

Putin Delenda Est

Today, we stand at the crossroads of the unthinkable and the unspeakable....

On what was to be a day of remembering and reflecting upon horrors past – the 4th Saturday of November, set aside as always to commemorate the millions of innocent victims of the Holodomor...men, women and children, intentionally and mercilessly starved to death by Stalin and his henchmen in the years 1932 to 1933, we instead now focus all of our attention and all of our efforts on trying to prevent Stalin's colossal crimes of the past from being repeated or, even worse, of being exceeded beyond anyone's imagination by Stalin's 21st century successor as the unquestioned, unrivalled, strongman of Russia, dictator for life, Vladimir Putin.

As we all know, the dissolution of the USSR had a profound impact on Putin. He called it a "catastrophe, the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century".

But let's be clear what he meant. Putin has no desire to reconstitute the USSR. He was not, and is not, a communist. He is a liar, a thief, and a murderer but has no interest in building socialism in Russia, much less the rest of the world. And while he very much admires Stalin, and has learned a great deal from him about how to acquire power, exercise power, and maintain power, as well as how to crush dissent, and eliminate personal enemies as well as enemies of the state, what he's really interested in, in fact...what he is obsessed with, is empire... the Russian empire.

To understand Putin and what he is doing, it is first necessary to understand what drives him in addition to the raw acquisition of power and the desire to reconstitute the Russian empire.

There are four things, in particular, to take note of here:

- Putin is a Great Russian chauvinist. He believes that the Russian language, Russian culture, and Russian brand of Orthodox Christianity, not as practiced in Russia -- but as professed by Russia – mark a high point in western civilization. Indeed, he believes in Russian manifest destiny (as did the Tsars before him), specifically, that Russia is the third Rome and the defender and protector of orthodox Christian values and civilization the world over. These beliefs, incidentally, are widely shared by a great many, if not most, Russians who have been fed a continuous diet of such elitist concepts their entire lives. One need look no further than to many of the titans of Russian literature for reinforcement of these very same ideas, among them Nobel Prize winners Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Joseph Brodsky, or the great 20th century writer Mikhail Bulgakov, or even Pushkin himself.
- Putin loathes the west, western values, western democracy, western conceptions of freedom and the west's emphasis on the primacy of the individual over the state. Ukraine and Ukrainians have for centuries gravitated towards western values, chosen individualism over collectivism whenever free to do so, rejected authoritarianism and dictatorial rule at every turn, and have for centuries exhibited far more egalitarian and democratic preferences and tendencies than their Russian neighbours.
- Putin understands, as have all leaders of Russia since the very first Tsars, that Russia without Ukraine is just another country, while Russia with Ukraine is an empire.
- Putin is incapable of grasping how Russian imperialism, colonial exploitation, and relentless efforts at Russifying the captive nations and peoples comprising the Russian empire might find disfavour with the victims of such subjugation and linguistic, cultural, and ethnic, if not physical, genocide.

Is this description being unfair to Putin?

Well, let's see what he has said or authorized to be said in an official capacity on this subject in just the past year or two. Then we can examine how Putin's genocidal assault on Ukraine compares with what Stalin started, but did not finish, when he undertook to destroy the heart and soul of Ukraine in the Holodomor nearly a century ago.

In July 2021, Putin published a nearly 7000 word essay titled, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians." It was a remarkable piece of historical dissembling, amateurishly written, devoid of truth, and consisting almost entirely of the deceitful ramblings of a wannabe emperor intent on invading a neighbouring, fledgling democracy with aspirations of aligning itself politically, economically and, someday, defensively with the European west instead of with Russia's eastward looking Eurasian enterprise. Putin argued that Russians and Ukrainians were one nation, one people, bound by a common language, a common history, a common culture, a common religion, and a common set of values despite being

artificially separated by borders that should never have been created and that have no basis in the historical record or in historical necessity. He even went so far as to say that Ukraine is a historical aberration, that Ukrainians do not exist as a separate people and, in fact, have no right to exist.

Former Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, then published an open letter elaborating on Putin's comments in a hate-filled screed dismissing Ukrainians as non-entities, as a "people who do not have any stable self-identification", that fall "prey to rabid nationalistic forces", and that constitute "absolutely dependent people". Medvedev stated that "Ukrainianism is a fake. It never was and is not." He concluded that "It makes no sense for us to deal with these vassals."

These delusional ravings became even more extreme after Putin's invasion of Ukraine on February 24. In early April, one of Putin's key propagandists, Timofey Sergeytsev, published in Ria Novosti, Russia's official state press, what world renowned Professor of Eastern European History, Harvard's Timothy Snyder, has described as "Russia's genocide handbook". The article was titled, "What Should Russia Do With Ukraine?"

The entire article focused on the need for "denazification" and "de-Ukrainianization" of Ukraine. It made no distinction between them. Among other things, the article claimed or called for the following:

- Anyone taking up arms against Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a Nazi and must be "destroyed to the maximum on the battlefield." All Nazis "should be exemplarily and exponentially punished."
- "There must be total lustration."
- "...in addition to the top, a significant part of the masses, which are passive Nazis, accomplices of Nazism, are also guilty. Further denazification of this mass of the population consists in re-education, which is achieved by ideological repression (suppression) of Nazi attitudes and strict censorship."
- To be effective, "denazification can in no way be less than one generation, which must be born, grow up and reach maturity under the conditions of denazification."
- Nazism is often difficult to identify. It can be "disguised as a desire for "independence" and a "European" (Western, pro-American) path of "development" (in reality - to degradation)."
- The name "Ukraine" cannot be allowed to exist.
- "Denazification will inevitably also be a de-Ukrainianization - a rejection of the large-scale artificial inflation of the ethnic component of self-identification of the population of the territories of historical Little Russia and New Russia."
- "Ukrainianism is an artificial anti-Russian construction that does not have its own civilizational content, a subordinate element of an... alien civilization."
- "The "Catholic province" (Western Ukraine ...) is unlikely to become part of the pro-Russian territories... The haters of Russia will go there. The guarantee of the preservation of this residual Ukraine in a neutral state should be the threat of an immediate continuation of the military operation in case of non-compliance with the listed requirements. Perhaps this will require a permanent Russian military presence on its territory."
- "The denazification of Ukraine is at the same time its decolonization, which the population of Ukraine will have to understand as it begins to free itself from the intoxication, temptation and dependence of the so-called European choice."

Putin later went on to justify his invasion of Ukraine as being based not only on retaking what belongs to Russia, and on the need for denazification and de-Ukrainianization of Ukraine, but also on de-satanization of Ukraine. Devil worship in Ukraine apparently being so widespread as to be of immense concern to Putin. It seems that with every breath, Putin's stated reasons for invading Ukraine become more bizarre and more the product of a clearly deranged mind.

With this background, it is now possible to compare the key features of the Holodomor perpetrated by Stalin with the steps Putin is cold-bloodedly pursuing to de-Ukrainianize Ukraine:

- Stalin forcibly confiscated grain from Ukrainian peasants and thereby directly caused the deaths of millions by starvation. While Putin's armies also confiscated millions of tons of Ukrainian grain stored in grain elevators in territories occupied by Russian forces, this was driven more by the desire for foreign currency to blunt the effect of economic sanctions, than any realistic expectation on Putin's part of starving Ukrainians to death *en masse*. Instead, Putin's preferred means of murdering Ukrainians on an industrial scale has consisted of the targeted carpet bombing of civilian infrastructure including countless hospitals, schools, apartment buildings, individual residences, government offices, shopping centres and railway stations combined with the wholesale destruction

of public utility infrastructure to deny something now approaching the entire remaining Ukrainian population of electricity, heating, clean water, and all means of communication at the very onset of winter.

- Stalin closed Ukraine's borders so that peasants could not escape the artificial famine. He instituted a system of internal passports to prevent people from the countryside escaping to the cities in search of food. And he closed Ukrainian ports to foreign ships loaded with food that might have spared the deaths of millions, while Stalin ensured that every last grain of wheat confiscated at gunpoint from Ukrainian farmers was exported for hard currency to finance industrialization. Stalin also exiled to distant parts of the Soviet Union hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian kulaks, as well members of the intelligentsia and clergy as part of a calculated process of decapitating the leadership of the Ukrainian nation. Many hundreds of thousands more ended up in Siberian hard labour camps never to return to their homes again. Putin's armies, meanwhile, regularly mine open fields, roads, and other escape routes and use roadside checkpoints to stop civilians from leaving occupied cities while they are being bombed into oblivion. People stopped in this way are then sent to filtration camps to determine whether they should be executed, imprisoned, kept as prisoners for later exchange, or deported to distant parts of Russia for re-education and Russification. Over a million Ukrainian citizens, including hundreds of thousands of children have disappeared in this way from major Ukrainian cities since the war began. People trying to flee or avoid Russian checkpoints are regularly shot and killed.
- After the Holodomor had ended, Stalin transferred hundreds of thousands of Russian peasant families from less fertile Russian lands to the depopulated villages of Ukraine's black earth zone (some of the richest and most productive farmland in the world) to accomplish two ends: (1) to maintain agricultural production after the destruction of a broad cross-section of the Ukrainian peasantry and (2) to accelerate the process of Russifying Ukraine by way of Russian colonization. Putin has followed a similar process in Crimea and has signalled that once Mariupol and various other completely destroyed and de-populated Ukrainian cities that were recently annexed by Russia are rebuilt, they will be resettled by Russians from elsewhere in the Russian Federation.
- As noted above, Stalin did his best to liquidate the entire Ukrainian intelligentsia in the 1930s and then began to Russify the next generation of Ukrainians by restricting the language of learning to Russian, adopting the Russian curriculum in Ukrainian schools and sending thousands of Russian teachers to take over the educational system in Ukraine. Putin has followed a very similar process in every Ukrainian village, town and city annexed by Russia in 2014 as well as in the newly-occupied parts of Ukraine's four eastern and southern-most oblasts in just the past few months. The Ukrainian language has been banned in schools, Ukrainian textbooks have been burned and replaced with Russian textbooks and the Russian curriculum, and Russian teachers have been brought in by the thousands at three to four times their former pay scale to take over the process of re-educating Ukrainian children to become Russians.
- Finally, while Stalin murdered Ukrainians *en masse* by starving them to death in the Holodomor or working them to death in concentration camps, Putin's preferred method is to take human life by bombing civilian infrastructure on a gargantuan scale. Putin's preferred instruments of death are cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, Iranian kamikaze drones, artillery shelling, and the liberal use of illegal and inhumane methods of civilian bombardment including hyperbaric weapons, phosphorous bombs and cluster bombs, all of which serve one purpose alone – to render survival by humans impossible.

To date, the damage caused to Ukraine's physical infrastructure by Russian bombing and shelling has likely surpassed half a trillion \$USD. Worse still, something approaching one half of Ukraine's entire population has been physically displaced by the war. Although accurate estimates are very difficult to come by in real time, it is likely that over 8 and possibly 9 million Ukrainians, largely women and children, as well as many seniors, have left the country in search of temporary if not permanent safe harbour. Easily that many and quite likely closer to 9 to 11 million people have been internally displaced, especially as Russia intensifies its efforts to leave the entire country without access to heating, power, fresh water or access to electronic communications.

The most frightening aspect of Putin's genocidal efforts to destroy all traces of the Ukrainian language, the Ukrainian people, and the Ukrainian nation is that his chosen means of achieving this end will eventually have their intended effect, regardless of the skill and resourcefulness of the Ukrainian army, and regardless of the bravery and will to survive of the Ukrainian people, unless Ukraine's western allies significantly step up the shipments and deliveries of needed military equipment, ammunition and financial support to Ukraine.

Ukrainians understand that this is their do or die moment. Either Putin and his murderous armies are vanquished, or Ukraine will perish. There is no middle ground, no room for a negotiated settlement, with a country intent on Ukraine's destruction while all Ukraine and Ukrainians have ever asked for is to be left alone to live in peace.

That being said, Ukraine still has reason to hope.

Although the better part of Ukrainian history is a record of foreign occupation by multiple regional powers and larger empires, sometimes simultaneously over different parts of the country, Ukraine has never disappeared and, as its national anthem proclaims, it has not perished. Indeed, Ukraine and its people see themselves as ultimately invincible: long-suffering, but indestructible. I believe they are right.

It would be to my eternal shame if I did not close these remarks with words of the deepest and profoundest gratitude to all of the countries of the western world who have stepped up to help Ukraine in its time of existential need. The U.S., Canada, the U.K., and members of the European Union have all been of tremendous assistance to Ukraine in supplying it with the means to defend itself against Russian aggression. Sometimes not soon enough, and sometimes not quite enough to meet Ukraine's needs, but always there.

Special thanks, however, must be extended to Ukraine's western neighbours – Poland, Moldova, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania – for opening their hearts to millions of penniless, desperate, and homeless Ukrainian families. These countries could have turned their backs on these displaced persons and refugees, but chose to do the opposite. They showed generosity, kindness, and basic human decency to Ukrainians appearing on their doorstep seeking food, clothing, shelter and refuge. After Ukraine brings the war to an end on her terms, God will reward these countries for their kindness, while Ukraine pursues a just outcome against those who sought to destroy it.

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