

## Reflections on World Politics: Ukraine - #12

John A. Bernbaum

May 14, 2022

### **Rebuilding Ukraine**

The brutality that Russian forces have unleashed in their attack on Ukraine has been a warning to the world about Putin and his cronies. As we watch the devastation unfold, we are witnesses to Russia's willingness to commit mass murder -- not only of Ukrainian soldiers, but also the elderly, women with children, and those with disabilities. Apartment buildings that house only those unable to flee are being hit with missiles. The vulnerable are defenseless.

In their efforts to destroy any evidence of Ukrainian culture, Russian forces are decimating art galleries, government buildings, and museums. In a report from Ukraine's Education Minister that was released a month ago, the damage to Ukrainian educational institutions was estimated to be \$5 billion. At that time, 91 educational institutions had been destroyed and 923 others were damaged -- numbers that multiply with each day of Russian aggression.

As the conflict has shifted to the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, the Ukrainian people have started to clean up the dismantled debris, repair the roads, and begin rebuilding apartments and offices. They are not waiting for foreign aid or a ceasefire; they are hard at work with an expectation that they are winning this battle and they will have a future free from Russian intervention.

**Signs of Hope:** Two remarkable examples of this resilience are evident in higher educational institutions that our foundation supports. The **Ukrainian Evangelical Theology Seminary** (UETS) in Kyiv has been hit with six Russian missiles that damaged the academic building, cafeteria and engineering systems. A team of volunteers recently arrived on campus and installed wood coverings over the shattered windows and doors to protect the facilities from the weather and looters. They are also working on repairing the roof and fixing the damaged water and heating systems.

In addition to repairing and rebuilding the campus facilities, seven mobile teams from the seminary are busily delivering food, power generators, hygiene items, and medicines to the vulnerable in Ukraine's capital and neighboring communities. They have also organized partnerships with churches pastored by their graduates in other cities hit hard by Russian artillery.

The seminary's leadership has also re-started their educational programs, both in-country and overseas. Their newest initiative is a satellite program in counseling in Central Asia. They also conduct online lessons for their resident students, which are both educational and therapeutic. UETS's president, Ivan Rusyn, said his campus has shrapnel scars from Russian

missiles, but “these scars will make us much stronger to continue serving the church and transforming society.” What courage and vision!

Another remarkable example is **Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU)** in Lviv, located in the western region of the country. This beautiful city, which is a center for democracy in Ukraine, has also been hit by Russian artillery, but continues to serve as a channel for aid from Ukraine’s NATO allies located near its border.

I have visited the UCU campus several times; it is an impressive educational institution. Bishop Borys Gudziak is one of the most gifted university presidents I have ever met, and his fearless leadership during the tumultuous days of Ukraine’s early independence was truly remarkable. With the support of its extensive Catholic donor base, including in the United States, UCU has generated a heroic resistance that includes sending more than 30 tons of food to 40 settlements, distributing vital medical equipment and supplies to hospitals and medical units, and providing housing for many IDPs (internally displaced persons) in various UCU locations. Students and staff have also issued a steady stream of news reports about Russian aggression and have translated 43 news articles from Ukrainian into English.

When discussing Ukraine’s struggle for independence from the Russian invaders, Bishop Gudziak noted that “in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the belief that there is no truth, where a dictatorship is subjective, suddenly, people give their lives for something. . . It made the whole world think there is something worth living for. . . I believe it will be a transformational moment for Ukraine, Europe, and the entire world.”

**Relief to Development:** No one knows how long the war will continue, although the Ukrainians I am in contact with are confident of their victory in this battle. Higher education institutions like these two schools, plus many others, are going to be of critical importance when the war winds down and the rebuilding process accelerates. The religious cooperation among people of faith in Ukraine that has been evident in this war is remarkable and will be a critical factor in the future development of the country. Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant communities will have important roles to play, unlike the marginalized religious institutions in Russia that did little to shape its governance after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The attack on democracy is not happening only in Ukraine. Democracy is under attack globally, and now more than ever we need to talk about how to protect it.

\*\*\*\*\*

These “Reflections” are circulated approximately once a week. If you want to have your name added to our mailing list, let me know ([johnbernbaum@gmail.com](mailto:johnbernbaum@gmail.com)); you can unsubscribe at any time. All of these “Reflections” can be found on Dr. Bernbaum’s website ([www.johnabernbaum.org](http://www.johnabernbaum.org)), along with many other resources.