

This is Where It Ends*

* Abridged version of the speech delivered by Canada-Ukraine Foundation and UCPBA Calgary Board member, and Ukrainian-Canadian community activist, Bohdan Romaniuk on February 24, 2023 at the Calgary Vigil commemorating the first anniversary of the War in Ukraine

One year ago today, Putin unleashed unspeakable horrors upon Ukraine.

Yet, there is little that is new in what Putin has done and is doing. A long line of Bolshevik butchers and Russian Tsars before them have all engaged to a greater or lesser extent in imperial conquest, colonial exploitation, systematic Russification and, at different times, genocide itself not only to rid the world of all traces of the Ukrainian language, all expressions of Ukrainian culture, and all facets of Ukrainian nationhood but to crush the centuries-old dream of the Ukrainian people to live and govern themselves in a free, democratic, independent, and sovereign Ukrainian state.

While Putin is by no means the first or only Russian autocrat or dictator to use overwhelming force to try and absorb Ukraine into the Russian empire, or destroy it in the process, he will be the last Russian leader to ever attempt it. Ukraine's message to Putin is crystal clear... ***"It ends here"***.

Consider the fact that...

Putin Has Already Lost Ukraine

- Putin completely misread how Ukrainians would respond to his invasion last year. Rather than being greeted with bread and salt, flowers and song, and dancing and jubilation, his armies were battered and thrashed and delivered a beating north of Kyiv they will not soon forget.
- Putin has done more to unite Ukrainians than any leader, Ukrainian or foreign, in the past several centuries. He has strengthened national self-awareness in Ukraine, highlighted the profound differences in the national character, culture, spirit and values of Ukrainians relative to their Russian neighbours, fostered the rapid spread of the Ukrainian language in all aspects of life and across all regions of Ukraine, and spurred a genuine interest in Ukrainian history – especially in universities *outside of Ukraine* which, for far too long, have taught Ukrainian history, if they have taught it

at all, solely from the perspective of imperial Russia. To Putin's utter dismay, the world is just now beginning to appreciate not only how different Ukraine is from Russia, but how much of what it used to think it knew about Ukraine is mere propaganda from the Communist era or, *as concerns Russia's claims to early Ukrainian history*, is but a tissue of Tsarist lies.

- Napoleon one famously said that in war “the moral is to the physical, as three is to one”. By this he meant that an army's morale contributes far more to success in combat than do sheer numbers. That is clearly the case in Ukraine where, despite Russia's overwhelming advantage in munitions and manpower, Putin's armies cannot match the fierce determination, courage, and indomitable spirit of Ukraine's smaller and significantly outgunned forces. Ukrainians know that if they lose, Ukraine will cease to exist. Russia's soldiers, meanwhile, have no idea why they're in Ukraine. First, Putin told them they were fighting Nazis. Then it was Satanists. Then Putin admitted he simply wants what Ukraine has and will proceed to take it even if it means killing every single Ukrainian to do so.
- No individual since NATO's creation has done more than Putin to strengthen the resolve, unity of purpose, and internal cohesion of NATO members. Putin has driven traditionally neutral countries such as Finland and Sweden to apply for membership in the alliance and can also take credit for NATO members agreeing, for the first time in decades, to increase their military spending to modernize their armies in response to the threat Russia represents to Europe and the post-WWII rules-based international order.
- Let us also not forget that it is Putin's actions that have led to the emergence of President Zelenskyy as Ukraine's outstanding wartime leader and the pre-eminent political figure in the world today.
- Putin's place in history, meanwhile, is already assured. He will long be remembered not as a mere murderer, liar, or thief (of which the world has no shortage) but as one of history's greatest losers or, as Ukrainians everywhere prefer to call him: “Хуйло”. He will be forever tainted and taunted as the man who single-handedly lost the war to what? ...to a country 1/28th the size of Russia, with a population barely one-quarter as large, possessing no nuclear weapons, no navy, no air force to speak of, no modern weapons beyond those provided to her by allies, led by a President who built an acting career playing an accidental President in a TV comedy

show, and defended by a volunteer army of warrior-poets who, like all Ukrainians everywhere, burst into song at every opportunity. Today, 98% of Ukrainians want nothing to do with Russia and have proclaimed loudly and clearly to the world: Ukraine is not Russia, has never been Russia and never will be Russia.

The Decline and Fall of the Russian Empire

- Putin's accomplishments are legion. He has turned Russia into a pariah state, precipitated the inevitable collapse of his own economy, and left Russia's army in tatters.
- Let's start with Putin's war aims. Evidently, Putin's messaging has failed to inspire large numbers of recruits to fight and die in Ukraine. The result has been a literal torrent, an absolute avalanche of military age men fleeing Russia, in every direction. Last year, some one million army-age citizens fled to Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Armenia, and Serbia plus a dozen other countries.
- These individuals are generally young, well educated, skilled professionals. It's unlikely that many will return any time soon. Their loss to Russia represents a triple blow: (1) they will be unavailable for military service ; (2) their absence will aggravate shortages in key sectors of the Russian economy, especially in IT and high tech; and (3) fewer children will be born in Russia. In fact, demographers have described the confluence of war, emigration, and plunging birth rates as the perfect demographic storm. The ongoing decline in Russia's population is now accelerating.
- Russia began its large-scale invasion one year ago with some 200,000 soldiers. It has since that time lost at least that many soldiers counting dead, injured, and missing in action. Were it not for Putin's massive mobilizations these past 6 months when upwards of half a million new recruits have been thrown into the fray, little would have been left of Russia's invading force.
- The recent mobilizations have only accelerated Russia's war losses. Putin's strategy has been reduced to trying to overwhelm Ukrainian forces with endless waves of human cannon fodder in frontline settlements like Soledar, Bakhmut and Vuhledar. Of course, for this strategy to make any sense at all, it is essential that Ukraine run out of ammunition before Russia runs out of soldiers. It's unlikely to be a very good bet. Although Ukraine's

losses in these battles have been and continue to be significant, Russia's are staggering, numbering in the many thousands per week.

- Russia's equipment losses this past year have likewise been massive. No army on the planet has been as badly mauled as Russia's has in active combat anywhere in the world since WWII.
- So badly has Russia's military performed that Putin has changed his top military commander 4 times in the space of a year.
- And so hollowed out from corruption, mismanagement, poor morale, and sheer incompetence have been Russia's armed forces, that within months of his invasion, Putin had to resort to begging for manpower, munitions and drones from a who's who of the world's worst dictatorships including Chechnya, North Korea, Syria, and Iran. That is what mighty Russia, with the 2nd largest army in the world, has been reduced to.
- The truth is, Russia is no more than a second-rate military power. Unfortunately, it also possesses a large nuclear arsenal which it uses to threaten WWIII every week or two.
- So demented is the taunting by Russian TV talk show hosts and the likes of former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev about the use of nuclear weapons, and so deranged are the allusions to reducing London or Washington or other western capitals to radioactive ash, that it is simply impossible to take such scare-mongering seriously.
- Besides, two of Russia's most important trading partners and/or allies, which also happen to be the two most populous countries in the world, and nuclear powers in their own right, namely, China and India, have repeatedly, and very publicly, rebuked Putin for his threats to use nuclear weapons. When friends, not enemies, castigate you for nuclear sabre-rattling, perhaps it's time to stop. Such public admonitions and remonstrations against the use of nuclear weapons, especially from friendly quarters, cannot but be a sobering reminder that simply shouting stupid things out loud does not render a dictator more fearsome to his enemies. Rather, it creates an impression of weakness and resignation to failure and defeat.
- Finally, a word about sanctions. They're not only working, they're working far better than expected despite Putin's repeated denials and boasts to the contrary. Sanctions are seriously weakening Russia's economy and are making it more difficult for Putin to continue waging war against Ukraine. Consider the following: (1) Russia's exports of gas have been cut in half and

there are no ready markets for what remains unsold. (2) Russia's revenues from oil exports are also plummeting because of much lower prices. Putin will be extremely lucky if 2023 oil and gas revenues reach one-half of last year's totals. (3) Much of Russia's domestic manufacturing capacity, which was not large to begin with, has been idled by a shortage of microchips. (4) And finally, Russia's weapons industry is now working around the clock to try and replace massive equipment losses, as well as the rockets, missiles, and millions of artillery and mortar shells expended thus far. Closely related, Russia's relatively large weapons export business has all but disappeared for two reasons (i) Russia needs the weapons itself and (ii) the abysmal performance to date of Russian military equipment has significantly dampened global demand.

Concluding Remarks

- It is said that wars ultimately end, not as a result of specific battles, but when it becomes clear that a country can no longer recruit enough soldiers and/or manufacture or acquire fresh supplies of ammunition and equipment as quickly as they are being used up or destroyed on the battlefield.
- Well, Russia is at that point already. Millions of Russian military age men want nothing to do with Putin's war. They have either already left Russia, or will do so as new mobilizations are announced. Putin, as well as the Wagner group, long ago ran out of volunteers and have been recruiting tens of thousands of convicted criminals to join the ranks of Russia's armed forces or mercenary groups. Russia's battlefield losses meanwhile have been extraordinary. Most of Russia's elite battalions have long since been liquidated by Ukraine and the vast majority of its soldiers are now relatively untrained recruits.
- Putin is now knocking on China's door for weapons and is recruiting new mercenaries anywhere he can find them since his policy of throwing bodies into a meatgrinder is not working out as well as he had hoped. That's what happens when military age men have access to the internet and realize how little Putin actually cares whether they live or die.
- Russia is losing this war because the people Putin is sending to die in Ukraine have no stake in his insane and vainglorious dream of empire. Ukrainians know precisely what is at stake for themselves, their families,

their communities, and their country. And so they fight on with valour, honour and conviction.

- It is because of these valiant men and women warriors that Ukraine is and shall forever remain unbreakable, unconquerable and indivisible.
- Слава Україні!