

Russia's 2022 Invasion of Ukraine

In an age where it seems impossible to imagine one country invading another peaceful, sovereign nation, Russia has proved to the world that such invasions are not only possible, but also, entirely feasible. President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, directed the Russian military to invade Ukraine in the early morning hours of February 23, 2022. The fighting continues to date, without a clear Russian victory. President Putin announced in December 2023 that Russia's goals in the Ukraine remain unchanged, and that the war will continue unless and until Kiev agrees to an agreement consistent with Russia's goals of "demilitarization" and "neutral status."¹

In the process, Ukraine has been decimated from Russian bombings, and Russia's military forces have also taken a beating with significant numbers of men, machines and aircraft destroyed. The death toll is rising, and on both sides the human toll has taken other forms as well:

"More than 7 million people have been displaced within Ukraine, according to the United Nations, and an additional 4.5 million have fled abroad. ... But finding a way out was a challenge. A bus from Kherson to Odesa, a key stop on the journey to Romania, usually cost \$10 and took [meaning: would normally take] four hours. Miller [an American who had been in Ukraine taking care of his grandmother] had to pay a taxi driver \$600, and the ride took 12 hours. The danger of staying in Ukraine's besieged cities was emphasized by Friday's missile strike at a train station in the eastern city of Kramatorsk that killed at least 57 and left more than 100 wounded. The station was crowded with civilians fleeing the Donbas. Ukraine and its Western allies blamed Russia for the deadly strike. Moscow denied carrying out the attack. [Ukrainian President, Volodymyr] Zelensky vowed that those responsible for the railway strike would be discovered and would face war-crimes charges. ..."²

Devastation and human suffering in Ukraine have resulted in international attention and concern:

"Since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, its war against Ukraine has had a disastrous impact on civilian life, killing thousands of civilians, injuring many thousands more, and destroying civilian property and infrastructure. Russian forces committed a litany of violations of international humanitarian law, including indiscriminate and disproportionate bombing and shelling of civilian

¹ CNBC, *Putin says goals in Ukraine have 'not changed' and war will continue until Kyiv agrees a deal*, Holly Ellyatt, Jenni Reid, December 14, 2023.

² Los Angeles Times, *Ukrainians flee as Russian troops converge on the east and south*, Nabih Bulos, Carolyn Cole and Kate Linthicum, April 10, 2022.

areas that hit homes and healthcare and educational facilities. Some of these attacks should be investigated as war crimes. In areas they occupied, Russian or Russian-affiliated forces committed apparent war crimes, including torture, summary executions, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, and looting of cultural property. Those who attempted to flee areas of fighting faced terrifying ordeals and numerous obstacles; in some cases, Russian forces forcibly transferred significant numbers of Ukrainians to Russia or Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine and subjected many to abusive security screenings. Russian forces' countrywide, repeated attacks on Ukraine's energy and other critical infrastructure appeared aimed at terrorizing civilians and making their life unsustainable, which is a war crime."³

Putin's Russia, on the other hand, has its own version of the need to rein-in Ukraine through a forced political outcome:

"The Russian political elite contends that Russia should be a superpower in a multipolar world, recognized as such by the international community. However, this elite also argues that Russia is strategically on the defensive due to a hostile West. Russia, the Russian identity, and Russia's territorial integrity are under permanent threat, according to this view, and this threat must be addressed. The threat is not only military in the form of NATO's eastward expansion—it is also reflected in the spillover of the West's culture, values, ideology, and political system into Russia. It is precisely this, elites argue, that poses an existential threat to Russia. Indeed, the emergence of an affluent, politically active, liberal-oriented social middle class may threaten Russia as an authoritarian-run, conservative autocracy. To counter this, the Russian political elite seeks to end the perceived American-led Western hegemony and replace it with a multipolar world order.

From the Russian perspective, the Ukraine invasion is a necessary offensive move within a strategic defensive posture. A prosperous, Western-oriented Ukraine that is a member of the EU may offer the Russian population a dangerous glimpse of an alternative political system and thereby fuel dissatisfaction with Russia's political and economic system. Furthermore, Ukrainian entry into NATO and the EU would lead to a political-strategic loss of face for the Russian regime at home and abroad and therefore represents a military-strategic vulnerability for Russia's defense."⁴

³ Human Rights Watch, *Russia-Ukraine War*, <https://www.hrw.org/tag/russia-ukraine-war>.

⁴ Modern War Institute at West Point, *WHAT IS RUSSIA'S THEORY OF VICTORY IN UKRAINE*, Marnix Provoost, March 31, 2023.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, self-serving view by Russian “elites” as to the sanctity of Russian’s “authoritarian-run, conservative autocracy,” the invasion of a democratic and peaceful sovereign nation (albeit with its own problems of corruption), attacks upon civilian transportation, and possible prisoner of war atrocities on both sides—constitute blatant war crimes and human rights violations—**today, right now**. Despite all of the proclamations and treaties, historical understanding of natural law and “inalienable” rights, there remain continuing human rights violations on both a small and global scale.

On December 6, 2023, the U.S. Justice Department announced⁵ that the United States has indicted four Russian military officers⁶ for alleged commission of War Crimes against an American in the course of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁷

“The four Russians are identified as members of the Russian armed forces or its proxy units. Two are described as commanding officers. ...[They] are accused of kidnapping an American man from his home in a Ukrainian village in 2022. [It is alleged in the indictment that the]... American was beaten and interrogated while being held for 10 days at a Russian military compound, before eventually being evacuated with his wife, who's Ukrainian, U.S. authorities said.”⁸

This purportedly is the first time the United States has pursued charges pursuant to a nearly 30-year-old federal statute making it a crime to subject an American to torture or inhumane treatment during a war. The four Russian defendants are still at large, with prospects of capturing and extraditing them deemed poor at best.

Is there a **natural trigger or tendency towards abusing other human beings**, and if so, what if anything can be done about that *enduring human proclivity*?

⁵ Associated Press, *US files war crime charges against Russians accused of torturing an American in the Ukraine invasion*, Lindsay Whitehurst and Eric Tucker, December 6, 2023.

⁶ Ibid. The Russian defendants are named as Suren Seiranovich Mkrtchyan and Dmitry Budnik, commanding officers in Russia's armed forces, and two lower-ranking officers identified by their first names only.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.