

## **The invasion of Ukraine is about us**

By Pavlo Bandriwsky

Steve Chapman in his editorial commentary in the Chicago Tribune on March 6, 2014 titled “The invasion of Ukraine is not about us” couldn’t have gotten it more wrong. While I typically agree with Mr. Chapman’s libertarian perspectives which tend to be grounded on philosophical principals, it is apparent that Mr. Chapman has missed several critical principals here and has overlooked important material historical facts in writing his opinion.

First let’s do a brief historical recap. In 1991 the Ukrainian people by an overwhelming margin, in excess of 90%, voted for independence from the Soviet Union and, in effect, independence from Russia itself. Three years later, in 1994 the Ukrainian government was in possession of the third largest nuclear arsenal in the world. In the interest of world peace and at the forceful urging of the American government and its allies, Ukraine agreed to eliminate all nuclear weapons from its territory. Its atomic arsenal, which was comprised of true weapons of mass destruction, not merely some rusty tanks, a few grenades and soviet machine guns, but in fact a nuclear arsenal which included Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, long and short range rockets to propel nuclear warheads, with the capability to devastate the planet Earth far beyond anything we have ever witnessed.

This nuclear arsenal was voluntarily given up by Ukraine, even though at the time the weapons were a firm insurance policy and rock-solid protection from foreign invasion by countries or despots with imperialistic designs. What would compel a sovereign nation to relinquish its weapons of mass destruction, making Ukraine the first and only nation in history to denuclearize its defense system? Simply put, the United States of America gave its word that we would support Ukraine should its territorial integrity, independence or sovereignty be threatened.

Twenty years ago Ukraine believed in world peace. Twenty years later Ukraine still believes in world peace; however, its territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty are under attack by virtue of the Russian invasion in Crimea. The Ukrainian interim government and its military forces have shown remarkable restraint in the face of brazen Putinesque Russian aggression. In spite of having Russian machine guns pointed at their heads and live rounds fired over them, Ukrainians have not evened the score. As per an intercepted phone call between Vladimir Putin and one of his commanders of the invading Russian force in

Crimea, Putin is stunned that the Ukrainians have not been provoked to retaliate, thus escalating the invasion to the level of a massacre.

Ukrainians would prefer not to have a “hot war” as they know quite well that too many lives of Ukrainians and others have been spilled on its rich, black soil to defend Ukraine over the centuries from foreign aggression. Having been an independent, sovereign country for over twenty two years, the longest period of time after suffering foreign imperialistic control for nearly 400 years, Ukraine seeks to have all appropriate steps exhausted rather than initiate another bloodbath.

Ukraine’s history predates Russia’s by centuries. Ukraine’s leaders in Kyiv, the capital Ukraine accepted the Christian faith in the year 988, back when Russia did not exist as a country. Over the years Ukraine’s aspirations to exist as a peaceful sovereign nation have been under systematic threats by Russia.

The last time Russia invaded Ukraine was in 1921. What did that assault lead to? It resulted in collectivization of private farms, a genocide known as Holodomor which resulted in 10 million innocent Ukrainian men, women and children forcibly starved to death, and mass executions and deportations. In essence, it brought about the most horrific annihilation of human life in modern times. There is no rational basis to expect that today the fate of the Ukrainians will endure any less suffering under the Putin regime.

In 1994, the Memorandum on Security Assurances (frequently referred to as the Budapest Memorandum) was signed by Ukraine, the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Russian Federation, whereby Ukraine agreed to voluntarily eliminate its nuclear weapons. In consideration, this international agreement committed all parties to recognize the independence, sovereignty and existing borders of Ukraine.

In the Budapest Memorandum America, Great Britain and Russia reaffirmed their obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, and confirmed that their weapons will not be used against Ukraine except in self-defense or otherwise in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

Indisputably, Ukraine did not attack Russia and there were no UN actions which called for a Russian invasion of Ukrainian territory. Russia did not seek any remedies for alleged grievances such as appeals to the United Nations or the International Court, knowing that its groundless claims would be summarily dismissed.

Instead, Russia patently violated these commitments through its illegal military invasion of Ukraine. As stated in a communique issued by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee dated February 28, “Russia’s foreign policy too often relies on the use of intimidation and fear to achieve its aims.” The statement goes on to say “The United States has a responsibility to see that these commitments are respected and to use all necessary diplomatic and, if required, punitive measures in concert with the European Union.”

In a sense, Vladimir Putin’s neck is in a metaphorical noose. It is incumbent on the United States and its allies to systematically tighten that noose through sanctions and international actions that will isolate him and his economy thereby forcing a withdrawal of his troops from Crimea back to the Russian naval base or to Russia.

Ukraine’s population chose independence and a democratic path based on western virtues, with guaranteed protection of the interests of minorities living on the territory of Ukraine by the Ukrainian government.

We know Putin’s and the Kremlin’s worst fear is that an independent democratic Ukraine will provide inspiration for the multitude of religious and ethnic minorities spread out in Russia’s nine time zones to foster their own democratic aspirations, breaking the bondage chain of Moscow.

So why is the invasion of Ukraine about us? First, because twenty years ago Ukrainians chose the same values as held dearly by Americans – liberty and world peace by relinquishing their nuclear arsenal. Second, because we gave our word and signed an obligation to support Ukraine should it be faced with external aggression. What are we to say to other countries when we are negotiating disarmament agreements now and in the future, “We were just kidding about the peace thing and we don’t intend to keep our word in the future?”

In essence, the integrity of the United States of America is on the line. The key question is: Do we stand up for our core values and get the world bully to back down or do we let America lose its leadership position in the world by not honoring our commitments? I believe, as do most Americans, that America is the great country it is because we support our values and do honor our word. Our allies around the world that share our values will stand with us. Apparently the shameful space of lies, broken promises and corrupt values is already occupied by Russia.

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\* NOTE TO EDITOR, NOT FOR PUBLICATION: The Tribune should be aware that the Ukrainian capital is spelled Kyiv and not Kiev. The proper name Kyiv is derived from the Ukrainian transliteration, and not Kiev which is derived from the Russian transliteration. To explain the matter more succinctly, the reason Kyiv should not be called Kiev is the same as why Beijing is not called Peking, Mumbai is not called Bombay, and Ho Chi Minh is not called Saigon. The old names have long since been retired and we must follow the lead of the countries involved. To clear up any doubt about this, consult the U.S. State Department web site at: <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/up/> where the proper usages are confirmed.