

## **For Ukraine, and for the World, What's Next?**

The author of these lines is a former human rights activist, Soviet prisoner of conscience (1977–1987) and a staunch supporter of nonviolent resistance. The escalation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, however, forces me to ask myself difficult questions and experience difficult emotions. Because nonviolent resistance in the war with Russia means capitulation and complete disappearance as a nation. That's why, on one hand, I am incredibly grateful to the West that, in the last few days before the war, the early tranches of modern weapons arrived in Ukraine, which gave our military the opportunity to stop the first attacks by Russian troops. Putin did not accomplish what he expected from his Blitzkrieg. On the other hand, I am tormented by the question of what Western democracies have failed to do in relation to Russia and why further escalation has not been stopped.

There are many voices reaching Ukraine that the conflict can be resolved by giving Ukraine neutral status. For example, let us cite the words of Jeffrey D. Sachs, taken from the blogosphere: "In a diplomatic solution, no party gets everything it wants. Putin would not get to restore the Russian empire, and Ukraine would not get to join NATO."

All such voices obviously flow from a win-win civilization, in which the aspirations of each side of the conflict are considered legitimate, and the real solution can be found only through the calculation of the interests of each side and through cooperation. In this methodology rests the incredible power and virtue of Western civilization. However, there is one "but": it is not applicable to criminals – say, al-Qaeda or ISIS. No one in the world thought of taking Osama bin Laden's interests into account and working with him to reach a compromise.

The attack on Ukraine may not look as spectacular as the fall of the World Trade Center in New York, but today a number of Ukrainian cities – Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Mariupol, Melitopol – are rapidly turning into ruins comparable to the ruins of World War II. The Russian occupiers have started a terrorist war by killing and taking hostage civilians, women and children. The Kremlin is bombing schools, hospitals and maternity wards; it threatens provocations at captured nuclear power plants and suggests the possibility of using biological weapons. However, Putin has not yet been truly recognized as a terrorist in the world, nor has his regime been recognized as a criminal regime. Moreover, there are more than a few in the Western world who see Putin's actions as justified in part by NATO's alleged wrongdoing or alleged promises.

But does the world have a single scale for evaluating crimes against humanity? Are the Kremlin's constant and cynical lies, its boundless hatred of Ukraine and the West, broadcast around the world, and now the outright violence in a war that "shows signs of genocide and aims to destroy the nation" (Polish President Andrzej Duda) not signaling to the world that this regime has placed itself outside any civilized framework and must be defeated?

Instead, we hear: "NATO countries cannot go to war with Russia." The reason is clear: the threat of a nuclear catastrophe. But then with all the moral force before the eyes of the world is the cunning deception of the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. Because if it was not legally binding for the guarantors, why was Ukraine not warned about it then that it was essentially on its own? After dismantling its entire nuclear arsenal, Ukraine was assured that its sovereignty and territorial integrity would be protected!

Putin is openly mocking world diplomacy, threatening a nuclear strike. It seems that it is high time for politicians in the West to ask themselves a number of questions: "We see nuclear weapons as a deterrent. But are Western nuclear weapons really holding Putin back? Hasn't the nuclear button in Putin's hands become an instrument of intimidation and blackmail?" Jeffrey Sachs quoted John F. Kennedy's statement: "Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate" and placed a logical emphasis on the second part of this equation. But has the first part of this statement ceased to be true? After all, the fear of the Third World War forces the world to solve the dilemma of "security versus values" in favor of security, which only brings the world closer to the very things it fears.

Proponents of Ukraine's neutrality often cite the Cuban Missile crisis, when both the Soviet Union and the United States made concessions. In fact, then the international order was based on a clear scheme of Power Blocs. However, since then, dozens of European nations have broken free from the stranglehold of a communist regime and achieved the right to self-determination. Will the world allow Putin to roll back time and restore the logic of bloc versus bloc confrontation? Will the world have the moral courage to say to Ukrainians: "Your lands belong to Russia's sphere of interests, and therefore you cannot decide your fate"?

There are many other arguments in the blogosphere, and I will allow myself to present them without referring to specific names, as many people think in the same way:

"Belgium and the Netherlands were neutral powers that were invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany in 1940. **A superior military power with what they perceived as a right to a sphere of influence is not going to respect neutrality.**"

"Aren't the calls for Ukrainian neutrality surprising, while in neutral Finland and Sweden there is growing public support for the idea of reconsidering their neutrality? In addition, Switzerland and Singapore are also losing their traditional financial neutrality."

"Perhaps it is time to put down the crack pipe of wishful thinking, no matter how seductive its appeal may be. Ukraine *was* a neutral country for the first 25 or so years of its existence starting in 1991, and the level of public support for participation in NATO was minuscule, yet Russia kept trying to subvert it, to further corrupt it via convenient energy deals, to intrude in Ukrainian elections etc. So neutrality didn't exactly work then, why would it work now?... I'm sorry, but perhaps it's time to confront the reality that **we are facing not just a competitive power but something that is essentially evil.**"

Indeed, are there any agreements with Russia left in the body of international agreements that have not been violated by Russia? What is the basis for any confidence that Russia will abide by a new agreement this time? After all, a mendacious regime can always, if it wishes, invent any elegant reason why it was “forced” to terminate this agreement also. Putin and the propagators of his lies were quite effective in distorting the image of a pluralistic Ukraine and pro-democracy Ukrainians as fascists or Nazis who threaten the human race, while at the same time Putin was financing right-wing extremist parties abroad, practicing unlimited tyranny at home, and professing a completely inhumane ideology!

Many of our Western interlocutors, even agreeing with these arguments, still ask us: “What do you suggest then?” The following considerations come to mind:

First of all, we need to change the perspective of analyzing the problem. If Europeans continue to think, “We need to help Ukraine again,” sooner or later another “Ukraine fatigue” will inevitably take place. There will be a temptation to put pressure on Ukraine to persuade it to compromise. This is how Czechoslovakia was once pressured to renounce the Sudetenland and Poland to renounce Gdańsk. The result is well known.

A different perspective which I have in mind is the ability to recognize in the current Ukrainian Army the leading detachment – the advance guard of Europe, which defends the civilized world order. How many more deaths are needed for the world to realize that Putin will not stop at the Ukrainian-Polish border, and therefore it is Europe itself that must be defended? The West must defend itself. Because it is the entirety of human civilization that is under threat.

Thus, aid to Ukraine – especially military aid – should be similar in scale to the lend lease of the Second World War. Hasn’t the West retreated enough? Hasn’t it allowed itself to be intimidated enough and boxed into a corner by the fear of angering Putin and so declined Ukraine’s urgent pleas for fighter jets or “closed skies” (a no-fly zone)? Did Putin appreciate the hundreds of previous attempts to “understand” him? Was he impressed with the West’s gestures of appeasement? The West must find the strength to extricate itself – to jump off the hook held by the world’s preeminent Blackmailer. It was precisely the appeasement of Putin that made him such a dangerous monster.

So will there be bold politicians in the West who will break free of the inertia of being mesmerized by Putin’s brutality and realize that the world is on the verge of a radical transformation of the international security system? Insisting on Ukraine’s neutrality is exactly what President Kennedy meant by “negotiating out of fear.” Conversely, by overcoming fear, we can see the outlines of a new security structure of the world, in which Ukraine will take its rightful place. With its current heroism and sacrifice, my country deserves nothing less.

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