Mariupol mayor says siege has killed more than 10K civilians

By YURAS KARMANAU, ADAM SCHRECK and CARA ANNA

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KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The mayor of the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol said Monday that more than 10,000 civilians have died in the Russian siege of his city, and that the death toll could surpass 20,000, with corpses that were “carpeted through the streets.”

Speaking by phone Monday to The Associated Press, Mayor Vadym Boychenko also said Russian forces brought mobile cremation equipment to the city to dispose of the bodies, and he accused Russian forces of refusing to allow humanitarian convoys into the city in an attempt to conceal the carnage.

The mayor’s comments emerged as Russia claimed that it destroyed several Ukrainian air-defense systems in what appeared to be a renewed push to gain air superiority and take out weapons Kyiv has described as crucial ahead of an expected broad new offensive in the east.

In one strike, Moscow said it hit four S-300 launchers near the central city of Dnipro that had been provided by a European country it did not name. Slovakia gave Ukraine just such a system last week but denied it had been destroyed. Russia previously reported two strikes on similar systems in other places.

Russia’s war to shrink Ukraine economy 45%, World Bank says

By KELVIN CHAN

April 11, 2022

LONDON (AP) — The World Bank says Ukraine's economy will shrink by 45.1% this year because of Russia's invasion, which has shut down half of the country's businesses, choked off imports and exports, and damaged a vast amount of critical infrastructure.

Unprecedented financial and export sanctions imposed by Western allies in response to the war, meanwhile, are plunging Russia into a deep recession, lopping off more than a tenth of its economic growth, the World Bank said in a report Sunday.

The war is set to inflict twice the amount of economic damage across Europe and Central Asia that the COVID-19 pandemic did, the Washington-based lender said in its "War in the Region" economic report. Besides Ukraine, it focuses on central and Eastern Europe, former Soviet republics, the Balkan countries and Turkey.

"The magnitude of the humanitarian crisis unleashed by the war is staggering," said Anna Bjerde, the World Bank's vice president for the Europe and Central Asia region. "The Russian invasion is delivering a massive blow to Ukraine's economy and it has inflicted enormous damage to infrastructure."

The report said economic activity is impossible in "large swaths of areas" in Ukraine because infrastructure like roads, bridges, ports and train tracks have been destroyed.

Ukraine plays a major role as a global supplier of agricultural exports like wheat but that's in question now because planting and harvesting have been disrupted by the war, the report said. The war has cut off access to the Black Sea, a key route for exports, including 90% of Ukraine's grain shipments, it said.

"The war is having a devastating impact on human life and causing economic destruction in both countries, and will lead to significant economic losses in the Europe and Central Asia region and the rest of the world," the report said.

Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Tajikistan also are forecast to slide into recession this year, while economic growth projections have been cut for the region's other economies because of the war's ripple effects.

The World Bank said the humanitarian catastrophe is the biggest initial shockwave from the war and will likely be its most enduring legacy, as the wave of refugees fleeing Ukraine is "anticipated to dwarf previous crises."

More than 4 million people have fled Ukraine, with more than half going to Poland and others heading to countries like Moldova, Romania and Hungary. An additional 6.5 million have been displaced internally. Those numbers are expected to swell as the war drags on, the World Bank said.

The report issued a stark warning that "the war will increase poverty in the region due to the recession and food price inflation."

Beyond the humanitarian crisis, the lender said “the war is also delivering a sizable blow to the global economy through multiple channels.”

The war and sanctions have scrambled global trade routes and pushed up shipping and insurance costs, “which magnifies strains on global value chains,” the report said, noting that industries getting hit include food, automobiles, construction, petrochemicals and transport.

Putin’s War in Ukraine Is a Watershed. Time for America to Get Real.

April 11, 2022 NYT

By Charles A. Kupchan

Mr. Kupchan is a professor of international affairs at Georgetown University and a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

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During his recent speech in Warsaw, President Biden said that Vladimir Putin “cannot remain in power,” only to clarify a few days later that he was merely expressing outrage, not announcing a new U.S. policy aimed at toppling Russia’s leader. The episode, interpreted by many as a dangerous gaffe, underscored the tension in U.S. foreign policy between idealism and realism.

Mr. Putin’s invasion of Ukraine should provoke moral outrage in all of us, and, at least in principle, it warrants his removal from office. But Mr. Putin could well remain the leader of a major power into the next decade, and Washington will need to deal with him.

This friction between lofty goals and realpolitik is nothing new. The United States has since the founding era been an idealist power operating in a realist world — and has on balance succeeded in bending the arc of history toward justice. But geopolitical exigency at times takes precedence over ideals, with America playing power politics when it needs to.

During the Cold War, Washington promoted stability by tolerating a Soviet sphere of influence and cozying up to unsavory regimes willing to fight Communism. In contrast, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, America operated under conditions of geopolitical slack; great-power rivalry was muted, enabling Washington to put front and center its effort to promote democracy and expand a liberal, rules-based international order.

What, then, is the path forward? The war in Ukraine now confronts the United States with the need to tilt back toward the practice of realpolitik. Washington's commitment to keeping NATO's doors open to Ukraine was a laudable and principled stand against an autocratic Russia. Yet America's idealist cause has run headlong into Russian tanks; Washington's effort to do right by Ukraine has culminated in Russia's ruthless effort to put the country back under Moscow's sway.

Mr. Putin has just sent history into reverse. The United States should seek to foil and punish Moscow's aggression, but Washington also needs to be pragmatic to navigate a world that, even if more unruly, is also irreversibly interdependent.

The Gap Between Means and Ends

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has exposed a gap between America's ideological aspirations and geopolitical realities that has been widening since the 1990s. During the heady decade after the end of the Cold War, Washington was confident that the triumph of American power and purpose cleared the way for the spread of democracy. A primary instrument for doing so was the enlargement of NATO.

But from early on, the American foreign policy establishment allowed principle to obscure the geopolitical downsides of NATO enlargement. Yes, NATO membership should be open to all countries that qualify, and all nations should be able to exercise their sovereign right to choose their alignments as they see fit. But geography and geopolitics still matter; major powers, regardless of their ideological bent, don't like it when other major powers stray into their neighborhoods.

It's true that Moscow's dismay at the prospect of Ukraine's membership in NATO most likely is fed in part by nostalgia for the geopolitical heft of the Soviet days, Mr. Putin's paranoia about a "color revolution" arising in Russia, and mystical delusions about unbreakable civilizational links between Russia and Ukraine. But it is also true that the West erred in dismissing Russia's legitimate security concerns about NATO setting up shop on the other side of its 1,000-mile-plus border with Ukraine.

All major powers desire strategic breathing room — which is precisely why Russia has objected to NATO's eastern expansion since the end of the Cold War. NATO may be a defensive alliance, but it brings to bear aggregate military power that Russia understandably does not want parked near its territory.

Indeed, Moscow's objections to NATO membership for Ukraine are very much in line with America's own statecraft, which has long sought to keep other major powers away from its borders.

The United States spent much of the 19th century ushering Britain, France, Russia and Spain out of the Western Hemisphere. Thereafter, Washington regularly turned to military intervention to hold sway in the Americas. The exercise of hemispheric hegemony continued during the Cold War, with the United States determined to box the Soviet Union and its ideological sympathizers out of Latin America. When Moscow

deployed missiles to Cuba in 1962, the United States issued an ultimatum that brought the superpowers to the brink of war.

After Russia recently hinted that it might again deploy its military to Latin America, the State Department spokesman, Ned Price, responded, "If we do see any movement in that direction, we will respond swiftly and decisively." Given its own track record, Washington should have given greater credence to Moscow's objections to bringing Ukraine into NATO.

NATO's open door policy has meanwhile encouraged countries in Europe's east to lean too far over their strategic skis. While the allure of joining the alliance has encouraged aspirants to carry out the democratic reforms needed to qualify for entry, the open door has also prompted prospective members to engage in excessively risky behavior.

Not long after NATO in 2008 pledged that Georgia and Ukraine "will become members of NATO," Georgia's president, Mikheil Saakashvili, launched an offensive against pro-Russian separatists in South Ossetia with whom the country had been sporadically fighting for years. Russia promptly carved up Georgia, grabbing control of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Mr. Saakashvili thought the West had his back, but he miscalculated and overreached.

In similar fashion, NATO encouraged Ukraine to beat a path toward the alliance. The 2014 Maidan Revolution toppled a pro-Moscow regime and put Ukraine on a westward course, resulting in Russia's intervention in Crimea and Donbas. NATO's open door then beckoned, prompting Ukrainians in 2019 to enshrine their NATO aspirations in the Constitution.

Now Russia has again invaded the country to block its westward path. Given its unenviable proximity to Russia, Ukraine would have been better off playing it safe, quietly building a stable democracy while sticking with the neutral status that it embraced when it exited the Soviet Union. Indeed, Ukraine's potential return to neutrality figures prominently in the talks between Kyiv and Moscow to end the war.

NATO has wisely avoided direct involvement in the fighting in Ukraine in order to avert war with Russia. But NATO's unwillingness to protect Ukraine has exposed a troubling disconnect between the organization's stated goal of making the country a member and its judgment that defending Ukraine is not worth the cost.

In effect, the United States and its allies, even as they impose severe sanctions on Russia and send arms to Ukraine, are revealing that they do not deem the defense of the country to be a vital interest. But if that is the case, then why have NATO members wanted to extend to Ukraine a security guarantee that would obligate them to go to war in its defense?

NATO should extend security guarantees to countries that are of intrinsic strategic importance to the United States and its allies, but it should not make countries strategically important by extending them security guarantees. In a world that is rapidly

reverting to the Hobbesian logic of power politics, when adversaries may regularly test U.S. commitments, NATO cannot afford to be profligate in handing out such guarantees. Strategic prudence requires distinguishing vital interests from lesser ones and conducting statecraft accordingly.

Beginning the World All Over Again

Americans have long understood the purpose of their power to be not only security but also the spread of liberty at home and abroad. As Thomas Paine wrote in 1776, "We have it in our power to begin the world all over again."

Paine was surely engaging in hyperbole. But successive generations of Americans have taken the nation's exceptionalist calling to heart, with quite impressive results. Through the power of its example as well as its many exertions abroad — including World War I, World War II and the Cold War — the United States has succeeded in expanding the footprint of liberal democracy.

But the ideological aspirations of the United States have at times fueled overreach, producing outcomes at odds with the nation's idealist ambitions. The founding generation was determined to build an extended republic that would stretch to the Pacific Coast. The exalted banner of Manifest Destiny provided ideological justification for the nation's westward expansion — but also moral cover for trampling on Native Americans and launching a war of choice against Mexico that led to U.S. annexation of roughly half of Mexico's territory.

President William McKinley in 1898 embarked on a war to expel colonial Spain from Cuba, insisting that Americans had to act "in the cause of humanity." Yet victory in the Spanish-American War turned the United States itself into an imperial power as it asserted control over Spanish possessions in the Caribbean and Pacific, including the Philippines. The resulting Filipino insurgency led to the deaths of some 4,000 U.S. troops and more than 200,000 Filipino fighters and civilians.

As he prepared the country for entry into World War I, President Woodrow Wilson declared before Congress that "the world must be made safe for democracy." After U.S. forces helped bring the war to a close, he played a leading role in negotiations over the League of Nations, a global body that was to preserve peace through collective action, dispute resolution and disarmament. But such idealist ambitions proved too much even for Americans. The Senate shot down U.S. membership in the League; Wilson's ideological overreach cleared the way for the stubborn isolationism of the interwar era.

"The Iraqi people are deserving and capable of human liberty," President George W. Bush proclaimed just before launching the invasion of Iraq in 2003. But the war resulted in far more bloodshed and chaos than liberty. Likewise, two decades of exhaustive U.S. efforts to bring stability and democracy to Afghanistan fell far short, with the American withdrawal last summer giving way to Taliban rule and a

humanitarian nightmare. Across these historical episodes, noble ambitions became divorced from strategic realities, yielding dreadful results.

Getting Real

NATO meant well in opening its doors to Ukraine, yet good intentions have again stumbled on geopolitical realities. To be sure, Mr. Putin had the opportunity to settle his objections to Ukraine's membership in NATO at the negotiating table. Last June, President Biden admitted that whether Ukraine joins the alliance "remains to be seen"; more recently, President Emmanuel Macron of France floated the idea of "Finlandization" for Ukraine — effective neutrality — and proposals for a formal moratorium on further enlargement circulated. Mr. Putin could have picked up these leads, but he instead opted for war — and now owns the resulting death and destruction.

Russia's relationship with the West is fast heading toward militarized rivalry. In light of the tight strategic partnership that has emerged between Moscow and Beijing — and China's own geopolitical ambitions — the next Cold War may well pit the West against a Sino-Russian bloc stretching from the Western Pacific to Eastern Europe.

The return of a two-bloc world that plays by the rules of realpolitik means that Washington will need to dial back its efforts to expand the liberal order, instead returning to a strategy of patient containment aimed at preserving geopolitical stability and avoiding great-power war. A new strategic conservatism will require avoiding the further extension of defense commitments into geographic areas that Russia and China consider their rimlands.

Instead, the United States should seek stable balances of power in the European and Asia-Pacific theaters. Washington will need to strengthen its forward presence in both theaters, requiring higher and smarter military spending and the strict avoidance of demanding wars of choice and nation-building adventures in the Middle East or other peripheral regions.

At the same time, taming an interdependent world will require working across ideological lines. Washington should ease off on the promotion of democracy and human rights abroad and the Biden administration should refrain from its tendency to articulate a geopolitical vision that too neatly divides the world into democracies and autocracies. Strategic and economic expedience will at times push the United States to partner with repressive regimes; moderating oil prices, for example, may require collaboration with Iran, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.

Even though the United States will continue teaming up with its traditional democratic allies in Europe and Asia, many of the world's democracies will avoid taking sides in a new era of East-West rivalry. Indeed, Brazil, India, Israel, South Africa and other democracies have been sitting on the fence when it comes to responding to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Russia clearly poses the most immediate threat to geopolitical stability in Eurasia, but China, because of its emergence as a true competitor of the United States, still poses the greater geopolitical challenge in the longer term. Now that Russia and China are regularly teaming up, they could together constitute an opposing bloc far more formidable than its Soviet forebear. Accordingly, the United States should exploit opportunities to put distance between Moscow and Beijing, following the lead of the quintessential realists Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, who in the 1970s weakened the Communist bloc by driving a wedge between China and the Soviet Union.

The United States should play both sides. Russia's invasion of Ukraine marks a fundamental breach with the Atlantic democracies, yet the West cannot afford to completely turn its back on Russia; too much is at stake. As during the Cold War, Washington will need a hybrid strategy of containment and engagement. Russia should remain in the penalty box for now, with the United States pushing back against the Kremlin's territorial expansionism and other aggressive behavior by reinforcing NATO's eastern flank and maintaining harsh economic sanctions.

But Washington should also remain on the lookout for opportunities to engage with Moscow. Its invasion of Ukraine has just made Russia an economic and strategic dependent of China; Mr. Putin will not relish being Xi Jinping's sidekick. The United States should exploit the Kremlin's discomfort with becoming China's junior partner by signaling that Russia has a Western option.

Assuming an eventual peace settlement in Ukraine that permits the scaling back of sanctions, the Western democracies should remain open to cautious and selective cooperation with Moscow. Areas of potential collaboration include furthering nuclear and conventional arms control, sharing best practices and technologies on alternatives to fossil fuels, and jointly developing rules of the road to govern military and economic activity in the Arctic.

Russia needs China more than China needs Russia, so Washington should also seek to pull Beijing away from Moscow. Beijing's ambiguous response to the invasion of Ukraine suggests at least a measure of discomfort with the economic and geopolitical disruption that has been produced by Russian recklessness. Yet Beijing continues to benefit from Russian energy and strategic cooperation and from the fact that Mr. Putin is forcing the United States to focus on Europe, thereby stalling the U.S. "pivot to Asia." Nonetheless, Washington should keep an eye out for opportunities to work with Beijing in areas of common interest — trade, climate change, North Korea, digital governance, public health — to improve relations, tackle global problems and potentially weaken the bond between China and Russia.

As during the Cold War, a world of rival blocs could mean economic as well as geopolitical division. The severe impact of the sanctions imposed on Russia underscores the dark side of globalization, potentially driving home to both the United States and China that economic interdependence entails quite considerable risk. China could distance itself from global markets and financial systems, while Washington could seek

to further decouple the United States from Chinese investment, technology, goods and supply chains. The world may be entering a prolonged and costly era of deglobalization.

The United States will always be an idealist country struggling to navigate a realist world. That's as it should be; the globe is a better place for it. But Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a geopolitical watershed: A more realist world is back, requiring that America's idealist ambitions yield more regularly to inescapable strategic realities.

Charles A. Kupchan, a professor of international affairs at Georgetown University and senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, is the author, most recently, of "Isolationism: A History of America's Efforts to Shield Itself from the World."

How Do We Deal With a Superpower Led by a War Criminal?

April 10, 2022 NYT

By Thomas L. Friedman

Opinion Columnist

It is hard to believe, but now impossible to deny, that the broad framework that kept much of the world stable and prospering since the end of the Cold War has been seriously fractured by Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. In ways we hadn't fully appreciated, a lot of that framework rested on the West's ability to coexist with Putin as he played "bad boy," testing the limits of the world order but never breaching them at scale.

But with Putin's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, his indiscriminate crushing of its cities and mass killings of Ukrainian civilians, he went from "bad boy" to "war criminal." And when the leader of Russia — a country that spans 11 time zones, with vast oil, gas and mineral resources and more nuclear warheads than anyone else — is a war criminal and must be henceforth treated as a pariah, the world as we've known it is profoundly changed. Nothing can work the same.

How does the world have an effective U.N. with a country led by a war criminal on the Security Council, who can veto every resolution? How does the world have any effective global initiative to combat climate change and not be able to collaborate with the biggest landmass country on the planet? How does the U.S. work closely with Russia on the Iran nuclear deal when we have no trust with, and barely communicate with, Moscow? How do we isolate and try to weaken a country so big and so powerful, knowing that it could be more dangerous if it disintegrates than if it's strong? How do we feed and fuel the

world at reasonable prices when a sanctioned Russia is one of the world's biggest exporters of oil, wheat and fertilizer?

The answer is that we don't know. Which is another way of saying that we are entering a period of geopolitical and geoeconomic uncertainty the likes of which we have not known since 1989 — and possibly 1939.

And it promises only to get worse before it gets better, because Putin is now like a cornered animal. He not only got *so much* wrong in his Ukraine invasion; he produced the opposite of so much he was aiming to achieve, making him desperate for any war achievement, at any price, that can obscure this fact.

Putin said he had to go into Ukraine to push NATO away from Russia, and his war has not only reinvigorated what was a stagnating Western military alliance, it has also guaranteed NATO's solidarity and weapons modernization for as long as Putin is in power — and probably another generation after that.

Putin said he had to go into Ukraine to remove the Nazi clique ruling in Kyiv and bring both the Ukrainian people and their territory back into the arms of Mother Russia, where they naturally belonged and, in his imagination, longed to be. Instead, his invasion has made Ukrainians — even some formerly pro-Russia Ukrainians — bitter enemies of Russia for at least a generation and supercharged Ukraine's desire to be independent of Russia and embedded in the European Union.

Putin thought that with a blitzkrieg takeover of Ukraine he would earn the proper respect from the West for Russia's military prowess — ending the insults that Russia, with an economy smaller than the state of Texas', was just "a gas station with nukes." Instead, his army has been exposed as incompetent and barbaric and needing to enlist mercenaries from Syria and Chechnya just to hold its ground.

Having gotten so much wrong, and having launched this war on his own initiative, Putin has to be desperate to show that he *produced something* — at least uncontested control of eastern Ukraine, from the Donbas region, south to Odesa on Ukraine's Black Sea coast and connecting with Crimea. And he surely wants it by May 9, for Moscow's giant annual Victory Day parade, marking Russia's victory over the Nazis in World War II — the day when the Russian military recalls its greatest glory.

So, it appears that Putin is gearing up for a two-pronged strategy. First, he's regrouping his ravaged forces and concentrating them on fully seizing and holding this smaller military prize. Second, he's doubling down on systematic cruelty — the continued pummeling of Ukrainian towns with rockets and artillery to keep creating as many casualties and refugees and as much economic ruin as he can. He clearly hopes that the former will fracture the Ukrainian Army, at least in the east, and the latter will fracture NATO, as its member states get overwhelmed by so many refugees and pressure Kyiv to give Putin whatever he wants to get him to stop.

Ukraine and NATO, therefore, need an effective counterstrategy.

It should have three pillars. The first is to support the Ukrainians with diplomacy if they want to negotiate with Putin — it's their call — but also to support them with the best weaponry and training if they want to drive the Russian Army off every inch of their territory. The second is to broadcast daily and loudly — in every way we can — that the world is at war "with Putin" and "not with the Russian people" — just the opposite of what Putin is telling them. And the third is for us to double down on ending our addiction to oil, Putin's main source of income.

The hope is that the three together would set in motion forces inside Russia that topple Putin from power.

Yes, that is a high-risk-high-reward proposition. Putin's downfall could lead to someone worse at the helm in the Kremlin. It could also lead to prolonged chaos and disintegration.

But if it leads to someone better, someone with just minimal decency and an ambition to rebuild Russia's dignity and spheres of influence based on a new generation of Tchaikovskys, Rachmaninoffs, Sakharovs, Dostoyevskys and Sergey Brins — not yacht-owning oligarchs, cyberhackers and polonium-armed assassins — the whole world gets better. So many possibilities for healthy collaborations would be resurrected or forged.

Only the Russian people have the right and ability to change their leader. But it will not be easy because Putin, an ex-K.G.B. officer — surrounded by many other former intelligence officers who are beholden to him — is nearly impossible to dislodge.

But here is one possible scenario: The Russian Army is a prideful institution, and if it continues to suffer catastrophic defeats in Ukraine, I can imagine a situation where either Putin wants to decapitate his army's leadership — to make them the scapegoats for his failure in Ukraine — or the army, knowing this is coming, tries to oust Putin first. There never has been any love lost between the Russian military and the K.G.B./S.V.R./F.S.B. security types surrounding Putin.

In sum, having the Russian people produce a better leader is a necessary condition for the world to produce a new, more resilient global order to replace the post-Cold War order, which Putin has now shattered. What is also necessary, though, is that America be a model of democracy and sustainability that others want to emulate.

When Ukrainians are making the ultimate sacrifice to hold onto every inch and ounce of their newly won freedom, is it too much to ask that Americans make the smallest sacrifices and compromises to hold on to our precious democratic inheritance?

For Russian priest protesting Ukraine invasion, a mixture of defiance and concern

April 7, 2022 by Religion News Service Leave a Comment

(RNS) — The Rev. Ioann Burdin, rector of Resurrection of Christ Orthodox Church in the Russian village of Nikolskoye, offered a simple explanation for why he spoke out last month against his country's invasion of Ukraine.

"I don't consider it possible to remain silent on this situation," he said in an interview, speaking through a translator. "It wasn't about politics," he added. "It was about the Bible. … If I remain silent, I'm not a priest."

It was an unassuming statement with far-reaching implications for a Russian Orthodox priest who made international headlines last month after Russian authorities fined him for his dissent. His actions were a break from the norm: Russian Orthodox leaders typically closely align their ideology, at least in public, with the Kremlin's.

Burdin outlined his reasons for criticizing the war to Lew Nescott Jr., an independent journalist who covers religion and politics. Nescott provided Religion News Service with recordings and transcripts of his interviews with Burdin, some of which were conducted through a translator. Burdin also gave RNS permission to edit his responses for clarity.

Burdin said his first public pushback to Russia's invasion came in an open letter he published online on Feb. 25, shortly after the war began. The priest said the goal of the letter, which he described as "anti-war," was to condemn the invasion of Ukraine as a "real war" and a "Russian invasion" — phrases that depart from Russian President Vladimir Putin's insistence it be described as a "special military operation."

The priest said the letter, which was signed by Burdin and another cleric, insisted "blood is not only a curse to the killers" but "also to those who kept silent" or "didn't protest."

“The duty of all Christians is not to support the power in this … aggressive war,” Burdin said in an interview. “We don’t have to repeat mistakes of those Christians who supported the German government when they invaded Poland many years ago,” he said in an apparent reference to the beginning of World War II — when Russia also invaded Poland.

The priest said the letter triggered debate online, although his local superior initially respected his right to his own opinion.

Burdin’s declarations contrasted with the preaching of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. Kirill is widely seen as having endorsed the war and laid the spiritual groundwork to justify it, suggesting in a recent homily the invasion is part of a larger “metaphysical” conflict between Russia and Western nations whose agenda is to promote, the prelate said, “gay parades.”

Even so, a vocal group of dissenting Russian Orthodox priests in Ukraine and elsewhere have stopped commemorating Kirill’s name during their worship services. More than 280 Russian Orthodox priests from different parts of the world — including Burdin, in Russia — also signed on to an open letter in early March calling for “the cessation of the fratricidal war” against Ukraine.

Around the same time, Burdin delivered a short address during a worship service on “Forgiveness Sunday” decrying Russia’s actions.

“I told my parishioners that Russians and Ukrainians are two parts of one church,” said Burdin, who later noted he was born and educated in the Ukrainian city of Odessa. “For a Russian Orthodox priest like me, it’s like civil war.”

He then told parishioners he would add to the litany two small prayers about peace in Ukraine and would ask God to protect Ukrainian people.

Roughly two hours later, he got a phone call from one of his parishioners saying the police had been asking congregants about his homily. The police contacted him directly an hour later, demanding he visit the station and provide an explanation.

Burdin explained initial reports that he had been arrested were false. Instead, after the unsettling phone call asking him to report to the authorities, he presented himself at his local police station, where his interlocutors began exerting "moral pressure," he said.

According to Burdin, authorities said: "You have such a wonderful church, but you are betraying your Motherland."

Before the conversation de-escalated, police officers suggested charges against Burdin could be criminal under a new statute passed in March making it illegal to spread "false information" about the Russian military. Breaking the law, particularly for repeat offenders, could result in up to 15 years of jail time.

Burdin said he was later summoned to the office of his local bishop. His superior asked him to "keep silent," he said, and "hinted" the priest could be "banned" from ministry because of his actions.

Meanwhile, Burdin's lawyer warned his phones could be tapped and that he may be followed by a special anti-extremism police unit.

> Burdin was fined 35,000 rubles (around $420) in a ruling that accused him of "discrediting the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation," according to Burdin and another person in communication with him. That's slightly more than the fine of 30,000 rubles (around $360) reportedly levied against Russian journalist Marina Ovsyannikova for publishing a video calling on Russians to protest the war. (Ovsyannikova made the video shortly before she staged an anti-war demonstration on live television, an act for which she was arrested and is now facing separate charges.)

Burdin's next steps appear to be in flux. In initial statements made soon after his encounter with police, he said he intended to continue speaking out from his pulpit. However, he later appeared ambivalent about doing so, saying, "If I want to be in jail tomorrow, that's a great option." Around the same time, he said, he began receiving threatening calls from "hidden numbers" branding him a traitor.

Burdin has since shifted his message to social media. In a recent post, Burdin appeared to decry a speech delivered by Putin at a March 18 rally in support of the

war. During his address, Putin paraphrased the Bible to laud Russia's troops, saying, "There is no greater love than giving up one's soul for one's friends."

"I don't know what was more — illiteracy or blasphemy — in the speech of the President, who tried with the gospel words 'there is no greater love, as if someone gave his life for his friends' to justify the bloody madness that the whole world has been watching for the second month already," Burdin wrote, according to an automated translation. "What is striking, however, is the approving chorus on the part of the priesthood and some of the laity that followed this performance."

In another post from late March, the priest suggested it was unlikely his words would change much, saying, "The soldier will not lay down his machine gun. The President will not go to a monastery. The Patriarch will not stop preaching about gay parades … "

Yet Burdin framed his actions as a requirement of his Christian faith.

"Your job is not to change, but to testify," he wrote.

Asked by if he was concerned Russian authorities would find and punish him for his posts, Burdin was defiant.

"There is a Russian proverb: 'If you are afraid of wolves, do not go into the forest,'" Burdin said.

When asked again this week, Burdin invoked Psalm 27.

"The Lord is my enlightenment and my Savior — whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defender of my life — whom shall I fear?"

By Jack Jenkins, Religion News Service

More than peace: How I'm learning to pray for Ukraine

April 7, 2022 by Joshua P. Kerr

As I confessed to my congregation a few weeks ago, I have been engrossed by news of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Admittedly, my knowledge of Ukraine's history, culture, and the vital role it plays on the world stage were lacking prior to this conflict. I have learned much in these tense and heartbreaking weeks of conflict. While I am no expert in the history of the region or military matters in general, I have managed to curate several reliable sources that provide a feast of information on the day-to-day and even hour-by-hour developments of the war. To put it simply, the conflict is never far from my mind. For a host of reasons, some of which are difficult to explain, this conflict matters deeply to me.

As an American living in the center of the United States, my options to help those suffering in this tragedy are minimal. I can donate to the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross or Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (please do that, by the way). I can also reach out to my congressional representation advocating for policies I think may be helpful. Beyond those practical but rather detached acts, all I can do is pray.

Yet when I do pray about this war, something feels a bit off. The words that I have been using do not seem to connect well to the situation on the ground or my emotions surrounding them. My prayers are largely filled with verbiage found in the PC(USA) *Book of Common Worship*. I confess to God that "We condone evil, prejudice, warfare, and greed." I pray that "wars and violence shall end, and your children may live in peace." While these prayers are not inappropriate, and I do hope for peace, they also feel impersonal, hardly fitting images of a bombed-out theatre that had been publicly marked as a shelter for children or millions streaming across borders just hoping to find safety. In short, these prayers do not reflect what my heart yearns to convey.

I recently stumbled upon a tweet from Anthony D. Baker, professor of systematic theology at Seminary of the Southwest and theologian in residence at St. Julian of Norwich Episcopal Church in Austin, Texas. His tweet reads, "I got tired of hearing prayers for peace rather than liberation in Ukraine." Here, Baker names the frustration that has been niggling at me. The PC(USA) *Book of Common Worship* does a wonderful job of rightly invoking God as the ultimate peacemaker in creation, but prayers for peace alone in the face of deadly, evil oppression fall short of vision of peace found in God's story of salvation.



Baker continues, “On Sunday, St Julian of Norwich, Austin, prayed this one that I composed. … O God who raised your son from the grave, vanquishing the reign of sin, betrayal, and death, we pray for liberation for the people of Ukraine, besieged as they are by deceit and weapons of war. In the name of Jesus Christ, the risen one. Amen.” Amen, indeed.

Baker’s prayer speaks to the suffering of the Ukrainian people at the hands of a more powerful aggressor. It names the oppression of deceit witnessed in shameless propaganda by Putin and the Kremlin and warfare from which Ukrainians need liberation. It is a reminder that God is not only a bringer of peace in a general sense but the one who leads people out of bondage and into life-giving freedom. Baker’s prayer speaks to my understanding of God as, not only the Prince of Peace, but the God of justice and equality. As the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) reminds us, “(God) has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.” Our God is in the business of restoring the weak when they have suffered at the unjust hands of the mighty.

While Christians should always be cautious about nationalism seeping into our practice of faith and remember that God is the God of *all* people, including those whom we label as enemies, we need not water down our prayers or mission with what my friend David Peters, vicar of St. Joan of Arc Episcopal Church in Pflugerville, Texas, calls “spectator pacifism.” We need not offer the Almighty platitudes about peace when there is injustice that still requires repair. Technology is showing us the war for Ukraine in stunning detail. Day by day and hour by hour, we see the horror of war in shocking detail. Our prayers of intercession should reach beyond generic pleas for peace and embrace the liberating power of the gospel.

With this in mind, I pray for the lives of Ukrainians and Russians needlessly in harm’s way as the direct result of gratuitous aggression. I pray for the wisdom of Ukrainian leaders trying to hold their country together and care for their people. I pray for the repentance of those who conceived and initiated this war. Finally, I pray for the liberation and restoration of Ukraine in the name of Jesus, the liberator and restorer of life itself.

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