

# Putin the War Criminal must be Punished



by Michael Curtis

**The Russian invasion of Ukraine** is a significant turning point in history, illustrating the dichotomy between countries in the world that are defending international principles, law and order and right of a people to choose its own destiny, and those countries supporting or tolerating autocratic and non-democratic systems who flaunt international law and human rights.

Most of the sane countries in the world have pronounced Russia guilty of an unprovoked attack on a sovereign European state and called for it to cease its use of force against Ukraine and to withdraw its troops immediately. They have recognized that the attack is a flagrant violation of international law, it is an assault on freedom and democracy, and politically and morally unacceptable. The sane world asserts that no action

by Ukraine or anyone can justify this aggression of Russian imperialism that refuses to allow another county to choose its own destiny. It will assert in the future that the reckless Russian President Vladimir Putin and his military commanders are guilty of war crimes and should be condemned and punished for them for the barbaric and indiscriminate shelling of cities and residential neighborhoods and murders of innocent civilians. No one can accept the view of Putin that a man who he does not name is the leader of "a gang of drug addicts and neo-Nazis."

The world has reacted to the Russian aggression in revealing ways. Many large-scale anti-war demonstrations have taken place around the world. Among the less consequential or momentous consequences are the following: the distinguished conductor Valery Gergiev, friend of Putin was fired as chief conductor in orchestra in Munich; the diva Anna Netrebko dismissed from the Bavarian State opera; Russian, and also Belarusian, athletes have been banned from the Paralympic winter games in Beijing; the international cat federation is not allowing cats bred in Russia to compete in their shows; the dish "chicken kiev" in restaurants is being renamed "chicken kyiv;" bars are not serving Russian vodka; oligarch Roman Abramovich is selling the Chelsea football club. Putin's honorary black belt has been revoked by the International Federation that governs the sport. No Russian national flags or anthems will be played at international events of the International Olympic committee.

More significantly, a historic shift, a watershed moment, is taking place in Europe. The EU will finance the purchase and delivery of arms and is planning to send more than half a billion dollar's worth of military aid to Ukraine. Almost all of European airspace is closed to Russian aircraft. Sweden, a non-NATO country, neutral in world wars, will send 5,000 anti-tank weapons to Ukraine. Germany, which at first, had refused to send weapons and prevented other countries from sending

their German made weapons to Ukraine, changed policy and agreed to send 1,000 anti-tank weapons and 500 Stinger anti-aircraft defense systems to Kyiv.

Most surprisingly and symbolically, Switzerland has suspended its historic neutrality, perhaps reinterpreting its principle of neutrality, in international affairs, which dates back to the Reformation. This neutrality, not to be involved in armed or political conflict between other states, is the oldest and most respected international policy of its kind, was upheld at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, and was said to be in the true interest of the whole of Europe, a valuable buffer zone and contributor to stability. The League of Nations was established in Geneva in 1920, and the European office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations is there. Switzerland is still neutral, not in NATO or the EU, and only joined the UN in 2002.

The Putin unprovoked military attack on a sovereign European state has led Switzerland to abandon neutrality for a moment. It decided to freeze the very considerable amount, estimated at \$11 billion, of Russian financial assets in the country, and stop Swiss banks from accepting new Russian money, and to bar entry to the country of some Russians. Switzerland joined members of the EU in freezing the assets of Putin, prime minister Mikhail V. Mishustin, foreign minister Sergey Lavrov and 367 other individuals. It also closed its airspace to Russian aircraft.

Accompanying this historic Swiss shift have been similar changes in other traditionally neutral countries. Sweden, in EU but not in NATO, announced it would send 5,000 anti-tank weapons and \$ 50 million in funding to Ukraine. Finland, also EU but not NATO, will send military supplies, assault rifles, cartridges, anti-tank weapons, and 70,000 combat ration packages to Ukraine.

It is encouraging that most of the world has recognized that

Russia is committing war crimes, barbaric and indiscriminate practices, terror against Ukraine and its civilian population and children, with heavy bombardment of residential areas in Kharkov and other cities. The majority has understood that a core principle of the UN Charter has been violated. On March 2, 2022, the UN General Assembly voted 141-5 with 35 abstentions in a non-binding resolution that rebuked Russia, called for an end to fighting and demanded Russian troops leave Ukraine, the five are Russia, Belarus, Syria, Eritrea, and North Korea. Thirty-five abstained, including China and India.

Three comments may be made on the UNGA vote. The first is that it is a timid commentary on Russian aggression. The resolution calls only for "peaceful resolution of the conflict through political dialogue, negotiations, mediation, and other peaceful means." The second is that there is no "conflict," only unilateral aggression by Putin who chose it. Putin must be held to account and punished for the killing of thousands of civilians and casualties.

The third factor is that the minority vote is an indication that Russian military action has not been condemned by some nations, either because of historic or trade ties, or to maintain what they conceive as a balance in international affairs, or because they are hostile to the United States and to democratic values. It is interesting to survey the rogues' gallery of the five countries. Besides Russia, they are Belarus, Syria, Eritrea, and North Korea. The abstainers included China, which is concerned with wheat import restrictions, and India which is connected with Russia as its largest arms supplier.

Among the abstainers are Pakistan which signed a new trade deal, importing wheat and buying natural gas from Russia. Serbia, an ally of Putin, has historic, political, and cultural ties. Its president Aleksandar Vucic said that Serbia will never join NATO and will maintain ties to Russia.

Brazil is led by Jair Bolsonaro who declined to condemn Putin's invasion, and said he is in solidarity with Russia which supplies fertilizer crucial for Brazil's large agribusiness sector, and declared that Ukraine had placed "the hope of the nation in the hands of a comedian." He is unaware that though the two parties share the same first name, in Russian and in Ukraine, they are dissimilar in every other way and are viewed differently. The "comedian" President Zelensky, with his T shirt and stubble face, who has survived three assassination attempts, has become the man of the moment, the wartime leader who has risen to the occasion, has inspired his nation, and transformed political opinion in Europe.

Disappointingly, Africa is divided: 25 countries voted for the UNGA resolution, but 24 countries, including South Africa, and the Central African Republic declined to join the UNGA resolution even though cluster bombs have been used against civilian areas. Sixteen countries abstained, 7 did not vote, and Eritrea voted against it.

For the United States there are four fundamental factors One is to impose more and deeper sanctions on Russia, and, in spite of problems, advocate a no-fly -zone in Ukraine. A second is to support Zelensky's search for EU membership. A third is to adjust foreign policy and international funding in the light of the refusal of countries to condemn Putin, and who are mostly implicitly anti-American.

The fourth and most important factor is to persuade the international community to call for a special legal tribunal to investigate, prosecute, and punish Putin for his aggression and for the bombing of Babyn Yar where mobile squads killed at least 34,000 Jews over a one-week period in September 1941. The memorial has become a symbol of horrific murder, of innocent people machine-gunned and murdered in other ways. It ensures that the tragedy is not lost in the memory hole of history. The war criminal Putin must be punished so that life

will win over death.