



Ukraine, and Beyond

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At church on Sunday, February 27, our pastor opened the service with a word of concern for the people of Ukraine. He invited the congregation to offer a prayer for peace by singing a hymn reminding us of the specialness of every land to the God of all the nations. It was a special moment in a time when the world's attention is focused on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The governor of the state of Ohio, Mike DeWine, had declared February 27 a "Day of Prayer for the Ukraine," and many churches in the state observed the occasion, as churches and people around the world continue to do in these tense and worrisome weeks.

The buildup and movement of tanks, missiles, and troops leading up to the invasion itself were signs of an imminent attack. The US and European allies had gathered intelligence that proved to be correct, enabling an accurate prediction of how the first days of the Russian strategy would be implemented. There were opportunities to work to avert an invasion through diplomatic means, but, by virtue of its permanent membership, Russia was able to veto a resolution in the UN Security Council condemning the attack. Preparations were made for a response, if such a negotiated off-ramp was not found, in order to avoid a much worse situation, with the threat of Russia's use of nuclear weapons hovering in the background.

To help Ukraine fend off the attack, the US has approved military aid for Ukraine. "Swift and severe" sanctions were immediately put in place on Russia, which were designed to "impose a severe cost" on the Russian economy. Mr. DeWine and other US governors urged a boycott of Russian products in protest of the invasion.

The implications of the invasion are already being felt by Ukrainians whose homes and communities are under attack. More than 500,000 Ukrainians are already displaced either within the country's borders or seeking refuge in neighboring countries (as of March 1); and some millions more could ultimately be forced to flee.

The principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force is

embedded in international law and the UN Charter and must be upheld. Russia must be held accountable, and the Ukrainian people, especially the most vulnerable, must be cared for, with their full rights and their full dignity. Europe, the US, and many around the world are rallying in support of Ukraine in global solidarity, including praising Ukrainians' valiant resistance to the invasion and occupation of their homeland.

Even as the world's attention is on Ukraine, there are other places in the world where international law is ignored with no outcry or accountability. One such case is the Israeli occupation and annexation of Palestinian lands and people, which has continued for decades. Israel continues to receive billions of dollars in military aid, despite its military occupation. Sanctions are not on the table. Boycotts have been made illegal in some of the same US states that now support boycotts of Russian products. Palestinian resistance to occupation is maligned, and Palestinian refugees are marginalized.

Can this broad support and insistence on international law in the case of the Ukraine be a sign that the principles and structures established to preserve and promote peace will be respected? Will it serve to be a rallying cry for a consistent application of international law?

We pray for a peaceful, prompt, and just resolution to the crisis in Ukraine with no more suffering and pain. And we pray that past, present, and future victims of violations of law and justice the world over find some recompense in regular, consistent, and robust insistence on the application of international law and principles of human rights—for the sake of the dignity of humanity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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