (@colinlebedev).

#2

PONARS and partners: A 24-Hour “Marathon” Online Event with 96 Scholars

Starting TODAY, Wednesday March 16h at noon EDT.

IERES, PONARS Eurasia, and the Petrach Program on Ukraine proudly invite you to Ukrainathon, a 24-hour “marathon” online event on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The program will feature continuous 15-minute talks from international experts starting Wednesday, March 16th at noon EDT and lasting until noon the following day.

More than 90 speakers join forces to provide comprehensive insight into the war from multiple angles. Each speaker will offer a 10-minute talk on their area of expertise related to the conflict, followed by a brief Q&A. As part of the event, attendees are encouraged to contribute to organizations that support displaced Ukrainian students and scholars.

The event will be broadcast on Zoom and livestreamed on the PONARS Eurasia Facebook page. See more about Ukrainathon, including the scheduled list of speakers [here](#).

#3

Upcoming Webinars This Week

Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Ottawa

(Mis)understanding Ukraine and Russia’s War

Wednesday, March 16th, 5.00-6.30 pm

With Olesya Khromeychuk (Ukrainian Institute London, Cambridge U)

To register: <https://bit.ly/FrankoLecture2022>

Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN)

Russian Invasion and Internal Displacement: Emerging IDP Issues within Ukraine

Thursday, March 17th, 2.00-3.30 PM

With Cynthia Buckley (Urbana), Volodymyr Dubovyk (Mechnikov U, Odesa), Oksana Mikheieva (Ukrainian Catholic U), Oxana Shevel (Tufts U)

To register: <https://tinyurl.com/55xem9cs>

Petro Jacyk Program for the Study of Ukraine, Munk School, University of Toronto

Putin's War with Ukraine: A Central European Perspective

Wednesday, March 16th , 12.00 – 1.00 pm

With Veronika Vichova (the European Values Center for Security Policy), Jacek Kucharczyk (Institute of Public Affairs), Peter Kreko (Political Capital Institute)

To register: <https://bit.ly/37uebtv>

Environmental Impacts of Russia's Invasion: Voices from Ukraine

Friday, March 18th, 12pm – 13pm

U of Toronto, Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy

With Olena Kravchenko (Lawyer; NGO - Environment-People-Law), Olha Melen-Zabramna (Lawyer, NGO - Environment-People-Law), Oleksii Vasyliuk (Biologist; NGO - Ukraine Nature Conservation Group), Tanya Richardson (Wilfrid Laurier U)

To register: <https://bit.ly/36jrPPI>

Other Institutions

The Humanity Dialogues #2: Tyranny and Cyber Resistance: Ukraine Now!

Wednesday, March 16th , 12pm – 1pm

With Scott J. Shapiro (Yale Law School), Yuliana Shemetovets (Belarusian activist), Marta Kuzma (Yale School of Art)

To register: <https://bit.ly/3IfXBdC>

The Impact of the Russian Invasion on the Ukrainian, Russian, and Global Economies

Thursday, March 17th, 10am – 11am

Georgetown University

With Sergei Guriev (Sciences Po U) and Tymofiy Mylovanov (Kyiv School of Economics) Shéhérazade Semsar-de Boissésou (McCourt Institute)

To register: <https://bit.ly/3IaGtWI>

Religious Dimensions of the War in Ukraine

Thursday, March 17th, 9:30pm – 11pm

St. Mark's College at UBC

With Heather Coleman (U of Alberta), Nicholas Denysenko (Catholic U of America), Paul L. Gavrilyuk (U of St. Thomas), Myroslaw Tatarzyn (St. Jerome's U)

To register: <https://bit.ly/3D15O4F>

How to Host Displaced Scholars on Your Campus

Friday, March 18th, 2pm – 3pm

ASEES

Yuliya Komska (Dartmouth College), Chelsea Blackburn Cohen (Scholars at Risk), James King (IIE Scholar Rescue Fund), Veronica Dristsas (University of Pittsburgh), and Mark Trotter (Indiana U), Joan Neuberger (U of Texas, Austin)

To register: <https://bit.ly/3q5MDRR>

#4

38 Webinars on the War in Ukraine Held Since February 24 with an Online Link

Association for the Studies of Nationalities (ASN)

The Russian Attack on Ukraine

Wednesday, March 2nd

With [Dominique Arel](#) (U of Ottawa), [Keith Darden](#) (American U), [Samuel Greene](#) (King's College London), [Marlene Laruelle](#) (GW U), [Tanya Lokot](#) (Dublin City U)

<https://nationalities.org/virtual-asn/the-russian-attack-of-ukraine>

Voices From Under Siege

Monday, March 7th

With [Yuliya Bidenko](#) (Karazin Kharkiv U), [Timofii Brik](#) (Kyiv Business School)

[Natalia Kudriavtseva](#) (Kherson Technical U), [Alexander Rodniansky](#) (Presidential Adviser, Kyiv), [Mariia Shuvalova](#) (Mohyla U, Kyiv), [Olga Onuch](#) (U of Manchester)

<https://nationalities.org/virtual-asn/voices-from-ukraine-under-siege>

Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Ottawa

L'invasion russe de l'Ukraine

Friday, March 4th

In partnership with the Centre for International Policy Analysis (CIPS)

With [Thane Gustafson](#) (Georgetown), [Anastasia Riabchuk](#) (Mohyla), [Anna Colin Lebedev](#) (Paris Nanterre), [Guillaume Sauvé](#) (U of Montreal), [François Audet](#) (UQAM)

<https://www.cips-cepi.ca/event/russian-invasion-of-ukraine/>

Live from Kyiv: The Battle for Ukraine

Wednesday, March 9th

In partnership with the Centre for International Policy Analysis (CIPS)

With [Andriy Shevchenko](#) (Former Ambassador of Ukraine to Canada, Foreign Affairs Ministry in Kyiv), [Dominique Arel](#) (U of Ottawa), [Rita Abrahamsen](#) (CIPS)

<https://www.cips-cepi.ca/event/live-from-kyiv-the-battle-for-ukraine/>

Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS), University of Alberta

Roundtable Russia's War Against Ukraine What is at Stake?

Sunday, March 6th

With [Natalia Khanenko-Friesen](#) (CIUS), [Volodymyr Kravchenko](#) (CIUS), [Frank E. Sysyn](#) (CIUS), [Marko R. Stech](#) (CIUS), [Oleksandr Pankiev](#) (Forum for Ukrainian Studies), [Tania Plawaszczak-Stech](#) (CIUS)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUglAbH5fUQ>

Petro Jacyk Program for the Study of Ukraine, Munk School, University of Toronto

Russia's Attack on Ukraine: An Expert Roundtable

Friday, February 25th

With Peter Mansbridge (Munk School), Timothy M. Frye (Columbia U), Olexiy Haran (Mohyla), Tymofiy Mylovanov (Kyiv School of Economics), Janice Stein (Munk School)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEBbdJsxfhE>

Ukraine on Fire: Voices on the Ground Tuesday, March 1st

With Andriy Kulykov (Hromadske Radio), Juliya Bidenko (Karazin Kharkiv U), Maria Zolkina (Democratic Initiatives), Mariia Shuvalova (Mohyla), Ksenya Kiebuszinski (Jacyk Program)

<https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/jacyk/event/31395/>

Harvard Ukrainian Studies Institute (HURI)

Ukraine Under Attack

Monday, February 28th

Ukrainian Research Institute (HURI)

With Dr. Lawrence Bacow (Harvard University), Volodymyr Dubovyk (Mechnikov National U), Rory Finnin, (U of Cambridge), Tymofiy Mylovanov (Kyiv School of Economics), Olha Onuch (U of Manchester), Gulnaz Sharafutdinova (King's College London), Emily Channell-Justice (Harvard U)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDyaV1z_-EQ

Audio Event: The Russian (Dis)Information Sphere

Saturday, March 12th

With Hannah Chapman (Havighurst Center for Russian and Post-Soviet Studies)

https://www.clubhouse.com/room/xpald4Zq?utm_campaign=FGTuUeVKz9HXwKt-kltf9Q-94524&utm_medium=ch_invite

Harriman Institute, Columbia University

Ukrainian Studies Under Attack

Wednesday, March 2nd

With Rory Finnin (U of Cambridge), Valentina Izmirlieva (Harriman Institute), Vita Susak (Ministry of Culture of Ukraine), Frank Sysyn (Peter Jacyk Centre for Ukrainian Historical Research at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies), Mark Andryczyk (Harriman Institute)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOw6c-NpTA4>

What's Next? Expert's Round to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Friday, March 4th

With Timothy Frye (Columbia U), Volodymyr Kulyk (National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine), Kimberly Marten (Barnard College), Brian Milakovsky (Independent Analyst), Oxana Shevel (Tufts U), Joshua Tucker (NYU)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGBV7u2DXas>

Ukrainian Artists Respond to the War

Friday, March 11th

With Mark Andryczyk (Harriman Institute), Kate Tsurkan (Apofonie Magazine), Maria Sonevytsky (UC Berkeley), Yuri Shevchuk (Musician), Olena Martynyuk (Harriman Institute)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3eZBcCt0m0>

Other Institutions (in decreasing chronological order)

Hindsight Up Front Ukraine: A Conversation with Catherine Ashton

Monday, March 14th

Wilson Center

With Catherine Ashton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7yRCzeu8I8>

The Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis: Responses to Refugees and Internally Displaced Civilians

Thursday, March 10th

Yale Macmillan Center, European Studies Council

With Olga Ivanova (Stabilization Support Services), Mauro Mondello (Documentary Filmmaker) Olena Sotnyk (Deputy PM Advisor), Molly Brunson (Yale U)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0o4hpPoGqA>

The Role of History, Religion, and Politics in the Russia-Ukraine War

Wednesday, March 9th

Fordham U

With George E. Demacopoulos (Fordham U), Olena Nikolayenko (Fordham U), Asif Siddiqi (Fordham U), Magda Teter (Fordham U)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d465qJrp6co>

War in Ukraine Perspectives from Scholars on the Ground Panel Source

Wednesday, March 9th

Tufts U

With Oxana Shevel (Tufts U), Tymofiy Mylovanov (Kyiv School of Economics), Tymofii Brik (Kyiv School of Economics), Nataliia Shapoval (KSE Institute), Anna Bulakh (KSE Institute), Oleg Nivievsky (KSE Institute)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DoGMvPjot4>

The War in Ukraine & the Future of the World – Yuval Noah Harari & Timothy Snyder
Tuesday, March 8th

Yalta European Strategy (YES)/ Victor Pinchuk Foundation

With Timothy Snyder (Yale U), Yuval Noah Harari (Hebrew U of Jerusalem), Anne Applebaum (Historian, Journalist)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9FDabcyPWk>

Ukraine: Public Health at Risk

Monday, March 7th

New York U, School of Global Public Health

Jack Caravanos (NYU GPH), **Peter Navario** (HealthRight International), **Anne O'Donnell** (NYU College of Arts and Science), **Danielle Ompad** (NYU GPH)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1GN2CIL694>

War in Ukraine

Sunday, March 6th

Yale University

With Timothy Snyder (Yale U), Richard C. Levin (Yale U), Arne Westad (Yale U), Nellie Petlick (Peace Corps)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xg0c6fd8PCk>

Princeton Experts Discuss the Global Impact of Russia – Ukraine War

Friday, March 4th

Princeton U

With Filiz Garip (Princeton U), Micheal Reynolds (Princeton U), Razia Iqbal (Newshour, BCC World Service)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwEVTkfuVBI>

War in Ukraine: Background, Context, Prospects and Implications

Friday, March 4th

UC Santa Cruz

With Jonathan Beecher, Rikki Brown, Melissa L. Caldwell, Peter Kenez, Tanya Merchat.

<https://transform.ucsc.edu/event/war-in-ukraine/>

The Context Behind the Crisis

Friday, March 4th

U of Chicago, The Graham School

With Faith Hillis, Monika Nalepa

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UG_yehiRMp4

The Humanity Dialogues: Tyranny, Artists and Agency: Ukraine Now

Friday, March 4th

Yale University

With Vasyl Cherepanyn (Visual Culture Research Center (VCRC)), Timothy Snyder (Yale U), Marta Kuzma (Yale School of Art)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-_X9T7qYDg

Reports from Kyiv, Moscow, and Chicago

Friday, March 4th

University of Chicago/ CEERES), Kyiv School of Economics

With Scott Gehlbach (U of Chicago), Tymofiy Mylovanov (Kyiv School of Economics), Monika Nalepa (U of Chicago)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOPGFbqdFeo>

The Impact of Russian Sanctions

Friday, March 4th

Harvard U, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies

With Alexandra Vacroux (Davis Center), Sergey Aleksashenko (Boris Nemtsov Foundation), Hans Helmut-Kotz (Harvard U)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oK7_JuKrn7o

Current Events Analysis - Ukraine: Terra Incognita

Friday, March 4th

International Studies Association (ISA)

With James Pearce (College of the Marshall Islands), Tetyana Dzyadevych (New College of Florida), Andrei Korbokov (Tennessee State U), Vendulka Kubalkova (U of Miami), Sarah Dorr (International Studies Association)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nsyuWdligs>

Spotlight on Ukraine: A Conversation on the Current Crisis

Thursday, March 3rd

U of Texas Austin, Center for European Studies

With Steven Seegel (U of Texas), Oksana Lutsyshyna (U of Texas), Mykhaylo V. Simanovskyy (U of Texas)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pT-p0Np1LWY>

Examining the Global Security Implications for the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

Thursday, March 3rd

U of Oklahoma

With Melissa Stockdale, Brian and Sandra O'Brien, Rob Andrew, Christopher Sartorius, Mark Raymond.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlqH_3EEhqs

Russia's Aggression: European Perspectives and Responses

Thursday, March 3rd

Wilson Center Kennan Institute

With Andrius Kubilius (European Parliament), Marie Mendras (Sciences Po U), Andrew Monaghan (George F. Kennan Fellow), William E. Pomeranz (Kennan Institute) <https://bit.ly/37BpEYs>

A Panel Discussion on Recent Events in Ukraine

Wednesday, March 2nd

UC Berkeley, The Institute of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies

With Steven Fish, Yuriy Gorodnichenko, Edward Walker.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL2KrK-3o4A>

Teach-In: Ukraine

Wednesday, March 2nd

U of Victoria

With Serhy Yekelchyk and Tamara Krawchenko

<https://www.uvic.ca/humanities/news/current/teach-in-ukraine.php>

Panel: Russia Invades Ukraine: A Public Forum

Wednesday, March 2nd

U of Wisconsin-Madison, CREECA

With Yoshiko M. Herrera

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rChbPcN5BOU&t=85s>

Q&A on the War in Ukraine

Wednesday, March 2nd

Idaho State

With Colin Johnson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58sxPLeCSis>

Russia's War on Ukraine

Wednesday, March 2nd

Carleton U

With Joan DeBardeleben, Paul Goode, Milana Nikolko, David Sichinava

<https://youtu.be/Q6GLmNQ-4U0>

War in Ukraine: The View from Here

Wednesday, March 2nd

Harvard U, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies

With Alexandra Vacroux (Davis Center), Nargis Kassenova (Davis Center), David Cadier (U of Groningen), Oxana Shevel (Tufts U)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCv3vQaNvW0>

Panel: What Does Ukraine Mean for Me?

Tuesday, March 1st

U of Utah, Hinckley Institute of Politics

With Geoff Allen, Marjorie Castle, Sean Lawson, Steve Lobell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRZQn9Urn4A>

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine – An Event from the Centre of Geopolitics

Tuesday, March 1st

Cambridge University, UK

With Brendan Simms (Cambridge U), Charles Clarke (Cambridge U), Rory Finnin (Cambridge U), Juliia Osmolova (Transatlantic Dialogue Center), Edward Stringer (UK Defence Academy), Svitlana Zalishchuk (Foreign Policy Advisor to Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister on European Integration)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67pRPXZErzo>

#5

Koshiw, Isobel. 2022. “Tanks, Bombs, Shootings: Ukrainians Describe Russian Takeover of Villages.” , March 13. <https://bit.ly/3tROdb0>

Russian soldiers have shot people dead in the street as they took over Ukrainian villages, according to fleeing residents.

Soldiers shot randomly at buildings, threw grenades down roads and went from house to house confiscating phones and laptops, witnesses said.

Online groups created for family members or friends looking for information about people in affected areas are receiving hundreds or even thousands of requests a day.

One witness, Mykola, described how soldiers arrived in Andriivka, a village near Kyiv. “They threw grenades down the street. One man lost his leg and the next day this person died,” he said. “They then came down the central street and started shooting at the windows and hit one woman. Her children managed to hide.”

Mykola lived within walking distance of his brother, Dymtro. “My brother came out the house with his hands in the air. They beat him and then executed him in the street,” he said.

Dymtro’s wife said she saw the killing of her husband from a window. She said she also witnessed their neighbour being killed in the same manner. Dymtro’s daughter believes both were shot because they had earlier helped the Ukrainian army as volunteers.

Mykola said they wanted to bury his brother, but his wife feared the soldiers would shoot them. “The next day they went house by house, confiscating phones and laptops,” he said. At this point, 3 March, there was no electricity. “Those who came into our house behaved OK. But they told us that it’s good you have a cellar, collect some water, because you’re going to be bombed for six days.”

Mykola said they wanted to bury his brother, but his wife feared the soldiers would shoot them. “The next day they went house by house, confiscating phones and laptops,” he said. At this point, 3 March, there was no electricity. “Those who came into our house behaved OK. But they told us that it’s good you have a cellar, collect some water, because you’re going to be bombed for six days.”

The Russians would not let them bury Dymtro in the graveyard, so they buried him in the garden. Dymtro’s daughter, Yulia, said that soon afterwards a mortar attack began and the neighbouring house started to burn. A Russian soldier told them to wait behind their tank because it was safer, she said. “We were terrified. We didn’t understand whether it was Russians shooting or our guys. Everything after that was a blur. We ran home and barely made it under constant mortar attack.”

On 8 March, Mykola, his family and Dymtro’s family decided to leave, as they had no phone signal and no electricity. Dymtro’s wife approached the soldiers to ask for permission, but the soldiers starting shooting in the air. Mortar attacks were also ongoing, so the family decided to leave without permission.

“As we were leaving, they were shooting at our car, even though we had [the word] ‘children’ written on bits of paper in the windows. But evidently they weren’t particularly interested in that fact,” said Yulia.

The father of a family that left with Mykola’s group was shot at when a soldier saw him calling someone from his garden, Yulia said. “How can you understand that people could be killed just for ringing their relatives to say that they’re alive?”

When the Russians entered Druzhnya, another village near Kyiv, they shot at the houses, according to Serhiy, who has since fled his home. “I think they did this so that they weren’t attacked with molotov cocktails,” he said.

“So all of those houses along the main road from Bordyanka to Makariv were hit and some people died. Then they started to go house by house. They killed a teacher who was outside feeding her chickens,” Serhiy said.

“They told people not to go outside and to stay at home.” Serhiy said the soldiers told him: “If you see us, don’t make any sudden moves, put your hands above your head.” He added: “There’s absolutely no connection, we still have relatives there and we cannot contact them. They took some people’s phones, and they temporarily took other people’s phones to check that they hadn’t photographed anything or filmed anything.”

On 10 March the Russians agreed to facilitate a humanitarian corridor to evacuate residents from Borodyanka and the neighbouring villages. According to Serhiy, the bombing was even heavier that day. Serhiy's brother-in-law cycled along a forest dirt road to check if it was clear of Russians, which it was. The family then drove out through the forest.

One Telegram group for relatives searching for people still in the affected areas, run by a well-known Ukrainian TV presenter, has had more than 60,000 inquiries since it launched on 26 February, and now receives about 1,000 new requests a day.

Community Facebook groups for the affected areas are full of hundreds of desperate appeals from relatives, hoping that someone in the area might have signal and be able to tell them if their loved ones are still alive.

Valeriy, 34, HR professional who lived in Kyiv, was at his country house in the village of Lypivka when the war started. After the Russians moved into a neighbouring town, he started receiving messages on a community group from relatives of people in the town who were no longer able to reach their family members.

“The messages were like: ‘Please help me find Ivan Ivanovych,’ with a photograph and address. And the number of messages just built and built, and I became scared,” Valeriy said. “Then started to come information that they were destroying the multi-storey buildings in Borodyanka with people in them using tanks.”

From 1 March there was no phone signal or electricity but there was some patchy signal in the fields, he said. “Either they somehow blocked the signal, or it was because of the lack of electricity.” He managed to escape under shelling on 3 March.

#6

Vanderklippe, Nahan. 2022. “Mariupol ‘On the Edge of Total Desperation,’ Official Says, as Death Toll Mounts in Besieged Ukrainian City.” *Globe & Mail*, March 11. <https://tgam.ca/3q4ByR8>

More than 1,500 people have been reported dead by municipal authorities in Mariupol, the Sea of Azov city that Russian forces have held under siege for nearly two weeks – but an adviser to the city's mayor says the real number is likely far greater.

“We now estimate that number of people killed has reached 10,000. And if the Russians keep shelling, we may see more than 20,000 people killed because of the Russian attacks,” Petr Andryushchenko said in an interview.

Cut off from water and electricity, desperation has grown so acute, he said, that some have taken to drinking water from heating radiators.

Mr. Andryushchenko spoke to The Globe and Mail after he was able to leave Mariupol on Wednesday. The estimate of 10,000 dead, he said, is based on the severity of damage to residential neighbourhoods.

Russian forces have maintained what he called a “carousel” of attacks on the city, with intense artillery fire – dozens of shells an hour – followed by the appearance of Russian jets that drop heavy explosives, followed by more rounds of artillery. This week, military experts said they have found evidence that a one-tonne bomb had been dropped on the city.

Roughly 350,000 people have been locked in Mariupol since the end of February, Mr. Andryushchenko said. Attempts to establish safe evacuation corridors have repeatedly failed after shelling resumed during times agreed for the cessation of hostilities.

Those who remain “are hostages of Russian troops,” he said.

The attacks have been so unceasing that it has been impossible to precisely calculate casualties or assess damages. “If someone goes out on the street, he is risking his life,” Mr. Andryushchenko said.

And yet, the necessities of life have forced people to emerge from shelters. They have scavenged for any available scrap of wood to light fires to cook and provide heat. Temperatures in the past week fell to -9 degrees. “They will burn anything they can,” Mr. Andryushchenko said. “Anything for a small bit of heat.”

Water has perhaps been the most acute need. With municipal systems damaged, the city has attempted to deliver water in barrels, but it has been far from enough. When they could, people gathered snow to melt for drinking water. They have also gathered at old hand-operated water pumps, even though the water they supply is not potable.

And, during breaks in the shelling, they have dismantled hot-water heating systems in search of something to drink, Mr. Andryushchenko said.

“They are using water from the radiators,” he said.

Earlier this week, a six-year-old girl died from dehydration in Mariupol. She was found next to her mother, who was killed by a Russian shell, local authorities said. Russian forces are “torturing” the city, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Friday. “It’s very hard to describe with words how people are just keeping on and staying alive,” Mr. Andryushchenko said. “They are without hope. And the psychological stresses are huge.”

Even burying the dead has become difficult. Russian forces occupy the city's main cemetery, forcing workers to dig a large trench in a historic cemetery as a mass grave for dozens of unidentified bodies, some buried in carpets or bags.

"Some dead people do not have documents. Sometimes there are only body parts, so the person cannot be identified," Mr. Andryushchenko said.

Still, "people are helping each other. They are not totally desperate," he said. "But they are on the edge of total desperation. And I cannot say what will happen in the future." Mariupol leaders have likened what is happening to their city to modern campaigns of destruction against the Chechen and Syrian cities of Grozny and Aleppo. But they have also drawn parallels with the siege of Leningrad, now St. Petersburg, by Nazi forces during the Second World War.

It is an event with particular historical meaning for Russian President Vladimir Putin. His own brother died in that siege, which lasted nearly 900 days and killed hundreds of thousands.

Today, however, Mr. Putin appears to be motivated by a thirst for reprisal, Mr. Andryushchenko said.

In 2014, Russian-backed separatists seized control of Mariupol along with other parts of the largely Russian-speaking Donbas region, some of which became breakaway republics.

But Ukrainian forces seized back control of Mariupol in June, 2014, and in the eight years since, the city has been rebuilt into a thriving "symbol of Ukrainian Donbas," Mr. Andryushchenko said. "We invested a lot in Mariupol to make it the most beautiful city." Russia's leadership, however, hasn't forgotten the loss of the city in 2014.

What is happening to Mariupol today, Mr. Andryushchenko said, is "revenge." Our Morning Update and Evening Update newsletters are written by Globe editors, giving you a concise summary of the day's most important headlines.

#7

Trofimov, Yaroslav. 2022. "In the Rubble of Ukraine's Second-Largest City, Survivors Make Their Stand: 'Nobody Wants the Russians.'" *Wall Street Journal*, March 11. <https://on.wsj.com/3CB5ZmJ>

KHARKIV, Ukraine -- A dazed older woman picked her way through Kharkiv's central Constitution Square, navigating a blasted landscape strewn with twisted metal, glass shards and fragments of brick.

Russian missile strikes have gutted every one of the elegant 19th century buildings lining the street. The innards of fashion boutiques, with decapitated mannequins, spilled onto the sidewalk. A cocktail bar down the road, its windows blown out, had bottles of Campari, gin and vermouth on display, untouched.

“Have you seen PrivatBank?” the woman asked a rare passerby. The ATM there had eaten her debit card, she said. “Have you? I need to get the card back, for my pension.” The bank building had been reduced to a jumble of broken glass and crumpled metal. Its security alarm still blared.

In the days since Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, shelling and airstrikes have killed hundreds of people in Kharkiv, a city of 1.4 million about 20 miles from the Russian border. Residents spend their days and nights huddled in the subway. Above them, explosions devastate their city.

At least 400 high-rise apartment buildings have been hit, Kharkiv city authorities said. Strikes have damaged the art museum, with its collection of famous Russian painters including Repin and Shishkin, and the Korolenko library, which houses priceless manuscripts.

“Everyone is in shock here,” said Ihor Terekhov, the city mayor. “We used to think of the Russians as our brothers. Even in our worst nightmares, we never imagined that they would destroy our city.”

Russia’s attempt to use rapid thrusts by armored columns and assaults by paratroopers and special forces to seize the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv and other cities, overthrowing the country’s government, has stalled in the face of fierce resistance. Now, Moscow is resorting to a punishing, wholesale destruction, shelling and bombing residential neighborhoods and historic downtowns.

Kharkiv has been pulverized with particular cruelty, even though almost all of its citizens are Russian-speakers, many of whom felt affinity with Russia in the past.

On Friday, the thumps of artillery punctured the city’s eerie silence. Few people were on the street. Around the corner from Constitution Square, the new Nikolsky shopping mall -- complete with an oyster bar and virtual-reality game zone -- smoldered. A Russian missile had plunged through its roof Wednesday night.

On the streets, police patrols watch for any looting. Municipal crews used a break in the shelling to repair power and water lines. Several Kharkiv taxi drivers worked together to remove debris from Constitution Square.

“There isn’t much work nowadays, so we’ve come here to clean up the city and raise morale,” said Andriy Kolesnik, one of the drivers. “We can do it, so we do it.”

It will take generations for the people of Kharkiv to forgive Russia and the Russians, said Mr. Terekhov, the mayor, as he visited a subway station-turned-dormitory. People there asked to take selfies with him.

“The Russians thought, mistakenly, that Kharkiv would greet them with open arms,” Mr. Terekhov said. “But nobody wants the Russians here, nobody has invited them here. Our people are fighting them for our freedom, for the future of our children.”

Misguided mission

Back in 2014, in the wake of Kyiv street protests that ousted pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, sympathy for Russia ran high in Kharkiv. Moscow-backed protesters briefly took over the regional government, hoisting a Russian flag and proclaiming a so-called Kharkiv People’s Republic, along the lines of similar pro-Russian statelets in nearby Donetsk and Luhansk.

The desolate record of Russian rule in Donetsk and Luhansk, however, has changed local minds, especially after more than 100,000 refugees from Donetsk moved to the city, bringing tales of expropriations, murders and political repression.

That shift wasn’t necessarily taken into account by Russia’s military planners, whose strategy in Kharkiv can only be explained by a profound miscalculation of the city’s mood, Ukrainian officers said. In the first days of the war, several units of lightly armed Russian troops in Tigr infantry vehicles penetrated deep into Kharkiv. Within hours, they were all killed or captured.

“I don’t know what they were hoping for. To seize the regional government building right away?” said Ukrainian air force Maj. Oleh Koshevyi, who serves at the Kharkiv-based Ukrainian Air Force University. “Instead, everyone has united against them.”

Responding to that initial assault, Ukraine pulled fresh troops into the city, organizing a defense around its northern, western and eastern perimeters that have been holding ever since. While Russian forces are close enough to shell residential neighborhoods with Grad multiple-launch rocket systems and artillery, they haven’t been able to advance and, in many areas, have been pushed back.

The roads from Kharkiv to the Ukrainian cities of Poltava and Dnipro remain open, allowing resupplies of food, fuel and ammunition, as well as providing a way out for civilians who have somewhere to go.

“The first days were scary. There was confusion, it was unclear who was where in the city,” said Lt. Andriy Babak of the Ukrainian Army’s 92nd Brigade, which is defending Kharkiv. “Now we have established the lines of defense and keep repelling their attacks.”

Frustrated with its inability to enter or encircle the city, Russia pivoted to the new strategy of destruction here on March 1, the end of the war's first week.

At 8 a.m. that morning, a Russian ballistic missile slammed into Kharkiv's Freedom Square, just outside the regional administration headquarters, a Stalin-era neoclassical building that pro-Russian protesters had taken over in 2014. Several other missile strikes since then have turned entire downtown city blocs into a cityscape of destruction akin to Stalingrad, Aleppo or Grozny.

Burned-out, shrapnel-peppered cars, the remains of their occupants melted into the seats, dot the streets. Twisted pieces of roofing hang from electricity lines. Inside the regional administration's courtyard, a giant crater marked the spot where a Russian missile vaporized an ambulance.

A rigid, frozen body is still lying outside. In the governor's former office, a book on the challenges and perspective of Ukrainian law studies remains, pristine, amid the soot and debris. Elsewhere in the building, pieces of flesh spatter whitewashed walls.

Oleh Supereka, a former studio portrait photographer turned soldier, pointed to a fifth-floor apartment of a gutted building near the regional government building. His friend lived there, he said, and miraculously survived the blast, which sheared off the living room's outer wall.

"The Russians are doing this out of desperation," Mr. Supereka said. "They understand they can't take the city from the land, so they just destroy it from the air."

The initial bombing of Freedom Square was one of many Russian strikes on Kharkiv that day. At around 10:30 p.m., four Russian cruise missiles slammed into the compound of the Kharkiv Air Force University. One of them hit a residential building that housed retired officers and the families of current officers. Most active-duty personnel were by then deployed to the front lines around Kharkiv, and so women and children made up most of the dozens of victims buried under the rubble that night, said Lt. Col. Oleh Pechelulko, the university's deputy commander.

A mother lost

Ten days later, rescue crews were still digging through the crumbled building. Col. Pechelulko said his wife luckily had left their apartment there a few hours earlier.

"Everything has burned down. Nothing is left. Not memories. Not documents. Nothing. I am continuing the war just with what I had on my back that night," he said, showing the charred block where the couple once lived.

The remains of a playground stood amid the debris. A painting of a lion with a pink mane, part of a mural, still showed on a charred brick wall. Wrecked cars littered the space.

“All the men had gone off to fight and defend Kharkiv that night,” Col. Pechelulko said. “Now, every one of them will avenge his family, his murdered children, his murdered wife. We will never forgive the enemy for this.”

At 3:30 p.m. on March 7, Serhiy and Elena Kosyanov’s children were lying on a sofa and playing with smartphones in northern Kharkiv’s Saltivka neighborhood. Elena, a kindergarten teacher, was in the kitchen and her mother was preparing to walk their dog. Serhiy was opening the door to their apartment building downstairs. He was in good spirits: After two hours waiting in line, he had filled their car with gas.

Then a Russian projectile slammed through their living room window and exploded. The building caught fire. One of the shards pierced the face of the couple’s 8-year-old son, Dmitri, and lodged between the base of his skull and his spine. The boy remains in the intensive-care unit of Kharkiv’s Hospital number 4, fighting for his life. His sister suffered burns, and his grandmother got a concussion and broken ribs.

“I came home just a little bit too late because of the wait at the gas station. We were supposed to leave Kharkiv that day,” Serhiy said, standing outside the hospital’s intensive-care unit. “All our pets have burned alive. Two cats. One dog. One hamster,” his wife said.

Seven-year-old Vladimir Baklanov was in the same hospital, recovering from gunshot wounds. As the boy and his mother tried to flee Kharkiv by car, they were caught in a crossfire between Russian and Ukrainian forces on Feb. 28, four days after the invasion. His mother died.

Vladimir’s father, Stanislav, a manager at a construction company, was on assignment in Uzbekistan when the war erupted. He has since returned to Kharkiv, and spends his days and nights in the hospital. Stanislav closed the door so Vladimir wouldn’t hear his conversation with The Wall Street Journal.

“He probably knows that his mama is dead,” Stanislav said. “But he still keeps calling her.”

The hospital’s chief neurosurgeon, Oleksandr Dukhovskyy, was supposed to be attending a conference in Bogotá, Colombia, this weekend. He hasn’t left the hospital since Feb. 24, except for a handful of one-hour forays home.

“It’s a war, and it’s a dirty war,” Dr. Dukhovskyy said, showing X-rays and CT scans of injuries to his pediatric patients from Russian shelling. “People who do this cannot be human. Those are war crimes, and one day these people must be put on trial.”

In hiding

Unlike in Kyiv, where Ukraine has concentrated its meager air defenses and can shoot down many incoming missiles, Kharkiv has limited means apart from shoulder-fired missiles to counter Russia's air superiority. All the Ukrainian military airfields nearby were knocked out in the early hours of the war. While snowy, cloudy weather has favored Ukrainian defenders in recent days, the war has been mostly conducted in stealth, rapid movements of small Ukrainian units that hunt Russian armor, artillery and rocket launchers.

"Many of their resupply columns have been destroyed, and they have a big problem with fuel and food. So they loot from the local villagers and take their homes," Lt. Babak said. "As for us, we receive information from the locals all the time, and we try to move ahead and hit the Russians little by little." A stock of British-supplied antitank missiles was at his unit's disposal. On Thursday, one was used to destroy a Russian armored vehicle, he said.

Support from local residents has also helped soldiers like Private Andriy Tkachuk. His company in the 92nd brigade, deployed near the border with Russia northeast of Kharkiv, disintegrated after suffering heavy combat casualties in the first days of the war.

Pvt. Tkachuk and eight fellow soldiers hiked to a nearby village, where they hid their weapons and, with the help of local residents who have fed and housed them, changed into civilian clothes. After days of dodging Russian patrols, they made their way through a forest to link up with Ukrainian police, he said, at one of the brigade's improvised bases in Kharkiv. A steady flow of civilian volunteers bring fresh-baked flatbread, juices and soup.

In the shelters of Kharkiv's underground subway, other volunteers have set up an improvised pharmacy and library, as well as a travel desk helping to coordinate the departure of civilians to western Ukraine. Book titles include Harry Potter, the Chronicles of Narnia and novels by Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov.

At night, mothers pushed baby carriages along the platform decorated with billboards of the Chelsea Football Club, lulling their little ones to sleep. An entire wall was covered with drawings made by children inside the station. One picture, by 7-year-old Illarion, was of his poodle Adele. "We all want peace," it said. "My Adele also wants peace."

Neighbors brought down a microwave, a refrigerator and an espresso machine. Lawyer Roman Cherepakha, one of the volunteers, made Americano coffee drinks. "We will win because the righteous always win in the end," he said. "And in the meantime, I am here to help people get through this."

Mr. Terekhov, the mayor, was equally certain of a Ukrainian victory. "We will never surrender," he said. "But now, the main task is to make sure our people stay alive."

Schwirz, Michael. 2022. “I’m Not Scared of Anything’: Death and Defiance in a Besieged Ukrainian City.” *New York Times*, March 15. <https://nyti.ms/3ulyUYz>

The port city of Mykolaiv is being shelled by Russian forces every day. Bodies are piled at the morgue. But residents refuse to succumb.

MYKOLAIV, Ukraine — Alla Ryabko stood in the courtyard of the city morgue, trembling with grief and rage. Her son, Capt. Roman Ryabko, had been killed in fighting on the first day of the war in Ukraine, but two weeks had passed and his body had not yet been prepared for burial.

“He’s there lying in a bag,” she said, gesturing to the covered bodies on the ground. “They’re not even giving him to me so that I can wash him. I have to take him away in a bag, a garbage bag.”

The morgue is overflowing. Bodies are being released to families in the state they arrived, half-dressed in shredded military uniforms, spackled with blood and blackened by fire. Bodies are in the corridor, in the administrative offices, in the courtyard, in a storage shed nearby. They are soldiers and civilians, wrapped in sheets or carpets or nothing at all.

Even as Ms. Ryabko cried out her anguish, artillery strikes shook the ground beneath her feet. There were already 132 bodies in the morgue that day. More would be on the way.

There is shelling every day in Mykolaiv. It usually starts before dawn, as a rumble or a thud or a thwack. It electrifies the air and sends a jolt through the gut, and those who choose to stay in bed, rather than flee to a basement, can shut their eyes and let their ears paint a picture of the battle raging in the dark.

Russian forces want to take Mykolaiv because it stands in their way. The Varvarivsky Bridge in the city is the only passage for miles across the wide mouth of the Southern Buh River. By seizing the bridge, Russian fighters can push along the Black Sea coast west to Odessa, the headquarters of the Ukrainian Navy and the country’s largest civilian port.

To get to the bridge, they have to go through the Ukrainian fighters who, so far, have not budged. And so the Russian troops bomb, randomly and indiscriminately, striking neighborhoods, hospitals and supermarkets, opting for terror in the absence of military gain. At least a dozen civilians were killed by airstrikes over the weekend, according to the local authorities.

Yet there is also a refusal to succumb. Trash is still being collected, and city workers have embarked on an aggressive tree-pruning campaign, though the shelling is knocking down some of those trees.

There is the family who closed down a high-end interior design business and now drives around the city all day delivering food to needy residents, pausing only on occasion to dash into a basement for cover. There is the group of local guys who banded together to try to fix a Russian tank damaged in the fighting so that Ukraine's military might use it.

A few blocks from the morgue, the Coffee Go cafe is doing a brisk business, even as artillery fire rattles the plate-glass windows. When the owners tried to close down, their teenage employees rebelled, said Viktoria Kuplevskaya, an 18-year-old barista with a streak of orange in her hair.

"We wanted to work," she said. "I'm not scared of anything."

Once a center of shipbuilding for the Russian Empire, Mykolaiv was among the first places attacked after President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia gave the order to invade on Feb. 24. The Russian troops have pressed deep into the city limits, only to be pushed out, leaving behind the burned-out carcasses of armored vehicles.

No one knows how long Ukrainian defenders can hold. Russian forces have attacked with tanks, artillery and fighter jets, pummeling the city on three sides. Every day brings more death. But also defiance.

The Governor

"Good morning. We're from Ukraine."

So begins the typical morning video message from Vitaliy Kim, the regional governor. The joke among city residents is that nobody will leave their homes unless Mr. Kim says it is safe, and no one can sleep soundly until Mr. Kim wishes them good night. It is only a slight exaggeration. His upbeat videos on Facebook and Telegram, which he invariably opens by flashing a peace sign and toothy smile, typically garner half a million views, roughly equal to the city's population.

"When he smiles, we can go to bed," said Natalya Stanislavchuk, who has been volunteering to deliver food to the needy. "If Kim says we can sleep calmly, then we can sleep calmly."

Mr. Kim posts videos throughout the day, a mix of reassurance and withering denigration of Russian forces, whom he refers to alternatively as idiots, bastards and orcs, the evil snaggletoothed army of the east in Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings." The messages are meant to bolster the spirits of city residents, even if the booms they are hearing sound terrifyingly close.

“What can I say, the 17th day of war, all is well, the mood is excellent,” Mr. Kim said in a message over the weekend that began with news of an airstrike on a residential neighborhood. “We have freedom and we’re fighting for it. And all they have is slavery. We want all of our dreams to come true and we’re moving in that direction. Together to victory.”

A month ago, Mr. Kim’s main priorities centered around improving roads and the region’s tourism infrastructure, including big plans to develop a resort on a picturesque piece of the Black Sea coast.

“These were costly, large, beautiful projects that were needed, and in one day this was destroyed,” Mr. Kim said.

Now he coordinates with the military for the defense of the city. Meeting for an interview at the regional administration headquarters, Mr. Kim was dressed in green cargo pants with a black pistol holstered to his belt.

He predicted that any Russian effort to take Mykolaiv would lead to a bloody and destructive street-by-street firefight. Every street corner has a pile of tires and a ready incendiary bomb sitting next to it. Should Russian forces enter the city, residents are prepared to quickly plunge them into a smoky blackness, giving cover as the Ukrainian defenders attempt to pick off the Russian tanks one by one.

It would be apocalyptic, Mr. Kim said.

“My strategy is to be much more joyous than is appropriate for this kind of situation,” he said. “This doesn’t mean that I don’t understand how serious things are.”

The Targets

The fireball lit up the night sky like an early sunrise. Another day of Russian shelling had begun.

It was Monday, March 7, and Russian forces had launched an early-morning attack that jolted residents from their beds. They fled into makeshift bomb shelters, basements that many residents have outfitted with mattresses and shipping pallets for sleeping because they now spend so much time there.

“They attacked our city dishonorably, cynically, while people were sleeping,” Mr. Kim said in one of his messages.

A cruise missile had hit a barracks filled with sleeping soldiers from the 79th Ukrainian Air Assault Brigade. Eight were killed and another eight were missing, their bodies buried in the pile of rubble. The strike opened the barracks like a dollhouse, revealing an eerie glimpse into a soldier's daily life: gray steel bunk beds, regulations posted on the wall.

It could have been worse had the missile not first slammed into a line of poplar trees, sending it slightly off target.

“We were very lucky that these poplar trees were here because if it were a direct strike we would have all been screwed,” said a soldier named Vova, who was helping to search for bodies. “The poplars bent the rocket's trajectory.”

It was the same across Mykolaiv that day. In one neighborhood of densely packed apartment blocks, residents alternated between clearing out their shattered homes and dashing to basement bomb shelters amid continuing strikes. One woman, when approached by a reporter, unleashed such a torrent of profanity directed at Mr. Putin that she felt the need to apologize, and then burst into tears.

The missile strikes had blown out windows and sprayed shrapnel through furniture, walls and appliances.

“Look at how the Russian world is saving us,” Marina Babenko, a mother of two, said, referring sarcastically to Mr. Putin's claim that Russia was waging a war of liberation. “We were living fine and had everything we needed. Now they're bombing residential neighborhoods, women and children. We have no weapons. All we can do is hide in the basement. We have no strength for anything else.”

In the tidy neighborhood of Balabanivka, residents were cleaning up after Russian jets dropped a payload of bombs early in the morning that leveled homes and killed several residents.

A bomb had carved a large crater out of what used to be Roman Nikora's backyard, and three chickens sat beside the mangled remains of their hut. An acrid smell hung in the air.

“Come, let me show you how we survived,” Mr. Nikora said, leading a visitor into the shallow basement where he had hidden during the bombing with his wife, their child and his parents.

The basement looked like it had been turned upside down and shaken. Cabinets had been ripped off the wall; part of the backyard was pushed through the windows.

“They're worse than the fascists,” Mr. Nikora, 32, a businessman, said of the Russian forces. “They're saying they only target military objects, military structures. Well, there's nothing like that here.”

Despite his fear of more bombing, Mr. Nikora said that he and his family had no plans to go anywhere.

“We’ll rebuild,” he said. “I still have hands.”

The Defiant

Two older women were sitting on a bench in a city park, watching three young children play, when their conversation was interrupted by an ominous droning sound. An air raid siren. The women kept talking. After a few minutes, they slowly rose, bundled the youngest child into a stroller, and walked away in no great hurry.

Russian rocket attacks may now set the rhythm of life in Mykolaiv, but many residents are determined to play the song in a key of their own choosing.

“There is no panic,” said Ms. Stanislavchuk, who spoke so admiringly of Mr. Kim, the governor. “Our people coolly evaluate the situation and help one another.”

Before the war, Ms. Stanislavchuk and her husband, Aleksandr, had planned to open a second branch of their interior design business in Bucha, an up-and-coming suburb of Kyiv where their son, Yegor, had moved into a sleek, newly built development.

Last week, they were instead driving around Mykolaiv, their hometown, passing out food and nervously awaiting news from Yegor. He was attempting to escape Bucha with his pet rabbit, Diva, after hiding in a basement for several days from the Russian troops who had occupied the suburb.

“There are those moments when morale falters and when your mood sours,” said Ms. Stanislavchuk, who was carrying an Orthodox icon of the Virgin Mary. “But when you see that someone needs your help and support, you have to get up and move. Then you realize that it will come to an end because the truth is on our side.”

There has been an exodus from Mykolaiv during the past two weeks. On some mornings, large convoys of cars and buses, some with homemade cardboard signs saying, “Children,” have snarled traffic at the Varvarivsky Bridge.

The bridge is the escape route. It is also a prize that Russian forces covet.

But should they enter the city, in addition to Ukrainian military forces, the Russian troops will have to face people like Dmitry Dmitriev, a local journalist who has put down his pen in favor of a submachine gun. On a recent visit to the offices of his online news outlet, there were more guns than journalists, and boxes of ammunition littered the floor.

“All of us are participating in the resistance,” Mr. Dmitriev said.

The Russian forces will also have to contend with Nikolai Bilyashchat, a 54-year-old bus driver. Last week, Mr. Bilyashchat was with neighbors, cigarettes dangling from their lips, peering into the open engine bay of a Russian T-90 tank.

A day earlier, Ukrainian forces had blown up a bridge as the tank was crossing over. It was still functional but could only drive in circles. A white Z, which has been used by the Russian forces to identify their vehicles, had been painted over in green, and the tank's antenna mast sported a Ukrainian flag.

Mr. Bilyashchat wanted to get it running and turn it against the Russian troops. "We're just locals. I'm not a mechanic. I'm just helping," he said. "What else are we supposed to do? We need to help somehow. I'm not going to sit at home and hide."

The Wounded

At City Hospital No. 3, Anna Smetana sat up in a cot, sobbing. A 40-year-old mother, she was wearing a peach dress with black polka dots, her shoulder and leg covered by large bandages soaked through with blood.

Two days earlier, Ms. Smetana and six of her colleagues from a local orphanage were driving to a small village where the children had been evacuated at the start of the war. About 15 miles outside of the city, she said, an armored Russian fighting vehicle, emblazoned with a white Z, opened fire on the van.

"First they shot at us with automatic weapons," Ms. Smetana said. "Then the car caught on fire and filled with smoke."

"Get out, get out," she said the soldiers had told her. "They put us on our knees, pointed their weapons at us and took our telephones."

"We asked them to give them back," she said. Their reply: "No, not possible. We have orders."

Three of Ms. Smetana's colleagues were incinerated by the fire that engulfed the van, she said. Ms. Smetana was shot twice in the shoulder and once in the leg.

"There were rockets everywhere, bombs," she added. "All we heard were the sounds of explosions."

On just one day, Ms. Smetana was one of 25 patients being treated for wounds from shelling and gunfire, according to the hospital's medical director, Dmitri Kolosov. Earlier in the week, shells had landed in the hospital courtyard, spraying shrapnel in all directions, he added.

“We thought coronavirus was a nightmare,” Mr. Kolosov said. “But this is hell.”

The Defenders

Black strafe marks pock a prop plane that sits on the runway of Mykolaiv’s small international airport. Inside, the security screening area has been gutted, and in a second-floor lounge are the remains of a soldier’s dinner of canned sardines in tomato sauce.

Early in the war, Russian troops held the airport briefly, only to be quickly expelled by Ukrainian fighters. Since then, the Russian forces have kept trying to gain control so that their transport planes can bring in troops and equipment to feed their fight and continue their push west.

But, for now, the Ukrainians keep stopping them. Video taken by Ukrainian troops show them firing shoulder-mounted rockets from the roof of the airport at Russian fighters below.

On a recent visit, the Ukrainian flag was flying.

“We have a very strong position and we’re waiting for them,” said Sgt. Ruslan Khoda, who insisted on practicing his English with a reporter. “There is nothing unexpected. We know they are arriving and from where they’re arriving. And we’re ready to say, ‘Hello, Russian stupid boys.’”

Sergeant Khoda said that Russian forces appeared to be probing for weakness. They launch attacks from the north and northeast, then switch directions and come from the south. Often, he said, attacks are preceded by overflights of Russian surveillance drones. “They are trying to attack us from different sides to taste our protection, to taste our power,” he said. “Russian troops did not expect such a strong army.”

Maj. Gen. Dmitry Marchenko, commander of Ukraine’s military forces in Mykolaiv, said that the Ukrainian strategy was to break morale through an unrelenting pounding of Russian positions. But there is another critical factor.

“We are defending our homes, our women, our families,” he said. “We don’t need their world. We don’t need their language. Let them build their own country and die in it and create whatever dictatorship they want there. We’re going to live like free people.”

A Boring Night

On Monday, Mr. Kim was somber in his evening video message. He acknowledged that the situation had grown more serious, while denigrating the Russian troops as “idiots” for attacking civilian areas with rockets.

“There’s no logical sense to it,” he said. “But the initiative is on our side, and we’re moving.”

With that, on the 18th day of the war, he sent the people of Mykolaiv to bed. “I wish everyone a boring night.”

#9

Trofimov, Yaroslav, and James Marson. 2022. “Russian Forces Kill Civilians, Loot for Supplies in Occupied Ukraine, Residents Say.” *Wall Street Journal*, March 14. <https://on.wsj.com/35V8Pr7>

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine—Russian forces are killing civilians and looting stores and homes across occupied parts of southern Ukraine, residents said, as Moscow arrested elected local leaders and sought to replace them with pro-Russian collaborators. People arriving here from Russian-held areas over the weekend described hungry and undisciplined Russian troops shooting unarmed villagers, breaking into supermarkets and shops, and raiding homes in search of food and valuables as their own supply lines have failed.

“They just brazenly come in, without any shame, and take whatever they want,” said Valentyna Khodus, 64, who came to Zaporizhzhia from the small village of Myrne after days hiding in the cellar with her daughter and grandson as Russian troops went door to door ransacking houses.

Two neighbors who were driving a car with a Ukrainian flag were shot and killed by a Russian patrol last week, she said. “It’s still there, on the roadside, and their bodies are still inside,” Ms. Khodus said.

Russia says it isn’t planning an occupation of Ukraine and that its forces are liberating Ukrainians. It says it has only hit military targets and that any civilian casualties are the fault of what it calls Ukrainian nationalists and extremists.

In a call with the United Nations secretary-general on March 4, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said, «The Russian army is not threatening civilians, it does not open fire at civilian facilities and observes international humanitarian law,» according to the ministry.

Russian attempts to seize Ukraine’s biggest cities of Kyiv and Kharkiv in the north have stalled in the face of fierce resistance. But in a rapid advance in the first week of the war, Moscow managed to take a swath of Ukraine’s southern Zaporizhzhia, Kherson and Mykolaiv regions.

That grab, while mostly paused in the past week, has created a land bridge between Russia and the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow seized militarily and annexed in 2014. The gains have sparked concerns in Kyiv and the West that Russia intends to permanently separate those areas from Ukraine.

Signs are emerging that Moscow is preparing to rule them for the long haul.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba warned that in the Kherson region, home to the only regional capital currently under Russian occupation, Russian forces are preparing to hold a referendum on separating it from Ukraine and proclaiming a so-called «people's republic.»

Such a plan would echo the playbook Moscow employed to sever Crimea and eastern Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk areas in 2014.

On Saturday, members of the Kherson regional legislature convened by Zoom and reaffirmed their loyalty to the Ukrainian state. “Our hearts are beating in the same rhythm as the rest of Ukraine, which is resisting the invaders,” Kherson Mayor Ihor Kolykhaev added on social media.

In Melitopol, part of the Zaporizhzhia region, Russia on Saturday named municipal council member Galina Danilchenko to run the city and surrounding district after Russian soldiers detained the elected mayor, Ivan Fedorov, in a move Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky decried as an abduction.

“Our main task is to create new mechanisms adapted to the new reality, so that we will live in a new way as soon as possible,” Ms. Danilchenko said on local TV. She warned that there were “still people in the city trying to destabilize the situation, trying to cause extremist acts.”

Anti-Russian demonstrations have broken out across occupied areas. In Kherson a week ago, thousands marched in the city center. A giant Ukrainian flag flew atop a slow-moving car that blasted a new Ukrainian pop hit, “Bayraktar,” which celebrates the destruction of Russian convoys with drone strikes.

In Melitopol on Saturday, a day after the mayor's arrest, residents walked through the streets chanting, “Melitopol, rise up!”

Near the end, as people were starting to disperse, one of the protest leaders, Olga Gaisumova, was on the edge of the crowd when a black car drew up. Someone threw a smoke bomb into the crowd and several black-clad men jumped from the vehicle and grabbed 54-year-old Ms. Gaisumova.

On Sunday, around a thousand Melitopol residents gathered once again outside the government building that now houses Russian military headquarters, chanting, “Where’s our mayor?” and “Where’s our Olga?”

Russian soldiers shoved back a few who tried to approach the building. That day, Russian forces also detained the mayor of the town of Dniprorudne, north of Melitopol, according to Mr. Kuleba, Ukraine’s foreign minister. “Getting zero local support, invaders turn to terror,” he said.

Ukraine’s government says politicians and public servants who collaborate with Russian occupation forces are guilty of treason and will be punished harshly. “If anyone is tempted by propositions from the occupiers, beware that you are signing your own sentence,” Mr. Zelensky said Saturday.

Recruiting collaborators among local Ukrainian officials is particularly important for Russian forces as they seek legitimacy. Ms. Danilchenko said she was forming a new body that would run the city, and called on councilors to join.

One city councilor said he was on the run from the new authorities. “I will try to break through to our army,” the councilor said in a text message. “In Melitopol there is already nothing I can do.”

Demonstrators in Melitopol said Russians were surprised at the level of popular discontent. “They can’t believe that people come out to protest without being paid and that we do not have a single leader,” said Tatiana Kumok, a 40-year-old designer of wedding dresses.

Many residents in occupied areas said they are confident the Ukrainian army will return.

“Everyone in the village is just waiting for our troops to come back,” said Ms. Khodus, who fled to Zaporizhzhia with her daughter and grandson on Sunday. “We had just started living, developing, building a comfortable home. And now what? Where shall we go? We have left everything behind.”

Russian soldiers in Myrne, she said, “had the gall to come and ask: Do you like us, do you appreciate that we have come to liberate you?”

“Not so much,” Ms. Khodus said fellow villagers replied. “We had no need for you.” Anatolii Kurtiev, the acting mayor of Zaporizhzhia, said only a small part of the population, nostalgic for their Soviet-era youth, would work with the Russians.

“The Soviet occupation lasted 70 years, and some people still have a good memory of that time: It was safe, there was something to eat and something to drink,” he said. “But we are a different generation, and all that is not enough for us. What we need is freedom, freedom to live in our own country where nobody else tells us what to do.”

A circus building in Zaporizhzhia has become a gathering center for people fleeing Russian-occupied areas of the region. On their way into the city, they lined up at military checkpoints in buses and cars with the word “children” displayed on windshields.

Many escaped under fire, with no time to collect belongings. They tried to find something suitable at the circus’s coat check, filled with used and new clothes donated by volunteers. Shoes were piled on the floor. Dazed, escapees wandered around, picking the right sizes for themselves and their children.

On Sunday afternoon, Alyona Serdyuk, a psychologist contracted by Ukraine’s emergency service, tried to cheer up some children, letting them play with a dog. “People arrive here scared and stressed. Their homes are destroyed, their entire lives are destroyed,” she said. “Everyone comes with wild fury, with burning anger toward the invader.”

Many people who have gathered in Zaporizhzhia didn’t have time to collect their belongings before they fled their homes.

Older people, she said, are particularly distraught because they feel they won’t have time to rebuild what they have lost. The children, she said, stun her with their emotional reactions. One 2-year-old boy, Ms. Serdyuk said, had just told her how he had thrown the biggest stone he could pick up at the Russians after their fire had “made a hole” in the wall of his home.

“When the Russians come into the villages, they maraud in every way they can, rob and shoot people,” said Oleksandr Sitnikov, who, alongside three small children, spent nearly two weeks hiding in a village cellar without water or electricity. “It’s extremely difficult out there.”

Darya Prystupa, a former waitress, said she had to walk through the front line with her 2-year-old daughter, Sofia, on Saturday. Her town of Molochansk was under Russian control, and she was desperate to escape and try to make her way to the European Union while it was still possible.

“There is no food, no salt, no sugar, no medication,” she said. “And Sofia, she just keeps saying ‘bang, bang,’ the sound of explosions.”

At the Russian checkpoint on the road to Zaporizhzhia, soldiers weren’t letting people cross before collecting a toll, Ms. Prystupa said.

“Every time they see Ukrainians in a car, they demand to be given food and cigarettes, and then they let you through,” she said. “Our people can’t refuse because the Russian soldiers point guns at them. Our people have no guns.”

Risen, James. 2022. "U.S. Intelligence Says Putin Made a Last-Minute Decision to Invade Ukraine." *The Intercept*, March 11. <https://bit.ly/3tUZurb>

DESPITE STAGING A massive military buildup on his country's border with Ukraine for nearly a year, Russian President Vladimir Putin did not make a final decision to invade until just before he launched the attack in February, according to senior current and former U.S. intelligence officials.

In December, the CIA issued classified reports concluding that Putin hadn't yet committed to an invasion, according to the current and former officials. In January, even as the Russian military was starting to take the logistical steps necessary to move its troops into Ukraine, U.S. intelligence again issued classified reporting maintaining that Putin had still not resolved to actually launch an attack, the officials said. "The CIA was saying through January that Putin had not made a decision to invade, but he was putting in place pieces for an invasion," said a senior U.S. intelligence official, who asked not to be identified in order to discuss sensitive matters. "I think Putin was still keeping his options open."

It wasn't until February that the agency and the rest of the U.S. intelligence community became convinced that Putin would invade, the senior official added. With few other options available at the last minute to try to stop Putin, President Joe Biden took the unusual step of making the intelligence public, in what amounted to a form of information warfare against the Russian leader. He also warned that Putin was planning to try to fabricate a pretext for invasion, including by making false claims that Ukrainian forces had attacked civilians in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, which is controlled by pro-Russian separatists. The preemptive use of intelligence by Biden revealed "a new understanding ... that the information space may be among the most consequential terrain Putin is contesting," observed Jessica Brandt of the Brookings Institution.

Biden's warning on February 18 that the invasion would happen within the week turned out to be accurate. In the early hours of February 24, Russian troops moved south into Ukraine from Belarus and across Russia's borders into Kharkiv, the Donbas region, and Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014.

The intelligence community's assessment that Putin waited until almost the last minute to decide to start a war with Ukraine, which has not been previously reported, is significant because it could help explain how ill-prepared and uncoordinated the Russian military has appeared since it invaded. There have been widespread reports that Putin kept many Russian leaders out of the loop, that they were stunned by his decision to attack, and that the Russian government was not fully ready for war. "I was shocked because for a long

time, I thought that a military operation was not feasible. It was not plausible,” Andrey Kortunov, a member of a Kremlin panel of foreign policy advisers, told Britain’s Sky News on March 2. Kortunov said that he and other foreign policy advisers had been sidelined by Putin.

The Russian president has instead surrounded himself with a small circle of like-minded military and intelligence officials who do his bidding. This has prompted outside experts to describe the current Russian government as being run by the siloviki, a small cadre of senior people with security, intelligence, and military backgrounds. It means that an increasingly isolated Putin made the decision to invade largely by himself. But that isolation makes it difficult to control a sprawling enterprise like a major war.

It’s possible that Putin made his decision earlier than U.S. intelligence concluded that he did. Current intelligence officials who described the CIA’s reporting on Putin’s intentions refused to identify the specific intelligence the agency used to determine when he decided to invade, making it difficult to judge the quality of the assessments. For example, whether U.S. intelligence was able to determine Putin’s plans because it gained access to his personal communications — thus giving the U.S. real-time information about his thinking — remains a closely guarded secret.

The Russian president has surrounded himself with a small circle of like-minded military and intelligence officials who do his bidding.

Several former intelligence officials said they doubt that the U.S. has access to Putin’s personal communications and instead believe it is more likely that the U.S. relied in part on intercepted communications among others in the Russian government and military. As Putin issued orders, increasing numbers of government and military officials had to be notified, and those officials then had to notify others around them. As a result, the Russian president’s plans for such a large-scale invasion couldn’t remain secret for long.

While Putin’s intentions were difficult for U.S. intelligence to determine, the Russian military’s troop buildup along the border with Ukraine was much easier to monitor. Over the past year, in fact, Russia did little to conceal its huge military deployments along the border with Ukraine. Last April, U.S. intelligence first detected that the Russian military was beginning to move large numbers of troops and equipment to the Ukrainian border. Most of the Russian soldiers deployed to the border at that time were later moved back to their bases, but U.S. intelligence determined that some of the troops and materiel remained near the border, the current and former intelligence officials said. The intelligence community realized that by only withdrawing part of its forces, Russia was making it easier to mount a quick mobilization later.

In June 2021, against the backdrop of rising tensions over Ukraine, Biden and Putin met at a summit in Geneva. The summer troop withdrawal brought a brief period of calm, but the crisis began to build again in October and November, when U.S. intelligence watched

as Russia once again moved large numbers of troops back to its border with Ukraine. Pentagon analysts began to warn that the scale and costs of the deployment were much larger than would be required if Putin were bluffing, said current and former officials familiar with the intelligence.

As U.S. intelligence monitored the Russian troop buildup, there was some concern among officials handling Russian operations inside the CIA about how aggressively they were being allowed to conduct spy operations against Moscow. Early in 2021, some officials involved in Russian operations inside the CIA said that they were facing at least a temporary pause on a series of sensitive covert operations related to Russia, according to a former U.S. intelligence official with direct knowledge of discussions among the officials involved in Russian operations. The former official said that William Burns, Biden's CIA director, was seeking to temporarily halt some high-risk and potentially provocative operations to give the new administration a chance to try to reset relations with Putin after the weird and controversial relationship between Putin and Donald Trump. The former U.S. president had been investigated for his ties to Russia, and his relationship with Putin often seemed submissive, poisoning every aspect of U.S.-Russian relations.

The Biden administration “wanted to see if they could avoid kicking over a hornet’s nest called Russia.”

“There was a deep desire for a stable and predictable relationship with Russia,” the former senior CIA official told *The Intercept*. The Biden administration “wanted to see if they could avoid kicking over a hornet’s nest called Russia.”

A CIA spokesperson denied that there were any restrictions imposed on operations against Russia, calling the idea that Burns had sought to limit high-risk spy missions to give Biden a chance to reset relations with Putin categorically false.

Senior intelligence officials said that the only real shift in Russian operations was to increase the agency’s focus on intelligence related to Ukraine instead of pursuing other Russia-related targets. In the first few months of the Biden administration, U.S. intelligence officials began working more closely with Ukrainian intelligence to help the country prepare for a possible Russian invasion, the senior agency official said.

As the intelligence began to show the Russian escalation along the Ukrainian border, top CIA officials became increasingly focused on Ukraine long before it burst into the headlines as a global crisis. “I saw Burns in December, and he was really agitated by the Russian buildup,” said the former senior intelligence official.

Yet for several critical weeks last fall, senior policymakers in the Biden administration remained deeply split over how best to respond. At that time, the administration was reluctant to dramatically and immediately increase arms shipments to Ukraine.

Alexander Vindman, the former Army officer who handled Ukraine policy at the National Security Council and who became a whistleblower in Trump's impeachment over the Ukraine scandal, says that Trump was largely responsible for delaying arms shipments to the country. Vindman said in an interview that the toxic politics surrounding Trump's handling of Ukraine continued to make officials in the Biden administration wary of how aggressively to handle Ukraine policy last year.

In 2019, Trump froze military aid to Ukraine to try to pressure Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to investigate Biden, then a contender for the Democratic presidential nomination. Trump was impeached by the House for his attempt to pressure a foreign leader to meddle in a U.S. election but was later acquitted in the Senate. "Trump's freeze on arms transfers made Ukraine toxic for the remainder of the Trump years, and I think Biden saw it as a toxic issue too," Vindman said. "We lost three years" worth of aid to Ukraine because of Trump's efforts to intimidate Zelenskyy, he added. (Vindman testified before Congress during the impeachment; he was subsequently forced out of his job at the White House and later retired from the Army, saying that his chain of command did not shield him from pressure from the Trump administration.)

By February, however, as the U.S. intelligence community issued specific warnings that an invasion was imminent, the period of indecision among Biden administration policymakers came to an end. Since the invasion, the U.S. and its NATO allies have poured arms into Ukraine to help the nation defend itself. But Biden has imposed limits, and this week he rejected a Polish proposal to transfer fighter jets to Ukraine.

A senior U.S. intelligence official said that Putin has been surprised and disappointed by the Russian army's problems so far and by the strength of the Ukrainian resistance. A U.S. intelligence official told Congress this week that as many as 4,000 Russian soldiers have been killed since the invasion began.

The senior intelligence official said that the Ukrainian intelligence service, which worked with the CIA to prepare for the invasion, has performed well since the Russian attack, but did not provide any details.

"Clearly Putin's expectation was that this would be a much easier enterprise than it is," the senior U.S. intelligence official said.

#11

Charter, David. 2022. "Which Countries Are Supporting Russia and Won't Back Ukraine?" (UK), *The Times*, March 11. <https://bit.ly/3t4WxVN>

Commonwealth states are among those refusing to condemn Putin

While western democracies have been vociferous in condemning Russian aggression, the silence of the key democratic Commonwealth nations of India, Pakistan and South Africa has been deafening.

Two weeks of military attacks appear to have done little to budge many of the pro-Russian or neutral nations around the world from their pre-war stance.

Pakistan

Imran Khan was in Moscow on a two-day state visit on the eve of the invasion and has angrily rebuffed western demands to speak out against Russia. “What do you think of us? Are we your slaves . . . that whatever you say, we will do?” the prime minister and former cricketer said.

He spoke out at the weekend after 22 diplomats in Islamabad published a joint letter calling on the Pakistani government to join the United Nations’ resolution in condemning Russia’s attack. Pakistan, like India, abstained. “I want to ask the European Union ambassadors: Did you write such a letter to India?” Khan said.

China

Beijing’s attitude has been described as “pro-Russian neutrality” and although there are now some signs of nervousness, the favourable treatment of Russia in the Chinese-language media continues, backed up by growing numbers of anti-western conspiracy theories.

India

The world’s largest democracy continues to maintain that sanctions are not the answer to the war but faces pressure from the US to condemn President Putin

What is causing the most perplexity in Washington and London — where the hostilities in Ukraine are seen as part of an existential clash between democracy and autocracy — is the approach of the Commonwealth trio and the largest two democracies in Latin America — Brazil and Mexico.

“It’s now time [for India] to further distance itself from Russia,” Donald Lu, the US State Department’s assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, said last week, suggesting that the US may reconsider its stance on waiving sanctions against India.

The US did not invoke Caatsa (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) provisions against India in 2018 when it signed a \$5.43 billion deal with Moscow to purchase Russia's S-400 missile defence system. Russia is India's biggest arms supplier. "The Biden administration will consider Caatsa," Lu told members of Congress last week, according to CBS News.

When President Biden listed the nations lined up in opposition to Russia during his State of the Union address at the start of the month, he did not mention a Central or South American country. Little appears to have changed.

Brazil and Mexico

They have declined to impose sanctions on Russia and avoided condemning the invasion. President Lopez Obrador, the left-wing populist Mexican leader, said last week: "We are not going to take any sort of economic reprisal because we want to have good relations with all the governments in the world."

President Bolsonaro of Brazil, a right-wing populist who visited Putin in Moscow last month, has maintained that he will remain "neutral" on Ukraine. He has said that Brazil buys much of its fertilizer from Russia and that he does not want its economy to be affected by taking sides.

South Africa

The ANC leadership has fallen back into its Cold War amity with Moscow, with the former president, Jacob Zuma, issuing a statement on Sunday calling Putin "a man of peace" and the western allies "bullies".

Jon Temin, vice-president of policy and programs for the Truman Center for National Policy, said that while Zuma was now discredited the pro-Russian feeling ran deep in the ANC leadership in South Africa.

"The South African response has been really tepid - there's been a lot of pushback from South African civil society, saying you must condemn this, like the rest of the world," he said.

"But the ANC has these longstanding relationships, and they have a very fixed view of the world that doesn't allow for a lot of flexibility on these issues. They sometimes find themselves in odd positions that are not aligned with what many South Africans see as the spirit of the liberation movement. President Ramaphosa has been more even-handed compared to Zuma. But we're not looking for even handed-here. We're looking for the strong condemnation that Russia deserves."

#12

Blackwell, Tom. 2022. “How Training by Canada Helped Give Ukrainian Army a Fighting Chance Against Russia.” *National Post*, March 9. <https://bit.ly/3KCVORt>

When Canadian troops began training counterparts in Ukraine five years ago, one of their key goals was deceptively simple.

In place of the top-down style of leadership inherited from Soviet days, the Canadians and other NATO instructors tried to instill the idea of giving small-unit commanders the autonomy to make decisions on the fly.

It was a cultural transformation, but seems to be paying off in spades as the out-gunned Ukrainian forces perform remarkably well against a Russian onslaught, says one of those teachers from Canada.

The attacks that have helped stall a huge Russian convoy north of Kyiv, for instance, have been made possible partly by small-unit leaders taking the initiative to craft their own ambushes, says Capt. Hugh Purdon.

“That all comes down to a platoon or section commander saying ‘We’re going to use the Javelin (anti-tank weapon) here and then we’re going to pull back and use the Javelin here,’” he said. “You multiply that thousands of times and all of a sudden you have a viable defence.”

“That is probably the biggest shock the (Russian) occupiers of Ukraine are seeing right now,” said Purdon. “You don’t have the level of success you are seeing ... if you haven’t developed that (leadership style).”

Canada and other NATO countries have been clear they will not get involved militarily in Ukraine’s war with its Russian invaders. But Canada’s training project suggests that — on top of the hardware donated by this country and others — Western combat know-how is having an impact on this conflict.

Meanwhile, some reports indicate that Russia’s halting advance with a vastly larger force has been slowed in part by its continued reliance on that top-down leadership.

Purdon, based in London, Ont., served two rotations with what is called Operation Unifier, Canada’s part in the mission by several NATO countries to train Ukraine’s forces to something closer to the alliance’s standards.

He was among the first group that set up the operation in 2015, and returned from his latest stint last October, as Russia began massing forces along the Ukrainian border.

The Canadians arrived shortly after Moscow's troops had annexed Crimea and come to the aid of separatists in eastern Ukraine in 2014, setting off a lower-grade war that continued until the full-scale invasion started last month.

The latest Canadian training contingent moved to neighbouring Poland before the Russian incursion began.

Among his Ukrainian counterparts, Purdon said there was never much doubt that they would soon be at it again.

The Canadians taught infantry units of the Ukraine army and its hybrid National Guard various specialty courses — from first aid to sniper skills — as well as the broader leadership principles.

Then they got help setting up courses they themselves could deliver to a wider group of troops.

The Ukrainians knew that the fight had not gone as well as it could have in 2014 and were eager to change the running of small units, said Purdon.

The concept the Canadians imparted is called “mission command” by NATO forces, he said.

“If you are my commanding officer, you give me the mission, you give me the intent ... and then I go off and I do it,” said Purdon. “But if something is happening in front of me on the ground, I am empowered to make a decision.”

There was also much interest in Canada's sniper training, he said, given that the three main causes of Ukrainian casualties in 2014 were artillery, mines and sniping.

But as much as the specifics of the instruction, Purdon believes help from the NATO countries provided the Ukrainians with added confidence. By last year, he said, they had “come a long, long way” from his first stint there in 2015.

At the end of his final deployment to Ukraine — with the military branch of its National Guard — a Guard colonel seemed to epitomize that new attitude.

“He said, ‘In 2014 me and my soldiers went to the front in school buses.’ And he goes, ‘Our soldiers will never do that again.... We’ll be better prepared for next time.’”

Purdon has kept in contact with several of his colleagues there since the war began and is struck by their resolute calmness — even as a vastly larger, more powerful enemy bears down on them.

The “matter-of-fact” attitude came out in his last conversation with a Ukrainian platoon commander he had befriended earlier.

“He said ‘When we win’ — when we win — ‘you have to come visit.’”

The mission faced bad press late last year when news emerged that members of small neo-Nazi militias had met with and been among the 30,000 troops trained by Canadians in Ukraine. Department of National Defence representatives said its policy has always been to not deal with such units and was investigating the incidents.

#13

Arel, Dominique. 2022. “Putin is Waging War on Eastern Ukraine.” *International Policy Studies (CIPS)*, March 7. <https://bit.ly/36hq9pR>

Historians have known for a long time that the idea that Ukrainians form a different nation than Russians, and therefore decide of their own destiny, is seen by Moscow, and a large segment of the Russian population, as artificial, as a creation of foreign powers (Austria and Poland before the wars, the United States since).

They have also known that since World War II Russia has associated Ukrainian nationalism, or the right of Ukrainians to self-determination, with fascism. In this view, it is not merely the Ukrainian insurgents of World War II (who called themselves the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) who were fascists, it is the very idea of Ukrainian nationalism that is fascist.

What we did not know is that a Russian ruler would be willing to wage a full-scale war on this premise. When Putin tells us that the objective of the so-called “military operation to protect Donbas” is to “denazify” Ukraine, what he literally means is that a Ukrainian state that persists in making its own choices, such as aligning itself with the West (EU, NATO) and maintaining a competitive electoral system, is nationalist, and therefore artificial, fascist, and threatening, since fascists kill civilians. This is the link between “denazification” and the absurd claim of “genocide” in Donbas.

Putin is telling us that in order to stop the genocide in Donbas, an army operation is necessary to overthrow the government and eradicate the very idea of Ukrainian nationalism. The state propagandists are loud and clear: the goal, in tones reminiscent of the darkest hours of the modern era, is to bring about a “solution to the Ukrainian problem”). In this macabre representation, the virus of Ukrainian nationalism, and the fake Ukrainian state, can be extirpated and the real Ukrainians will emerge. He explicitly called on Ukrainian generals to lay down their arms to save themselves from fascism. We are now lightyears away from geopolitical neutrality and a special status for Donbas. Putin aims to destroy what it sees as the Western-created unreal Ukraine, once and for all.

The real Ukraine, however, is resisting. Before Maidan, Ukraine oscillated between Western-oriented and Russian-oriented governments. In 2014, in the wake of the annexation of Crimea, Russia expected that Ukraine would collapse on its own in all of the East. Yet the fate of Ukraine was decided largely in the street and Ukraine prevailed everywhere except in the portion of Donbas territory where ethnic Russians were most concentrated. It seems that Putin learned nothing from 2014 and expected once again that Ukraine would collapse quickly once the Russian Army entered.

Since the Ukrainians are resisting, Putin is resorting to bombing cities with ever increasing civilian casualties. Some missiles miss their mark (as in Kharkiv where the university campus was hit instead of the adjacent Interior Ministry), others appear to target civilians directly (such as an entire apartment in Irpin). No matter what, the shelling is indiscriminate and Russia is engaging in systematic war crimes. Ukrainian authorities, and Western intelligence agencies, are bracing for a terrible escalation, with Grozny 1994 or London 1940 coming to mind.

Putin may be obsessed with “fascists”, “radical nationalists” and “neo-Nazis,” but what his Army is actually doing is attacking Eastern Ukraine, not particularly known historically as a hotbed of nationalism. With the exception of some military installations in Western Ukraine in the early going, all the bombing has been taking place in Kyiv and Eastern Ukraine where the majority of the population prefer to speak Russian. In other words, he is attacking the Russian-speakers that he claims belong to his Russian World (). The result has been the vaporization of whatever support and affinity Russia had in Eastern Ukraine.

There is no doubt that historical, cultural, linguistic, religious and family ties with Russia run deep in Eastern Ukraine. Any doubt that these ties translated into an actual loyalty to the Russian state dissipated in 2014: the Eastern Ukrainians declared themselves Ukrainian. Now that Russia is literally bombing their cities, the deep bonds are getting shattered.

Mikhail Dobkin, the governor of Kharkiv in 2014 whom Russia counted upon to organize an anti-Maidan resistance in Eastern Ukraine, is done: “Much of what I believed in collapsed overnight . . . just burned out,” “May this war be damned.” The man who sent vigilantes to beat up Maidan protesters in 2014 has broken with Russia. Onufriy, head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate, denounced the “unjust war” and called on his flock to pray for the Ukrainian army. He is facing an internal revolt from priests who want a total break from Moscow. Brave Russian-speaking protesters in occupied Kherson are telling soldiers to leave along with their “Russian World.” The Russian flags, that could be seen throughout Eastern Ukraine in early 2014, have vanished.

The imaginary Ukrainians applauding the Russian “operation” don’t exist. How could it be otherwise? Russia is attacking them, killing their children and wives, destroying their livelihood. Putin aims to extinguish the Ukrainian idea and he has achieved the total opposite: everybody is now Ukrainian, in the sense of identifying with an independent

Ukrainian state. The old debate over whether the Ukrainian nation was “incomplete”, or the province of as a “minority faith,” is over. There is no more East/West divide on the most fundamental issue: the existence of a Ukrainian state, where decisions are taken in Kyiv, not Moscow. An overwhelming majority stands behind Zelensky, the Eastern Ukrainian President.

If we assume the worst and the Russian army does take control of the large cities, at the cost of enormous civilian casualties, what next? We saw in World War II that every state has its collaborators. The Vichy types believed in a Nazi-led project of a New Europe. But what can potential Ukrainian collaborators believe in since Russia is waging war on the notion that the Ukrainian state is not real? How can the Russian military be expected to rule without social support? No matter what happens next, Russia has lost Ukraine, and Eastern Ukraine, forever.

#14

Charap, Samuel. 2022. “Samuel Charap Considers How Russia’s War in Ukraine Could Escalate.” *The Economist*, March 10. <https://econ.st/3i9Zgqx>

The political scientist says Vladimir Putin may now see himself as engaged in an existential struggle.

Russia’s attack on Ukraine—horrific as it is in itself—has raised concerns in many Western capitals of an even-worse outcome: escalation to a broader war with nato allies which could involve nuclear weapons. While such a war is far from inevitable, the possibility of the current conflict spiralling beyond the immediate theatre of hostilities is real. Understanding how that could happen is essential to minimising the risk that it does.

Escalation—an increase in the intensity or scope of conflict—can occur because of a deliberate decision to up the ante, or because of a step or accident that unintentionally produces the same effect. While the American strategist Herman Kahn famously described escalation in terms of deliberate ascent up rungs on a ladder, his metaphor failed to capture this latter dynamic, which is more akin to free-falling down a ravine.

The nature of Russia’s war in Ukraine and the reaction to it have opened up a wide range of escalatory pathways. Russia is conducting a large-scale military operation—involving cruise missiles, artillery, ballistic missiles, multiple-launch rocket systems and air strikes inter alia—in a country that borders four nato allies on land and shares the Black Sea littoral with two more. Moscow also has deployed a large force to Belarus, which abuts another two members of the alliance. All eastern allies are on edge, fearful that Moscow

might not plan to stop at Ukraine. America, among others, has deployed additional forces to several frontline states, including Poland and Romania, to deter any further adventurism. Meanwhile Russia's general staff will be watching vigilantly for any sign that nato, which it sees as the stronger party, is considering intervention in Ukraine.

In these circumstances, not only are accidents more plausible, but the associated escalation risk is also higher. For example, a Russian missileer's targeting error could send a rocket into nato territory. In peacetime, the scenario of that accident even occurring, let alone of its leading to all-out war, is far-fetched. But not today. Both Russia and nato are looking for any indication that the other side is preparing to fight. Current enhanced readiness and frayed nerves, along with the fog of war and the general first-mover's advantages in modern conflict create pressure for a military response to that errant missile. As the American economist and nuclear strategist Thomas Schelling put it: "In an emergency, the urge to pre-empt—to pre-empt the other's pre-emption, and so on ad infinitum—could become a dominant motive." Fortunately, Washington and Moscow have set up a so-called deconfliction mechanism (essentially a communication channel between the defence ministries of each side) that provides an additional failsafe to clear up misunderstandings and avoid accidents in the first place.

While such measures can help mitigate the chance of accidental escalation of the Russia-Ukraine war, they cannot prevent deliberate actions to broaden the conflict. Here it is important to view recent events from the Kremlin's vantage point, because as much as we find that perspective morally repugnant, it is hugely consequential. In the past few weeks, nato member states—and others, including Finland—have rushed to supply the Ukrainian armed forces with additional materiel to resist the Russian attack, which inevitably will result in more Russian casualties. Press reports indicate that America is helping the Ukrainian armed forces with real-time intelligence on Russian troop movements. Volunteers from many nato states, including veterans, are pouring into Ukraine. Meanwhile, not only the eu and America, but also a range of other countries from Singapore to Switzerland, have essentially declared economic warfare on Moscow by imposing draconian sanctions. These have sent the Russian economy into a tailspin. The sanctions have been framed exclusively as (deserved) punishment, without any hint of what Russia might do to get them lifted. Senior Western government officials have openly mused about undermining Mr Putin's regime, and some have even expressed a desire that he be "physically eliminated", as Luxembourg's foreign minister put it, in remarks he soon recanted. Meanwhile, thousands of Russians have bravely taken to the streets of Russian cities to protest against Mr Putin's war.

Russian military strategists have written similar scripts in their scenarios, which lay out how nato will go about destroying their own country. A proxy war on Russia's periphery, a significant American buildup in Eastern Europe, Western economic warfare and fomenting of domestic unrest are steps anticipated in what they describe as a nato operation to change the Russian regime. Even though all of his current woes result

from his own aggression, Mr Putin probably views recent developments through this lens. He may now see himself engaged in an existential struggle; Mr Putin and those around him conflate the security of their regime with the security of the country. And he has now placed both at risk.

Russian retaliation against nato and other American allies thus seems a matter of when, not if—not because Moscow wants a broader conflict, but because it believes itself to be engaged in one already. In fact both sides now may actually believe, as put by Robert Jervis, the international relations scholar, “that with the infliction of a bit more pain and the running of a bit more risk, the other side [will] back down”. Under such circumstances, he concluded that “even a purely rational decision maker could participate in a cycle of destruction and counter-destruction”. And a Russian president who is facing economic and political turmoil at home might well not be in a rational frame of mind.

Moscow could start with cyber-retaliation for the sanctions, since its formidable capabilities give it the opportunity to counter. The West’s financial sector may well be a plausible target, since the sanctions targeted Russia’s big banks. Mr Putin’s stakes in relations with the West and in the health of the global financial system—from which Russia has largely been ejected—are now essentially nonexistent. He may feel he has little to lose from doing damage to both. If a criminal ransomware group could shut down the largest pipeline operator on the east coast of the United States, one might reasonably assume that the Russian state could do much worse. If it does, Western government cyber-operators would likely be inclined to hit back, and from there things could spiral out of control quickly.

Ongoing nato member-state assistance to the Ukrainian armed forces or any future resistance movement represents another escalation pathway. If they succeed in taking over most or all of Ukraine, Russian forces may be tempted to interdict convoys crossing from nato states. The Soviet Union, it should be recalled, conducted numerous air and artillery strikes into Pakistani territory during its war in Afghanistan in order to sever mujahideen supply lines. That does not mean Western assistance to Ukraine should cease, but that it should be carried out in such a way that minimises risks. In the short term, that could include greater central co-ordination of allied assistance and the avoidance of publicity about the deliveries.

If a Russia-nato conflict does ensue from one of these pathways, it is possible that Moscow would resort to use of its non-strategic—also known as tactical or battlefield—nuclear arsenal. Russia’s military doctrine explicitly allows for nuclear use in a conventional war “when the very existence of the state is threatened”. A war confined to Ukraine is unlikely to reach that threshold, particularly because Russia has significant conventional firepower remaining. But a conflict with nato certainly could. With its conventional magazine depleted, the bulk of its combat-ready military engaged in Ukraine and the stranglehold of sanctions tightening, the Kremlin might resort to the nuclear option earlier than it would have before it attacked its neighbour.

During the cold war, escalation concerns were at the top of the agenda for scholars and policymakers alike. While that did not stop East or West from engaging in a ferocious, global confrontation, it did inject enough caution to prevent the cold war from growing hot. Although major-power competition has been declared “back” for several years, it took this war to return fears of escalation to the fore. As the conflict drags on into its third week, Western leaders now face the challenge of balancing the necessity to respond to Russian aggression with the need to avoid escalation that could produce even worse outcomes.

#15

Freedman, Lawrence. 2022. “The Bankrupt Colonialist: What Kind of Peace Could Russia Afford?” *Substack*, March 15. <https://bit.ly/3q5h8Hm>

The Russo-Ukrainian War has settled into a pattern of Russian failure to achieve core military objectives, combined with a readiness to inflict death and destruction on the Ukrainian people. While some attacks, such as those on the training base near Lviv over the weekend, have a discernible strategic purpose, most are indiscriminate and, other than vengefulness, their purpose is less clear. They have evidently not made it easier for Russian troops to enter cities. They might be intended to coerce Kyiv into making concessions in the negotiations but President Zelensky has not wavered on securing his country’s freedom and sovereignty. It may be that the damage is an end in itself, so that even a free Ukraine is incapacitated. Whatever the purpose, making causing hurt the military priority has left Russian war aims even more confused than they were three weeks ago.

This is particularly important when we consider the South where Russian forces have more presence and possibly still more military options if they can move out from their current positions. This is the area where they might expect to make lasting territorial gains as a result of the war. Yet it is here that their methods have made any gains less sustainable, both economically and politically.

The Economics of a Peace Deal

The relative optimism expressed by both Ukrainian and Russian negotiators about a possible peace deal seems surprising given the state of the war. This is the best account we have of the state of the negotiations (it also fits it with other accounts) from Kommersant based on an interview with Mikhail Podolyak, adviser to the head of the Ukrainian president’s office.

I want to focus on just one of the issues raised by this account. I dealt with a number of others in my previous post.

My interest is in the relevance of the anticipated economic impact of the war on both the belligerents to the negotiations. Up to now the main question has been about whether sanctions and the pressure on the Russian economy will force Putin to abandon his aggression. There is, however, also a post-war issue, which is the cost of reconstruction. Estimates of the impact of the war on Ukraine are already well over \$100 billion, and this for an economy that also faces already a contraction of at least 10% in its economy and probably more. A recent IMF assessment noted that in addition to the economically consequential damage to ports and airports:

“As of March 6, 202 schools, 34 hospitals, more than 1,500 residential houses including multi-apartment houses, tens of kilometers of roads, and countless objects of critical infrastructures in several Ukrainian cities have been fully or partially destroyed by Russian troops.”

And that was over a week ago. Understandably Kyiv wants compensation. This is raised in the *kommersant* story. According to Podolyak:

“compensatory mechanisms should be clearly spelled out: at the expense of what and from what budget all this will be restored. I’m sorry, these are the amounts in billions of dollars if we take a preliminary estimate.”

Yet reparations of this sort - a more than reasonable request - would not only amount to an admission of guilt for the damage caused (Russia ludicrously claims only military targets have been hit) but will be beyond the capacity of the Russian economy, in its enfeebled state, to support.

The costs of the Russian war effort are not as high as those inflicted on Ukraine, and its infrastructure has not been attacked. Nonetheless war expenditure - lost equipment, fuel, ammo etc. - is still well into the billions of dollars. Looking forward the most worrying issue for the Kremlin is the isolation of the country’s economy. Since the start of the war the Russian stock market has closed, interest rates have doubled, inflation has shot up, and the value of the rouble has plummeted. One recent estimate suggests that Russia faces a drop of from 7 to 15% in GDP in 2022. It risks defaulting on its debts.

Whatever the impact on Russia’s ability to prosecute the war it is hard to see how Russia is going to have much spare capacity to compensate Ukraine for the damage it has inflicted upon it, even in the unlikely event it was prepared to offer to do so as part of an agreement.

The Economics of No Peace

There is a further issue here even if there is no agreement. The cities and towns that have suffered the worst as a result of Putin’s war are those that were once claimed to be pro-Russian and so required “liberation” from Ukrainian “genocide”. A regular suggestion

with regard to Putin's more modest war aims (as opposed to occupying the whole country and installing a puppet government), to be achieved with or without an agreement with Ukraine, is that Russia will hold on to territory its forces have taken in the east and south. At the very least Moscow will want the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk in their entirety, and not just the previous separatist enclaves, to be annexed or given some independent status. This was, after all, the demand with which Russia entered the war.

This is considered by many analysts to be quite likely, and some go so far as to suggest it would be prudent, though painful, for Kyiv to accept it to get the war over. It is, however, by no means straightforward even from a Russian perspective.

First, if Ukraine has not otherwise been defeated and so "demilitarised" then this will be a frontier that will require defending for the indefinite future. Second, given what has happened over the past few weeks to the population of these territories, those remaining will be more hostile to Russia and will likely resist an imposed government. We are seeing signs of this already, leading to Russia returning to the old Soviet playbook by abducting local mayors and other leaders, as if this will make a difference to popular sentiment. Third, these territories will be economically wrecked and with no prospect of recovery so long as they are separated from Ukraine.

Before the war Russians were grumbling about the cost of subsidising the existing enclaves. The Ukrainians stopped paying the pensions of those in the enclaves some time ago. Their economies were in decline before 2014 and that process has since accelerated. They are now poorer than other parts of Ukraine and prone to criminality. So the cost of occupying even this limited part of the country will be considerable and that is before even thinking about the expense required to render those horribly damaged towns and cities at all habitable, with effective infrastructure and accommodation. The alternative is to leave them in their devastated state with the bulk of their population departed and with minimal productive economic activity.

Precedents

Consider what happened to Chechnya after Russia's war to prevent secession which also involved brutal attacks on civilian areas. In this case Putin found a Chechen ally, Ramzan Kadyrov, to govern the country, in his own ruthless way. Russia handed him just under \$8 billion between 2002 and 2012, which Kadyrov spent as he chose. The capital Grozny was rebuilt but the economy functioned thereafter at barely a fraction of pre-war levels. Despite efforts to make the economy more productive, in 2017 it was estimated that Chechnya required 80% of the government budget to be subsidised. Attempts to turn the situation around have not been helped by Chechnya's rampant corruption. So this relatively small territory is already costing Moscow close to \$3 billion a year. Crimea, annexed in 2014, may be costing a similar amount.

Or take Syria. Here Russian air power was also used in a brutal way, this time against rebel populations and in support of the Assad regime. That campaign succeeded in keeping Assad in power but Russia lacks the resources to reconstruct Syria and as Assad has little support from other Middle Eastern countries, other than the equally economically challenged Iran, nobody else is inclined to help. This is a recent World Bank assessment:

“Now moving into its eleventh year, the conflict in Syria has inflicted an almost unimaginable degree of devastation and loss on the Syrian people and their economy. Over 350,000 verifiable deaths have been directly attributed to the conflict so far, but the number of unaccounted lethal and non-lethal casualties is almost certainly far higher. More than half the country’s pre-conflict population (of almost 21 million) has been displaced—one of the largest displacements of people since World War II—and, partly as a result, by 2019, economic activity in Syria had shrunk by more than 50% compared to what it had been in 2010.”

It reported a study which found that losses caused by the conflict’s disruption of the economy exceeded those losses caused by physical destruction by a factor of 20.

Syria was a far cheaper war for Russia to wage, probably in the low billions of dollars, in fuel, ordnance, and personnel cost. Far less has gone into economic assistance and much of that has been returned to Russia as arms sales and gas and infrastructure contracts. Russian patronage kept a regime in power but left the country with little prospect of an early recovery from this humanitarian and economic catastrophe.

Implications

The strains on the Russian war effort are already evident, from the army’s hesitation about trying to fight their way into cities and the recruitment of mercenaries, to the reported appeal to China for help with supplies of military equipment and Putin’s fury with his intelligence agencies for misleading assessments and wasting roubles on Ukrainian agents who turned out to be useless. He is now having to choose between a range of poor outcomes, which the US suggests may include escalation to chemical use (which would be both militarily pointless and test further Western determination not to get directly involved).

We are now beyond the point where Putin has much ‘face’ to be saved, even if it were a priority for the other major powers to save it. In launching this disastrous war he has revealed himself to be not only a vicious bully but also a deluded fool.

War is rarely a good investment. Putin has acted for reasons of political and not economic opportunism. The prospects for any territory “liberated” by Russia is bleak. They will not prosper and will remain cut off from the international economy. To the extent that people stay they will have to be subsidised for all their needs while there will be little economic activity.

Because of the destruction the short-term prospects will be bleak even if these territories are fully returned to Ukraine. But over the longer-term they will be much better off because of the amount of economic assistance Ukraine will receive and its integration into the international economy.

This support will be even more vital should Putin be inclined to follow a scorched earth policy, attempting to demolish Ukraine’s defence and industrial capacity, diminishing it as a modern economic power for the foreseeable future. This would be not so much a strategy and more of a temper tantrum, punishing the Ukrainians for refusing to be colonised.

Yet as Germany and Japan showed after 1945 even shattered economies can be rebuilt to even greater levels of efficiency with sufficient resilience and resources. That is another reason why Western financial assistance and investment will be especially vital - Ukraine’s full recovery will serve as a testament to Putin’s failure.

As part of this, and with his standing boosted by his war leadership, President Zelensky will need to tackle some of the chronic problems of corruption that have plagued his country.

We have been caught out already by Putin’s capacity to act on the basis of his warped world-view, whatever objective calculations might suggest. Nonetheless, it is worth keeping this analysis in mind when considering prospective peace deals. The Russians may have underestimated the costs of conquest from the start but their approach to war has raised those costs considerably, especially in those parts of Ukraine close to Russia. If they are realistic about future costs (big if) then they might prefer to revert to the old formula from the 2015 Minsk agreement that would have given these areas more of a say in some new constitutional arrangement. On the other hand these areas will now, if allowed to express themselves, likely be as anti-Russian as the rest of Ukraine.

The other implication is that while economic sanctions have not yet given the West much leverage over Putin’s war strategy they do offer it leverage over his peace strategy. While he may have convinced himself that Russia – with Belarus – has a self-sufficient autarchic option this is another self-serving fantasy. The question of the future of sanctions and how they might be unwound is not one to be discussed separately from any peace talks. They are a vital part of the negotiations. As there can be no Western-led peace talks without

Ukraine, it should be made clear to Moscow that for now this is a card for Zelensky to play. The future of the Russian economy can then be in his hands. Should a moment come to start to ease sanctions, some leverage will be required to ensure that any agreement is being honoured. There could be a link to reparations for the terrible damage caused.

“Fanaticism”, according to George Santayana, “consists of redoubling your efforts when you have forgotten your aim.” As his original war plans failed Putin has insisted his forces follow a disruptive and cruel strategy that has put his original aims even more out of reach and Ukraine with a say over the future of the Russian economy.

#16

Greene, Samuel A. 2022. “Is Putin Coup-Proof? That Depends on How Much Hardship Russian Elites Will Stand.” *Washington Post*, March 10. <https://wapo.st/34C2C2A>

As Russia’s invasion of Ukraine grinds into its third week — with mounting civilian casualties, more than 2 million refugees fleeing and untold numbers of internally displaced people still in the country — there is a growing realization among Western policymakers that the quickest way to end this war is for President Vladimir Putin to leave office, and most likely not of his own volition.

While no Western government is openly pursuing a policy of regime change, all of them hope that sanctions will encourage Russians of all stripes to show Putin the door. Which invites the question: Is Putin coup-proof? Because if there were ever a set of circumstances that might induce a change of power in Moscow, we are seeing them now.

The reasons Putin went to war remain inscrutable. Whatever else it might achieve, this war will make Russia poorer and less secure, bring NATO closer to its borders — rather than pushing it away — and strengthen the resolve of governments throughout Moscow’s former empire to seek protection from rival powers, be they the United States, the European Union or China. But it is also radically reshaping the structure of power in Russia itself, in ways that could consolidate Putin’s authority for years to come, or possibly bring his rule crashing down.

Initiating this war, in short, seems to be part of a continuing effort on Putin’s part to reshape the structure of Russian politics, moving from a situation in which he serves the titans of Russian business, politics and bureaucracy to one in which those elites serve him. If he’s successful, instead of a large and fractious class of rich and powerful Russians who maintain at least some ties with Europe and the United States, Western leaders will be left to deal with Putin and his security men — a group over whom Washington, London and Brussels have considerably less leverage. This will be an unfettered and even more unpredictable Russia, and very likely a much more tyrannical one, as the state claims more and more control over the economy.

Putin has long chafed at being beholden to his country's elites. When he first came to power in 2000, his ability to rule, like Boris Yeltsin's before him, was severely limited. He had to deal with media moguls and oligarchs, politicians and officeholders — people who were not only self-interested but powerful enough to try to impose their own agendas on the Kremlin. To remedy that situation, Putin offered the Russian elite a bargain: They could be fabulously wealthy and entirely unaccountable to the public if they agreed not to use their leverage to prevent Putin from doing as he saw fit.

This bargain has held for nearly 20 years. Anyone who challenged it — such as the media mogul Vladimir Gusinsky, the oligarchs Boris Berezovsky and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, or former Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov — quickly found themselves either in jail or in exile. Others got access to federal, regional and municipal budgets, and to the resources of state-run corporations, from Gazprom to the railways to the mortgage agency, all of which were encouraged to direct funds in politically convenient directions.

While the elite never really owned the assets that generated their enormous wealth in Russia, they were allowed to park the proceeds overseas, where they could invest them, borrow against them and live in luxury. Meanwhile, Putin's role was to keep the money flowing, to manage conflicts between competing interests and to be the public face of a system that did not have the public interest at heart.

This arrangement served both sides well — until it didn't. In fact, for the past decade or so it has been hard to find anyone in the Russian elite who is particularly satisfied. As Russia's economy began to sputter in 2014, Putin found that there was no longer enough money in the system to keep his elite happy, and he began to prioritize those on whom his continued rule truly relied: the security services, and the oilmen, first and foremost. Everyone else was invited to be content with reduced status.

People grumbled, but no one challenged Putin. Political change would have created winners and losers, with considerable uncertainty about who would come out on top. Putin himself helped reinforced that sense of risk, dividing economic and political interests against one another, and making it difficult for coalitions to form. In response, the elite stashed increasing amounts of their wealth outside Russia, insulating themselves against the Kremlin's predations and resisting Putin's continued calls to repatriate their cash.

That era is now over. Putin's war — and the sanctions the West has imposed — deprive Putin's economic and political clients of their key source of semi-autonomy: access to the West as a safe place to protect their money, their families and their freedom. What happens next will decide the future of Russia.

If Putin — with help from Western sanctions — succeeds in depriving the men currently running the country's biggest industries, bureaucracies and regions from access to the West, and subjugates their interests to those of the security services, they would be transformed into expendable salarymen and managers. No longer the protected

constituents of a powerful political system, this class would lose the power to control its own future. If the sense of loss is sufficiently widespread, we should expect a response. No longer paralyzed by the fear of change, Russian elites could begin to see that without change, they will all lose out. Where he once guaranteed their prosperity, Putin would now be guaranteeing only their penury.

Putin clearly sees this threat. Ministers, high-level functionaries and the heads of major corporations are reportedly under orders not to resign, on pain of arrest. Even Elvira Nabiullina, the usually apolitical and technocratic central bank chief, was forced to make a public statement calling on her staff — and the economic elite at large — to “stop bickering about politics” and get back to work. But Putin’s problem is that this war upends the divide-and-rule strategy that had served him so well. It makes a loser out of each and every member of the Russian elite.

A coup in which elites back a new Russian leader would seek to restore the system that class enjoyed before Putin set out on the path to war. Returning Crimea to Ukraine would be out of the question, but Putin’s replacement, whoever that might be, would have a clear mandate to take whatever steps lead to the end of sanctions, restore economic ties with the West and use the state’s considerable control over the media and political system to explain to Russian citizens just how badly they’ve been led astray. Western observers should take care, however, not to confuse such a coup with a democratic revolution. It would continue, almost inevitably, to be a corrupt and unaccountable system, contemptuous of the Russian public and wedded to kleptocracy — but not to war.

#17

Kalyvas, Stathis. 2022. “How We Got Putin So Wrong: Taking Putin at his Word.” *Iainews*, March 1. <https://bit.ly/3HxufHd>

In a widely viewed lecture he gave back in 2015 (it has garnered over ten million views), John J. Mearsheimer, a respected professor of International Relations at the University of Chicago and perhaps the best-known exponent of the so-called Realist school of thought, explained the crisis that broke out in the Ukraine the year before. In essence, he blamed Russia’s aggression in 2014 on the US and NATO overreach, an unneeded provocation against Russia. It was only natural for Russia to react the way it did, and the West had only itself to blame for prioritizing what Mearsheimer describes as frivolous “21st century” ideas over his own solid “19th century” ones. As for the Ukrainians, tough luck. In the hard world of great power politics, you can’t possibly seek closer integration with the West if you happen to live on Russia’s doorstep. “The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must,” is how Thucydides famously had the Athenians say and what Mearsheimer echoes.

Mearsheimer's lecture is referenced these days by those who wish to blame the West for Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Yet, it also contains a remarkable passage. At two points, Mearsheimer observes that "if you really want to wreck Russia, what you should do is to encourage it to try to conquer Ukraine. Putin," Mearsheimer adds, "is much too smart to try to do that." In his telling, Russia could safely undermine Ukraine without having to invade it. Things turned even worse than this grim realist predicted. So why did this analysis prove so wrong, and how should we understand Putin instead?

A key insight from economics to international relations, and beyond is that "talk is cheap." Because what one says is potentially of little consequence, it should be heavily discounted. So, when on 12 July 2021 the Russian president Vladimir Putin published a student-like essay with the telling title "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", not many people took notice. After all, the pandemic dominated the news cycle and Ukraine seemed irrelevant. But Putin meant what he said.

Putin's essay is chilling both because of its form but also its content. The claim that Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians are one people belonging to the historical Russian nation is shocking. Yet Putin kept reiterating it in subsequent speeches. Most analysts ignored it, seeing it as cheap talk meant for internal consumption. Conventional wisdom was that Putin could win just by threatening to attack, not by attacking. So why did he decide to invade? The answer lies in two features that Realists tend to underestimate if not downright ignore: leaders' preferences and peoples' demands.

We now know that Putin really meant his July 2021 invective against the Ukrainians; he really believes that Ukraine does not exist as a nation; and he really seems to think that his own historical role is the restoration of the former Soviet Union. Put differently, his stance is no longer informed by the kind of strategic calculus implied by Mearsheimer. To understand his behavior we must turn to a strand of International Relations known as constructivism, which posits that leaders shape their goals and actions based not just on balance of power calculations, but also on their own understanding of who they are and what their goals should be. Leaders are not irrational, but rationality serves their goals. Seen from this perspective, Putin looked around and saw that the United States was distracted by China, that Germany had a new and untested government, and that Europe was dependent on Russian gas. The moment seemed propitious for his move, but his move was a function of his broader goals. His talk hadn't been cheap after all.

Realists do not only underestimate leaders' preferences; they also disdain domestic politics and agency. Watching Mearsheimer speak, one is struck by his disregard for the Ukrainian yearning for democracy and closer ties to the West, which he depicts as foreign-incited and ultimately irrelevant. He dismisses the 2014 Euromaidan revolution as a coup, a gratuitous disturbance to the work of great power politics. And yet, there are times when history is powered by peoples' desires rather than the logic of the international system.

I was reminded of all this quite recently, while Greece celebrated the bicentenary of its war of independence. Being Greek myself, I used the opportunity to catch-up on its history, including the historian Mark Mazower's new book. Although the uprising

was directed against Greece's Ottoman overlords, it was opposed by the Concert of Europe, the European alliance that sought to maintain stability in the wake of the Napoleonic upheaval. Klemens von Metternich, the Austrian Chancellor at the time, was Mearsheimer's forerunner, the great Realist of the day. In fact, he did everything he could to help suppress the uprising. He failed. The Greeks got their state and began their journey to join the West. Somehow, their desires both trumped and altered European balance of power considerations.

Ultimately then, this is the tale of how Vladimir Putin's idiosyncratic imperial revanchism met the Ukrainians' national aspirations to potentially upend the Realist logic of great power politics. Perhaps it is also the story of how an uncalled-for war of choice that was supposed to put an end to the liberal post-Cold War world, might well end up invigorating and expanding the very institutions it was meant to terminate.

Stathis Kalyvas is the Gladstone Professor of Government at the University of Oxford

#18

Remnick, David. 2022. "The Weakness of the Despot." *New Yorker*, March 11. <https://bit.ly/3w0w3GB> [Interview with Stephen Kotkin]

Stephen Kotkin is one of our most profound and prodigious scholars of Russian history. His masterwork is a biography of Joseph Stalin. So far he has published two volumes—"Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928," which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and "Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941." A third volume will take the story through the Second World War; Stalin's death, in 1953; and the totalitarian legacy that shaped the remainder of the Soviet experience. Taking advantage of long-forbidden archives in Moscow and beyond, Kotkin has written a biography of Stalin that surpasses those by Isaac Deutscher, Robert Conquest, Robert C. Tucker, and countless others.

Kotkin has a distinguished reputation in academic circles. He is a professor of history at Princeton University and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, at Stanford University. He has myriad sources in various realms of contemporary Russia: government, business, culture. Both principled and pragmatic, he is also more plugged in than any reporter or analyst I know. Ever since we met in Moscow, many years ago—Kotkin was doing research on the Stalinist industrial city of Magnitogorsk—I've found his guidance on everything from the structure of the Putin regime to its roots in Russian history to be invaluable.

Earlier this week, I spoke with Kotkin about Putin, the invasion of Ukraine, the American and European response, and what comes next, including the possibility of a palace coup in Moscow. Our conversation, which appears in the video above, has been edited for length and clarity.

We've been hearing voices both past and present saying that the reason for what has happened is, as George Kennan put it, the strategic blunder of the eastward expansion of NATO. The great-power realist-school historian John Mearsheimer insists that a great deal of the blame for what we're witnessing must go to the United States. I thought we'd begin with your analysis of that argument.

I have only the greatest respect for George Kennan. John Mearsheimer is a giant of a scholar. But I respectfully disagree. The problem with their argument is that it assumes that, had *nato* not expanded, Russia wouldn't be the same or very likely close to what it is today. What we have today in Russia is not some kind of surprise. It's not some kind of deviation from a historical pattern. Way before *nato* existed—in the nineteenth century—Russia looked like this: it had an autocrat. It had repression. It had militarism. It had suspicion of foreigners and the West. This is a Russia that we know, and it's not a Russia that arrived yesterday or in the nineteen-nineties. It's not a response to the actions of the West. There are internal processes in Russia that account for where we are today.

I would even go further. I would say that expansion has put us in a *nato* place to deal with this historical pattern in Russia that we're seeing again today. Where would we be now if Poland or the Baltic states were in *nato*? They would be in the same limbo, in the same world that Ukraine is in. In fact, Poland's membership in *nato* stiffened *nato*'s spine. Unlike some of the other *nato* countries, Poland has contested Russia many times over. In fact, you can argue that Russia broke its teeth twice on Poland: first in the nineteenth century, leading up to the twentieth century, and again at the end of the Soviet Union, with Solidarity. So George Kennan was an unbelievably important scholar and practitioner—the greatest Russia expert who ever lived—but I just don't think blaming the West is the right analysis for where we are.

When you talk about the internal dynamics of Russia, it brings to mind a piece that you wrote for Foreign Affairs, six years ago, which began, "For half a millennium, Russian foreign policy has been characterized by soaring ambitions that have exceeded the country's capabilities. Beginning with the reign of Ivan the Terrible in the sixteenth century, Russia managed to expand at an average rate of fifty square miles per day for hundreds of years, eventually covering one-sixth of the earth's landmass." You go on to describe three "fleeting moments" of Russian ascendancy: first during the reign of Peter the Great, then Alexander I's victory over Napoleon, and then, of course, Stalin's victory over Hitler. And then you say that, "these high-water marks aside, however, Russia has almost always been a relatively weak great power." I wonder if you could expand on that and talk about how the internal dynamics of Russia have led to the present moment under Putin.

We had this debate about Iraq. Was Iraq the way it was because of Saddam, or was Saddam the way he was because of Iraq? In other words, there's the personality, which can't be denied, but there are also structural factors that shape the personality. One of the arguments I made in my Stalin book was that being the dictator, being in charge of Russian power in the world in those circumstances and in that time period, made Stalin who he was and not the other way around.

Russia is a remarkable civilization: in the arts, music, literature, dance, film. In every sphere, it's a profound, remarkable place—a whole civilization, more than just a country. At the same time, Russia feels that it has a “special place” in the world, a special mission. It's Eastern Orthodox, not Western. And it wants to stand out as a great power. Its problem has always been not this sense of self or identity but the fact that its capabilities have never matched its aspirations. It's always in a struggle to live up to these aspirations, but it can't, because the West has always been more powerful.

Russia is a great power, but not great power, except for those few moments in history that you just enumerated. In trying to match the West or at least manage the differential between Russia and the West, they resort to coercion. They use a very heavy state-centric approach to try to beat the country forward and upwards in order, militarily and economically, to either match or compete with the West. And that works for a time, but very superficially. Russia has a spurt of economic growth, and it builds up its military, and then, of course, it hits a wall. It then has a long period of stagnation where the problem gets worse. The very attempt to solve the problem worsens the problem, and the gulf with the West widens. The West has the technology, the economic growth, and the stronger military.

The worst part of this dynamic in Russian history is the conflation of the Russian state with a personal ruler. Instead of getting the strong state that they want, to manage the gulf with the West and push and force Russia up to the highest level, they instead get a personalist regime. They get a dictatorship, which usually becomes a despotism. They've been in this bind for a while because they cannot relinquish that sense of exceptionalism, that aspiration to be the greatest power, but they cannot match that in reality. Eurasia is just much weaker than the Anglo-American model of power. Iran, Russia, and China, with very similar models, are all trying to catch the West, trying to manage the West and this differential in power.

What is Putinism? It's not the same as Stalinism. It's certainly not the same as Xi Jinping's China or the regime in Iran. What are its special characteristics, and why would those special characteristics lead it to want to invade Ukraine, which seems a singularly stupid, let alone brutal, act?

Yes, well, war usually is a miscalculation. It's based upon assumptions that don't pan out, things that you believe to be true or want to be true. Of course, this isn't the same regime as Stalin's or the tsar's, either. There's been tremendous change: urbanization, higher levels of education. The world outside has been transformed. And that's the shock. The shock is that so much has changed, and yet we're still seeing this pattern that they can't escape from.

You have an autocrat in power—or even now a despot—making decisions completely by himself. Does he get input from others? Perhaps. We don't know what the inside looks like. Does he pay attention? We don't know. Do they bring him information that he doesn't

want to hear? That seems unlikely. Does he think he knows better than everybody else? That seems highly likely. Does he believe his own propaganda or his own conspiratorial view of the world? That also seems likely. These are surmises. Very few people talk to Putin, either Russians on the inside or foreigners.

And so we think, but we don't know, that he is not getting the full gamut of information. He's getting what he wants to hear. In any case, he believes that he's superior and smarter. This is the problem of despotism. It's why despotism, or even just authoritarianism, is all-powerful and brittle at the same time. Despotism creates the circumstances of its own undermining. The information gets worse. The sycophants get greater in number. The corrective mechanisms become fewer. And the mistakes become much more consequential.

Putin believed, it seems, that Ukraine is not a real country, and that the Ukrainian people are not a real people, that they are one people with the Russians. He believed that the Ukrainian government was a pushover. He believed what he was told or wanted to believe about his own military, that it had been modernized to the point where it could organize not a military invasion but a lightning coup, to take Kyiv in a few days and either install a puppet government or force the current government and President to sign some paperwork.

But think about the Prague Spring, in August, 1968. Leonid Brezhnev sent in the tanks of the Warsaw Pact to halt "socialism with a human face," the communist reform movement of Alexander Dubček. Brezhnev kept telling Dubček, Stop it. Don't do that. You're ruining communism. And, if you don't stop, we will come in. Brezhnev comes in, and they take Dubček and the other leaders of Czechoslovakia back to Moscow. They don't a puppet regime to install. In the Kremlin, Brezhnev is asking Dubček, after having sent the tanks in and capturing him, what should they do now? It looks ridiculous, and it was ridiculous. But, of course, it was based upon miscalculations and misunderstandings. And so they sent Dubček back to Czechoslovakia, and he stayed in power [until April, 1969], after the tanks had come in to crush the Prague Spring.

One other example is what happened in Afghanistan, in 1979. The Soviet Union did not invade Afghanistan. It did a coup in Afghanistan, sending special forces into the capital of Kabul. It murdered the Afghan leadership and installed a puppet, Babrak Karmal, who had been hiding in exile in Czechoslovakia. It was a total success because Soviet special forces were really good. But, of course, they decided they might need some security in Afghanistan for the new regime. So they sent in all sorts of Army regiments to provide security and ended up with an insurgency and with a ten-year war that they lost.

With Ukraine, we have the assumption that it could be a successful version of Afghanistan, and it wasn't. It turned out that the Ukrainian people are brave; they are willing to resist and die for their country. Evidently, Putin didn't believe that. But it turned out that "the television President," Zelensky, who had a twenty-five-per-cent approval rating before the war—which was fully deserved, because he couldn't govern—now

it turns out that he has a ninety-one-per-cent approval rating. It turned out that he's got cojones. He's unbelievably brave. Moreover, having a TV-production company run a country is not a good idea in peacetime, but in wartime, when information war is one of your goals, it's a fabulous thing to have in place.

The biggest surprise for Putin, of course, was the West. All the nonsense about how the West is decadent, the West is over, the West is in decline, how it's a multipolar world and the rise of China, et cetera: all of that turned out to be bunk. The courage of the Ukrainian people and the bravery and smarts of the Ukrainian government, and its President, Zelensky, galvanized the West to remember who it was. And that shocked Putin! That's the miscalculation.

How do you define "the West"?

The West is a series of institutions and values. The West is not a geographical place. Russia is European, but not Western. Japan is Western, but not European. "Western" means rule of law, democracy, private property, open markets, respect for the individual, diversity, pluralism of opinion, and all the other freedoms that we enjoy, which we sometimes take for granted. We sometimes forget where they came from. But that's what the West is. And that West, which we expanded in the nineties, in my view properly, through the expansion of the European Union and nato, is revived now, and it has stood up to Vladimir Putin in a way that neither he nor Xi Jinping expected.

If you assumed that the West was just going to fold, because it was in decline and ran from Afghanistan; if you assumed that the Ukrainian people were not for real, were not a nation; if you assumed that Zelensky was just a TV actor, a comedian, a Russian-speaking Jew from Eastern Ukraine—if you assumed all of that, then maybe you thought you could take Kyiv in two days or four days. But those assumptions were wrong.

Let's discuss the nature of the Russian regime. Putin came in twenty-three years ago, and there were figures called the oligarchs from the Yeltsin years, eight or nine of them. Putin read them the riot act, saying, You can keep your riches, but stay out of politics. Those who kept their nose in politics, like Mikhail Khodorkovsky, were punished, sent to prison. Others left the country with as much of their fortune as possible. But we still talk about oligarchs. What is the nature of the regime and the people who are loyal to it? Who is important?

It's a military-police dictatorship. Those are the people who are in power. In addition, it has a brilliant coterie of people who run macroeconomics. The central bank, the finance ministry, are all run on the highest professional level. That's why Russia has this macroeconomic fortress, these foreign-currency reserves, the "rainy day" fund. It has reasonable inflation, a very balanced budget, very low state debt—twenty per cent of G.D.P., the lowest of any major economy. It had the best macroeconomic management.

So you have a military-police dictatorship in charge, with a macroeconomic team running your fiscal, military state. Those people are jockeying over who gets the upper hand. For

macroeconomic stability, for economic growth, you need decent relations with the West. But, for the military security part of the regime, which is the dominant part, the West is your enemy, the West is trying to undermine you, it's trying to overthrow your regime in some type of so-called color revolution. What happened is that the balance between those groups shifted more in favor of the military security people—let's call it the thuggish part of the regime. And, of course, that's where Putin himself comes from.

The oligarchs were never in power under Putin. He clipped their wings. They worked for him. If they didn't work for him, they could lose their money. He rearranged the deck chairs. He gave out the money. He allowed expropriation by his own oligarchs, people who grew up with him, who did judo with him, who summered with him. The people who were in the K.G.B. with him in Leningrad back in the day, or in post-Soviet St. Petersburg—those people became oligarchs and expropriated the property to live the high life. Some of the early Yeltsin-era people were either expropriated, fled, or were forced out. Putin built a regime in which private property, once again, was dependent on the ruler. Everybody knew this. If they didn't know, they learned the lesson the hard way.

Sadly, this encouraged people all up and down the regime to start stealing other people's businesses and property. It became a kind of free-for-all. If it was good enough for Putin and his cronies, it's good enough for me as the governor of Podunk province. The regime became more and more corrupt, less and less sophisticated, less and less trustworthy, less and less popular. It hollowed out. That's what happens with dictatorships.

But such people and such a regime, it seems to me, would care above all about wealth, about the high life, about power. Why would they care about Ukraine?

It's not clear that they do. We're talking, at most, about six people, and certainly one person as the decision-maker. This is the thing about authoritarian regimes: they're terrible at everything. They can't feed their people. They can't provide security for their people. They can't educate their people. But they only have to be good at one thing to survive. If they can deny political alternatives, if they can force all opposition into exile or prison, they can survive, no matter how incompetent or corrupt or terrible they are.

And yet, as corrupt as China is, they've lifted tens of millions of people out of extreme poverty. Education levels are rising. The Chinese leaders credit themselves with enormous achievements.

Who did that? Did the Chinese regime do that? Or Chinese society? Let's be careful not to allow the Chinese Communists to expropriate, as it were, the hard labor, the entrepreneurialism, the dynamism of millions and millions of people in that society. You know, in the Russian case, Navalny was arrested—

This is Alexey Navalny, Putin's most vivid political rival, who was poisoned by the F.S.B. and is now in prison.

Yes. He was imprisoned in the run-up to the invasion of Ukraine. In retrospect, it could well be that this was a preparation for the invasion, the way that Ahmad Shah Massoud, for example, was blown up in Northern Afghanistan [by Al Qaeda] right before the Twin Towers came down.

You have the denial of alternatives, the suppression of any opposition, arrest, exile, and then you can prosper as an élite, not with economic growth but just with theft. And, in Russia, wealth comes right up out of the ground! The problem for authoritarian regimes is not economic growth. The problem is how to pay the patronage for their élites, how to keep the élites loyal, especially the security services and the upper levels of the officer corps. If money just gushes out of the ground in the form of hydrocarbons or diamonds or other minerals, the oppressors can emancipate themselves from the oppressed. The oppressors can say, we don't need you. We don't need your taxes. We don't need you to vote. We don't rely on you for anything, because we have oil and gas, palladium and titanium. They can have zero economic growth and still live very high on the hog.

There's never a social contract in an authoritarian regime, whereby the people say, O.K., we'll take economic growth and a higher standard of living, and we'll give up our freedom to you. There is no contract. The regime doesn't provide the economic growth, and it doesn't say, Oh, you know, we're in violation of our promise. We promised economic growth in exchange for freedom, so we're going to resign now because we didn't fulfill the contract.

What accounts for the “popularity” of an authoritarian regime like Putin's?

They have stories to tell. And, as you know, stories are always more powerful than secret police. Yes, they have secret police and regular police, too, and, yes, they're serious people and they're terrible in what they're doing to those who are protesting the war, putting them in solitary confinement. This is a serious regime, not to be taken lightly. But they have stories. Stories about Russian greatness, about the revival of Russian greatness, about enemies at home and enemies abroad who are trying to hold Russia down. And they might be Jews or George Soros or the I.M.F. and nato. They might be all sorts of enemies that you just pull right off the shelf, like a book.

We think of censorship as suppression of information, but censorship is also the active promotion of certain kinds of stories that will resonate with the people. The aspiration to be a great power, the aspiration to carry out a special mission in the world, the fear and suspicion that outsiders are trying to get them or bring them down: those are stories that work in Russia. They're not for everybody. You know many Russians who don't buy into that and know better. But the Putin version is powerful, and they promote it every chance they get.

The West has decided, for obvious reasons, not to go to war with Russia, not to have a no-fly zone. Economic sanctions have proved more comprehensive and more powerful than maybe people had anticipated some weeks ago. But it seems that the people who these are aimed at most directly will be able to absorb them.

Sanctions are a weapon that you use when you don't want to fight a hot war because you're facing a nuclear power. It's one thing to bomb countries in the Middle East that don't have nuclear weapons; it's another thing to contemplate bombing Russia or China in the nuclear age. It's understandable that economic sanctions, including really powerful ones, are the tools that we reach for.

We are also, however, arming the Ukrainians to the teeth. And there's a great deal of stuff happening in the cyber realm that we don't know anything about because the people who are talking don't know, and the people who know are not talking. And there is quite a lot of armed conflict, thanks to the courage of the Ukrainians and the response and logistics of nato, with Washington, of course, leading them.

We don't know yet how the sanctions are going to work. The sanctions often inflict the greatest pain on the civilian population. Regimes can sometimes survive sanctions because they can just steal more internally. If you expropriate somebody's bank account in London or Frankfurt or New York, well, there's a source where that came from originally, and they can go back inside Russia and tap that source again, unfortunately. Putin doesn't have money abroad that we can just sanction or expropriate. Putin's money is the entire Russian economy. He doesn't need to have a separate bank account, and he certainly wouldn't keep it vulnerable in some Western country.

The biggest and most important sanctions are always about technology transfer. It's a matter of starving them of high tech. If, over time, through the Commerce Department, you deny them American-made software, equipment, and products, which affects just about every important technology in the world, and you have a target and an enforceable mechanism for doing that, you can hurt this regime and create a technology desert.

In the meantime, though, we saw what Russian forces did to Grozny in 1999-2000; we saw what they did to Aleppo. For Russia, if precision doesn't work, they will decimate cities. That is what we're seeing now in Kharkiv and in other parts of Ukraine. And it's only just begun, potentially.

Russia has a lot of weapons that they haven't used yet, but there are a couple of factors here. First of all, Ukraine is winning this war only on Twitter, not on the battlefield. They're not winning this war. Russia is advancing very well in the south, which is an extremely valuable place because of the Black Sea littoral and the ports. They are advancing in the east. If the southern and eastern advances meet up, they will encircle and cut off the main forces of the Ukrainian Army. What's failed so far is the Russian attempt to take Kyiv in a lightning advance. Otherwise, their war is unfolding well. It's only a couple of weeks in; wars last much longer.

But here are some of the considerations: after three or four weeks of war, you need a strategic pause. You have to refit your armor, resupply your ammo and fuel depots, fix your planes. You have to bring in reserves. There's always a planned pause after about three to four weeks.

If Kyiv can hold out through that pause, then potentially it could hold out for longer than that, because it can be resupplied while the Russians are being resupplied during their pause. Moreover, the largest and most important consideration is that Russia cannot successfully occupy Ukraine. They do not have the scale of forces. They do not have the number of administrators they'd need or the cooperation of the population. They don't even have a Quisling yet.

Think about all those Ukrainians who would continue to resist. The Nazis came into Kyiv, in 1940. They grabbed all the luxury hotels, but days later those hotels started to blow up. They were booby-trapped. If you're an administrator or a military officer in occupied Ukraine and you order a cup of tea, are you going to drink that cup of tea? Do you want to turn the ignition on in your car? Are you going to turn the light switch on in your office? All it takes is a handful of assassinations to unsettle the whole occupation.

Let's take the story back to Moscow. We know the story of how Tsar Paul I was assassinated by people around him. Khrushchev was overthrown and replaced, eventually, by Brezhnev. Under Putin, is there any possibility of a palace coup?

There is always a possibility of a palace coup. There are a couple of issues here. One is that [the West is] working overtime to entice a defection. We want a high-level security official or a military officer to get on a plane and fly to Helsinki or Brussels or Warsaw and hold a press conference and say, "I'm General So-and-So and I worked in the Putin regime and I oppose this war and I oppose this regime. And here's what the inside of that regime looks like."

At the same time, Putin is working overtime to prevent any such defection while our intelligence services are working overtime to entice just such a defection—not of cultural figures, not former politicians but current security and military officials inside the regime. This happened under Stalin, when General Genrikh Lyushkov of the secret police defected to the Japanese, in 1938, with Stalin's military and security plans and a sense of the regime. He denounced him at a press conference in Tokyo.

So now we're watching Moscow. What are the dynamics there with the regime? You have to remember that these regimes practice something called "negative selection." You're going to promote people to be editors, and you're going to hire writers, because they're talented; you're not afraid if they're geniuses. But, in an authoritarian regime, that's not what they do. They hire people who are a little bit, as they say in Russian, tupoi, not very bright. They hire them precisely because they won't be too competent, too clever, to organize a coup against them. Putin surrounds himself with people who are maybe not the sharpest tools in the drawer on purpose.

That does two things. It enables him to feel more secure, through all his paranoia, that they're not clever enough to take him down. But it also diminishes the power of the Russian state because you have a construction foreman who's the defense minister [Sergei Shoigu], and he was feeding Putin all sorts of nonsense about what they were going to do in Ukraine. Negative selection does protect the leader, but it also undermines his regime.

But, again, we have no idea what's going on inside. We hear chatter. There's a lot of amazing intelligence that we're collecting, which is scaring the Chinese, making them worry: Do we have that level of penetration of their élites as well? But the chatter is by people who don't have a lot of face time with Putin, talking about how he might be crazy. Always, when you miscalculate, when your assumptions are bad, people think you're crazy. Putin pretends to be crazy in order to scare us and to gain leverage.

Do you think that's the case with this nuclear threat?

I think there's no doubt that this is what he's trying to do. The problem is, we can't assume it's a bluff. We can't assume it's a pose of being crazy, because he has the capability; he can push the button.

Steve, Sun Tzu, the Chinese theorist of war, wrote that you must always build your opponent a "golden bridge" so that he can find a way to retreat. Can the United States and nato help build a way for Russia to end this horrific and murderous invasion before it grows even worse?

You hit the nail on the head. That's a brilliant quote. We have some options here. One option is he shatters Ukraine: if I can't have it, nobody can have it, and he does to Ukraine what he did to Grozny or Syria. That would be an unbelievable, tragic outcome. That's the pathway we're on now.

Even if the Ukrainians succeed in their insurgency, in their resistance, there will be countless deaths and destruction. We need a way to avoid that kind of outcome. That would mean catalyzing a process to engage Putin in discussion with, say, the President of Finland, whom he respects and knows well, or the Israeli Prime Minister, who has been in contact with him; less probably, with the Chinese leadership, with Xi Jinping. Someone to engage him in some type of process where he doesn't have maximalist demands and it stalls for time, for things to happen on the ground, that rearrange the picture of what he can do.

It's not as if we're not trying. The Finns know Russia better than any country in the world. Israel is another good option, potentially, depending on how skillful Naftali Bennett proves to be. And then China, the long shot, where they're paying a heavy price and their élites below Xi Jinping understand that. There's now quite a lot of worry inside the Chinese élites, but Xi Jinping is in charge and has a personal relationship with Putin. Xi has thrown in his lot with Putin. But how long that goes on depends upon whether the Europeans begin to punish the Chinese. The Europeans are their biggest trading partner.

The Chinese are watching this very closely. They're watching (a) our intelligence penetration, (b) the mistakes of a despotism, and (c) the costs that you have to pay as the U.S. and European private companies cancel Russia up and down. Xi Jinping, who is heading for an unprecedented third term in the fall, needed this like a hole in the head. But now he owns it.

Finally, there's another card that we've been trying to play: the Ukrainian resistance on the ground and our resupply of the Ukrainians in terms of arms and the sanctions. All of that could help change the calculus. Somehow, we have to keep at it with all the tools that we have—pressure but also diplomacy.

Finally, you've given credit to the Biden Administration for reading out its intelligence about the coming invasion, for sanctions, and for a kind of mature response to what's happening. What have they gotten wrong?

They've done much better than we anticipated based upon what we saw in Afghanistan and the botched run-up on the deal to sell nuclear submarines to the Australians. They've learned from their mistakes. That's the thing about the United States. We have corrective mechanisms. We can learn from our mistakes. We have a political system that punishes mistakes. We have strong institutions. We have a powerful society, a powerful and free media. Administrations that perform badly can learn and get better, which is not the case in Russia or in China. It's an advantage that we can't forget.

The problem now is not that the Biden Administration made mistakes; it's that it's hard to figure out how to de-escalate, how to get out of the spiral of mutual maximalism. We keep raising the stakes with more and more sanctions and cancellations. There is pressure on our side to “do something” because the Ukrainians are dying every day while we are sitting on the sidelines, militarily, in some ways. (Although, as I said, we're supplying them with arms, and we're doing a lot in cyber.) The pressure is on to be maximalist on our side, but, the more you corner them, the more there's nothing to lose for Putin, the more he can raise the stakes, unfortunately. He has many tools that he hasn't used that can hurt us. We need a de-escalation from the maximalist spiral, and we need a little bit of luck and good fortune, perhaps in Moscow, perhaps in Helsinki or Jerusalem, perhaps in Beijing, but certainly in Kyiv.

#19

Kudelia, Serhiy. 2022. “Ukraine's Occupied Towns Are Facing a Tough Choice: Collaborate or Resist?” *openDemocracy*, March 7. <https://bit.ly/3HUGSwc>

With the capture of the first towns by Russian troops, local authorities across Ukraine suddenly face a choice: between collaboration and resistance.

Across southern and eastern Ukraine, local government officials are up against a classic collaboration dilemma – whether to continue their work and thus implicitly recognise Russian occupation or withdraw and leave these cities on the verge of collapse.

The logic behind each choice may seem equally compelling. The mayor of Kupyansk, a town in the Kharkiv region in eastern Ukraine, reported on social media that he met with Russian military representatives and agreed to continue his work in the interests of the local community. By contrast, the mayor of Berdyansk, a town in Zaporizka region in southern Ukraine, explained in an appeal that he had left the city council building and would try to govern the city outside of his main office. He refused to accept the Russian military presence. Other mayors, by and large, have refused invitations to collaborate, but continued performing their duties.

This raises the question about the proper response of the local authorities to the Russian occupation. By forcibly taking control of towns, the Russian military also assumes responsibility for the provision of basic services and the proper functioning of municipal infrastructure. It can only ensure effective governance, however, through reliance on local officials who are intimately familiar with their towns and their needs.

Types of collaboration

In an article on the Vichy regime in France during World War II, renowned social scientist Stanley Hoffman distinguished between two types of collaboration exhibited by local officials.

Voluntary collaboration relied on the initiative of many French citizens, who were preparing for a long-term German occupation and sought to find a place for themselves in the new governing order. Involuntary collaboration, on the other hand, was based on the recognition that the only way to continue serving the interests of the French people was to acquiesce to German domination.

Both types were based on the logic of collaboration d'état, or state collaboration, which viewed working with German occupation as the most effective strategy to prevent the eventual collapse of the state. Finally, Hoffman also pointed to the collaborationism of individuals outside formal power structures – “misfits” or political exiles – who sought to use their ties to the Nazi party in order to gain positions of power.

Collaboration in 2014

The question of local collaboration with Russian occupation is not new.

Since the war in Donbas started in 2014, the region exhibited all three types of collaboration at the early stage of the Russian-backed separatist insurrection.

The most common type was involuntary acquiescence to the demands of Russian agents and local separatist leaders. The mayor of the city of Lyman, for example, often spoke in favour of Ukraine's unity, but ultimately had to assist with holding a separatist referendum in the face of coercive pressure from separatist forces. The mayor of Druzhkivka, also in Donbas, initially pledged his support for a united Ukraine, but in his public appearances often repeated separatist demands. He also assisted with gathering funds from local businessmen to support men manning checkpoints and local self-defence militias, and ensured that the local newspaper was published bearing separatist symbols.

Voluntary collaboration, on the other hand, was frequently motivated by sympathy with the pro-Russian cause. In the town of Lysychansk, for example, a city council deputy from the Communist Party of Ukraine agreed to serve as an interim city mayor while the town was under the control of various separatist military units. She maintained close ties to the city's militant commander Oleksiy Mozgovoi and ensured the adoption of council resolutions pushed by the separatists. In Kostiantynivka, a deputy mayor openly sympathetic to the pro-Russian cause similarly helped with organising a referendum in support of joining the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" while the mayor and other officials fled.

Finally, in a number of towns political outsiders took power with the backing of Russian agents in 2014. The self-proclaimed military governor of Kramatorsk was a former physical education teacher in a local school. The "people's mayor" of Mariupol was an owner of the boxing club with alleged ties to the criminal underworld. A local businessman replaced the mayor of Sloviansk after the town was captured by Russian military leader Igor Girkin's unit.

The new war

In contrast to 2014, the number of local officials who have openly sided with Russian occupying forces has so far remained limited to the heads of two towns and several villages.

The most clear-cut case of voluntary collaboration relates to the Stanytsia Luhanska administration, where Albert Zinchenko who has governed the town since 2009. Several days after the seizure of the eastern Ukrainian town by Russian forces last week, Zinchenko appeared at a press conference next to Leonid Pasechnik, head of the self-proclaimed "Luhansk People's Republic". The latter promised to make no changes in the town's municipal government. In another case of collaboration, the mayor of Kupiansk, Gennady Matsegora, who is a member of the pro-Russian political party Opposition Platform – For Life, allegedly offered Russian military commanders material assistance in exchange for maintaining order in the town. He was later detained on treason charges by the Ukrainian security services.

In some cases, defiant local authorities have been backed up by local residents. On 3 March, the mayor of Svatove, a city in Luhansk region, held talks with a Russian military representative in the presence of the local community, who insisted on appointing a local “military commander”. Speaking in Ukrainian, the mayor asserted that the town had sufficient food supplies and that law enforcement was functioning.

“Please leave the territory of the town and then everything will be quiet,” she told the Russian military. Faced with the angry shouts of a crowd waving Ukrainian flags, several armed men jumped into their cars and drove away.

Awkward co-existence

The most common response, however, has been some form of awkward co-existence between local Ukrainian authorities and Russian occupying forces.

In Melitopol, the first major settlement in southern Ukraine occupied by Russian troops, mayor Ivan Fedorov has continued running the city of 150,000 residents. Despite his open support for pro-Ukrainian rallies, Fedorov said the Russian military has not approached him directly. When Current Time, a media outlet, asked him about “alternative power structures” created by Russian forces, he responded that he remained fully in charge. “Our team continues administering the city and solving the problems of town residents. They are not participating in running the town’s communal enterprises and other services,” Fedorov said.

On 2 March, Russian forces appear to have occupied another town, Starobilsk in Luhansk oblast. However, its mayor Yana Litvinova publicly asserted her loyalty to Ukraine and continued performing her duties despite threats. In a Facebook post on 5 March, Litvinova explained that it felt surreal for her to continue taking care of the city despite the presence of the Russian military. “We are making sure that all social payments are made to locals as they should be. I am not hiding anywhere and if the military wants to meet, we will have a meeting with the entire community,” she said.

Even in Kherson, the first regional centre seized by Russian forces, the local authorities have remained in place. The city’s mayor Ihor Kolyhaev confirmed on his Facebook page on 2 March that the Russian military visited the city council to talk to him. He claimed to have made no deals with them: “I promised them nothing. I am only interested in the normal functioning of the city. I asked them not to shoot at city residents.” Following a rally on 5 March in Kherson in support of Ukraine, the mayor praised local residents for refusing to take any humanitarian assistance from Russian forces: “I am proud of you, Kherson! Kherson is the hero city. Kherson is Ukraine.”

Thus while Ukrainian municipal authorities in occupied towns continue their operations, their public expressions of defiance indicate they have not crossed the collaboration threshold. This categorisation, however, would change the moment any of the mayors start accepting direct orders from the occupying Russian forces or agree to replace Ukrainian state symbols with those of the occupier.

The nature of Ukraine's municipal response to the Russian occupation so far, and its comparison to the 2014 insurrection in Donbas, points to five key conclusions.

First, the Russian military invasion lacks a well-planned political and administrative dimension. Russian forces may deploy their armoured vehicles around central squares and station soldiers around the city, but there is no one to back them on the administrative level. None of the key local officials has yet embraced Russian narratives about the goals of the invasion. No local officials, with very few exceptions, have been willing to recognise Russia's sovereign control over towns.

Second, in contrast to 2014, the Russian military has largely avoided removing symbols of Ukrainian state power in the occupied towns. Ukrainian flags still fly over local government buildings. The tactical calculation behind this approach may be to signal that Russians are, in fact, not planning to annex these towns and make them a permanent part of the Russian state. This suggests that Putin's overall political goal may indeed be their merger into a new political quasi-Ukrainian territory under Russian military tutelage. However, neither the contours of this new territory, nor its ideological basis, have been articulated yet.

Third, in order to sustain their military occupation of Ukrainian towns, Russians need to ensure that Ukrainians remain responsible for their day-to-day operation. This means that Russian forces would either have to tolerate an open expression of defiance on the part of the mayors or find lower-level bureaucrats who could take over the reins of municipal governance. By ignoring mayoral opposition, however, they may face mounting public mobilisation against occupation, backed by local authorities, which has been already visible in Kherson, Melitopol, Berdyansk and other towns.

These public expressions of opposition to the Russian military presence undermines the very premise of the invasion. By contrast, cooptation of loyalists from within local governing structures could backfire if their authority is challenged by lower-level officials and the public, sparking more disobedience.

Fourth, the legitimacy of local mayors puts them at the centre of symbolic non-violent resistance to Russian occupying forces. They can credibly speak on behalf of the entire community, articulate demands and serve as focal points for coordination of town residents. They also symbolise continuity in Ukraine's sovereign rule over these localities, and hence the persistence of the Ukrainian state there, despite the Russian military presence. The tenuous nature of Russian claims to have control over Ukrainian cities is exposed with every new act of defiance of city officials.

Finally, if the Russian military occupation continues, it may at some point require local authorities to make a choice between siding with Russia's political goals or resigning. Then the dilemma of involuntary collaboration that Stanley Hoffman described in the case of Vichy France would become particularly clear.

Some local rulers could justify their continued work under Russian control by referencing the good of the community. Some may see such involuntary collaboration as a lesser evil when compared to the breakdown in communal services and provision of social payments that, should they resign, could affect their most vulnerable residents.

However, as Hoffman stresses, any type of collaboration would only "increase the immediate, certain and tangible evils" of the occupying regime, such as violence and repression. The end result would involve an end to any material benefits of collaboration and possible reputational damage to local officials.

This is what Russian occupying forces may be counting on as they silently tolerate the defiance of local mayors today. And this is why local Ukrainian authorities will be particularly sensitive about whether their continued cooperation will stop benefiting local residents – and start reinforcing the Russian occupation.

#20

Popova, Maria and Oxana Shevel. 2022. "Putin Cannot Erase Ukraine." *Foreign Affairs*, February 17. <https://fam.ag/3oVIZug>

Russian President Vladimir Putin has made no secret of how he regards Ukraine, the nation he is threatening to invade. At the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania, Putin told U.S. President George W. Bush that the former Soviet state "is not even a country." The Russian president believes the Ukrainians and the Russians are one people. It follows that Ukrainians cannot reject being part of Russia and any "anti-Russian" sentiment in Ukraine must be the result of Western meddling rather than a reflection of the preferences of Ukrainians. Putin has used this argument to characterize peaceful political mobilization in Ukraine as foreign-orchestrated coups. He also dismisses polls showing that Ukrainians now favor European Union and NATO accession over membership in Russian-led political and economic organizations.

Putin's refusal to see Ukraine as an independent country undermines rather than advances his professed foreign policy objectives. Had he taken Ukrainian domestic politics seriously, the current crisis could have been avoided. Even after pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich was driven out by a popular uprising in 2014,

Putin could have maintained Russia's influence and steered Ukraine away from NATO—if only he had allowed the democratic process in his western neighbor to play out without interference. After 30 years of independence, the genie of Ukrainian national identity and statehood cannot be put back into the bottle, no matter how hard Putin tries.

But the Kremlin is not alone in paying too little attention to the realities of Ukraine's domestic politics. If Washington and its European allies hope to unwind the current standoff and avoid a similar one in the future, they will also need a better grasp of what ordinary Ukrainians want.

A Problem of Putin's Making

After 1991, when Ukraine declared its independence from the Soviet Union, regional divisions generated a pro-Russian electorate in the eastern and southern parts of the country. Since then, pro-Russian and pro-Western politicians have alternated in power. In 2010, the pro-Russian candidate, Yanukovich, defeated the pro-Western candidate in a fair election, after losing to the same candidate five years prior.

Three years later, under pressure from Russia, Yanukovich refused to sign a trade agreement with the EU, prodding Ukrainians who favored stronger European ties to take to the streets. After clashes between government forces and protesters left dozens dead in Kyiv's Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in February 2014, the parliament booted Yanukovich from office and pro-European politicians took over. Pro-Russian Ukrainian elites, however, quickly began bargaining with the new government: they were well positioned to maintain influence over national policies because the Russia-friendly electorates in the south and east meant their priorities could not be ignored. As in 2010, another pro-Russian political competitor would have stood a good chance of returning to power in the next electoral cycle.

But Putin didn't wait for the democratic process to play out. Instead, he annexed Crimea and began sponsoring an insurgency in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Rather than fueling Ukraine's divisions, [Russian aggression](#) increased support not just for Ukraine's continued independence but also for a pro-European orientation. The Russian invasion fundamentally altered Ukraine's electoral geography by cutting off some 12 percent of the mostly pro-Russian voters in Crimea and occupied Donbas from voting in Ukraine's elections. Russian military involvement undermined Russia's standing in Ukraine: before 2014, less than 25 percent of the Ukrainian population favored NATO membership; in December 2021, 58 percent were in favor.

Putin's aggressive policies also reduced Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's willingness to compromise with Russia, despite the fact that he was considered the more pro-Russian centrist candidate in the 2019 elections. He sought to diminish Russia's influence over Ukraine when he removed oligarch-owned pro-Russian TV channels from the airwaves, something that his more nationalist predecessor, Petro Poroshenko, had stopped short of doing. Russia's determination to curtail Ukraine's sovereignty also

pushed Zelensky to harden his position in the negotiations intended to end the war in the Donbas: Russia insists on constitutionally-guaranteed “special status” for these regions within Ukraine, which would give [Russian proxy](#) leadership a de facto veto over Ukraine’s domestic and foreign policies. During the presidential campaign, Zelensky had said he hoped to reach an agreement with Putin. But once Zelensky was in office, Putin’s intransigence pushed him to become, in the words of Russia’s top negotiator over Donbas, “no different” from the previous “nationalist” president, Petro Poroshenko.

Russia’s reluctance to recognize Ukrainian national identity has fueled fears in the former Soviet state of being absorbed into Russia’s orbit. Ukrainian citizens know that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church’s split from Moscow—which began in 2018 and provoked the [Kremlin’s ire](#)—could be undone. Language policy could shift dramatically toward de-emphasizing Ukrainian and strengthening Russian. Russia could pressure Ukraine to change how it teaches schoolchildren about the Holodomor, the manmade famine engineered by the Soviet government of Joseph Stalin that cost millions of Ukrainians their lives. Russian overlords could stymie the Ukrainian president’s efforts to expose oligarchic networks. Putin could also try to curb efforts, aided by European allies, to create an independent judiciary in Ukraine, given his concerns that the establishment of rule of law in Russia’s neighbor might resonate in Russia.

Further Russian attempts to squeeze Ukraine will generate more anti-Russian sentiment in the country. But instead of wrestling with its own miscalculations and misperceptions about Ukraine, Russia continues to either blame the West or write off attitudes in Ukraine. If Russia invades, it will face widespread and sustained resistance not only from the [Ukrainian army](#), outgunned though it may be against Russian military might, but from ordinary people in all regions of the country. In a recent poll, 50 percent of Ukrainians said they were willing to resist Russian aggression; 33 percent said they would do so with arms and another 22 percent by nonmilitary means.

As long as the West condemns and sanctions Russian aggression and rejects Russia’s claims over Ukraine, the current leadership in Kyiv stands to gain support as people rally around the government in the face of Moscow’s saber-rattling. And if the Zelensky government were to crumble in the face of protests following military defeat, its replacement in all likelihood would be even more adamant about safeguarding Ukrainian independence. A Russian puppet government, on the other hand, would lack any modicum of legitimacy and could rule only with the full force of Russian guns behind it, requiring Russia’s complete and sustained occupation of Ukraine.

Putin Doesn’t Speak for All Russians

Russia is not doomed to be a wannabe imperialist power, seeking to dominate its neighbors. It is a mistake to equate Putin’s views on Ukraine and Russia’s relations with the West with the stable preferences of Russian society. To be sure, for now, Putin’s authoritarian rule has destroyed parliamentary opposition and pushed civil society

opposition into exile or prison, giving Putin leeway to act unilaterally. Even in this highly repressive climate, however, thousands of Russians, including former military officials, have called on Putin not to attack Ukraine. The Russian president should listen to them: paradoxically, the best way to bring Ukraine closer to Russia would be to let Ukraine go.

The Ukrainian leadership, meanwhile, should be careful to distinguish between guarding its independence from an imminent military threat and foreclosing any possibility of forging a cooperative future relationship with Russia. The democratic rights of Ukrainian citizens who prefer a closer relationship with Russia should be scrupulously guaranteed. Ukraine's strength lies in being a pluralist alternative to Russian authoritarianism. By strengthening and deepening democracy, Ukraine would deny Putin his objective to turn the former Soviet state into a "little Russia."

As diplomatic efforts to defuse tensions proceed, Ukraine and its allies should be trying to shift the focus away from debates over NATO expansion. Instead, diplomacy should focus on helping Russia understand that its long-term interests are better served by forging a cooperative relationship with a Europe-oriented, independent Ukraine. Hopefully, it will not require a war for the Kremlin to learn that although it can influence Ukraine, it cannot control it or reverse time through force.

#21

Tokarev, Olga. 2022. "Ukraine Won't Surrender (Apologies to Certain Europeans)." *CEPA*, March 16. <https://bit.ly/36qNupj>

There is one big difference between how Ukrainians and many well-wishing Westerners expect Russia's war to end.

Some in the West hope for an end to hostilities, whatever the terms. Ukrainians know that only victory will bring long-lasting peace.

To those analysts abroad, notably in those European Union countries with a long-standing tolerance of Vladimir Putin's Russia, such as Germany and Italy, who are calling on Ukraine to surrender because they can't stand watching the horrors of war, here's the message on behalf of Ukrainians: that's not going to happen.

Russia wants to destroy Ukraine, in one way or another. Putin and his acolytes have made this crystal clear. What Western governments should do instead is to support Ukraine more — impose new sanctions on Russia, including on its oil and gas, stop the use of Russian ports, and disconnect all Russian banks from SWIFT. At the same time, send more weapons; first of all, aircraft and air defense systems Ukraine badly needs to protect its civilians, including pregnant women and children, from Russian bombs raining on their heads.

Ukrainians cannot surrender, because that would mean the end of their nationhood. In particular, they won't do it to make anyone else happy. Russia's invasion marked a fundamental change in the global security order. The post-Cold war world now no longer exists, despite desperate attempts by some to pretend a return to a sort of business as usual is possible.

Ukrainians cannot surrender because they know all too well what happened after Russia occupied territories in Donbas after its 2014 invasion, when pro-Ukraine citizens were executed, held in secret prisons, tortured, and raped. This will happen again on a huge scale, if Russia is allowed to take more land. It is already happening in Southern Ukraine, where Russian occupiers temporarily took control: in Berdyansk, Melitopol, and Kherson, where local mayors, journalists, and activists who opposed the Russian invasion were abducted in recent days. And on March 15, when Ukrainian authorities said Russian forces had taken hostage around 400 patients and medical staff in Mariupol.

Ukrainians have learned the lessons of history. In the 20th century, more than 3 million Ukrainians were starved to death by Stalin in an artificial famine, known as Holodomor. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, including the best and brightest — scientists, writers, poets, artists — were executed or sent to gulags in the USSR. In its new war on Ukraine, Russia is bombing food warehouses and bread factories, bringing back chilling memories of the Holodomor. It is going after prominent Ukrainians, and the reports of its plans to create camps for Ukrainians after the occupation, voiced before the war, do not sound detached from reality anymore.

Ukrainians fight so fiercely because they know that this war concerns their very existence. In a recent poll, 56% of respondents said they believed Russia wanted to fully destroy the Ukrainian people — and this opinion is prevalent in every region of the country.

Ukrainians value the freedom and independence they obtained 30 years ago, after long centuries of struggle. Democratic values that might sound shallow to those in the West, who take them for granted and are used to decades of peace, are genuinely cherished. The West should not feel it's secure under the NATO umbrella, if Russia is allowed to continue slaughtering Ukrainians with impunity. On Russian state TV, propagandists openly state that Ukraine is only an intermediate step on a path to ensuring “the strategic security of the Russian Federation.”

This war is not just between Russia and Ukraine. It's a war between tyranny and democracy. Between the past and the future. Between backwardness and innovation. Between cruelty and humanity.

For the sake of everything that is good in this world, for the sake of hope, Ukraine should win. Ukraine must win, but the world must help it do so.

Olga Tokariuk is an independent journalist and non-resident fellow at CEPA. She lives in Kyiv but has been forced to move elsewhere in the country by the Russian invasion.

UKL 504, 16 March 2022

Fair Use Notice: MAY CONTAIN COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL THAT IS REDISTRIBUTED FOR PERSONAL, SCHOLARLY USE ONLY. UKL is a single emission e-mail to a limited number of scholars and professionals in the area of Ukrainian studies for scholarly and educational purposes. UKL is distributed on a completely volunteer basis. The UKL editor believes that the use of copyrighted materials therein constitutes “fair use” of any such material and is governed by appropriate Canadian and International law.

Dominique Arel, Chair of Ukrainian Studies
University of Ottawa
559 King Edward Ave.
