

A Peace that Dares Not Speak its Name



FIGURE 1 IMAGE CREDIT, SHUTTERSTOCK

By Dr. John Bruni
Founder & CEO
SAGE International
Host of the [STRATEGIKON](#) &
[The Focus](#) Podcasts

&

CDRE Patrick Tyrrell OBE RN (Ret'd)
Chair of the SAGE International Advisory Board

In a Romano-Christian world, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse represented the quintessence of evil and a harbinger of the end of the world as we know it. The Four: Death, Famine, War and Conquest, are headline news today, and their manifestation is growing daily. Russia's attack on Ukraine has unleashed a level of violence unprecedented in Europe over the last 75 years. The information war waged by Russia against its populace and the West is creating instabilities within the different societies, which can lead to misrepresentations, misunderstandings, uncertainties and, unless we in the West remain firm, World War III.



As we know it, world order was based upon the work done by the victorious allies after World War II. Based on the United Nations and the Rule of Law, the optimistic view was that all problems would, in future, be solved through international bodies following established laws and procedures; wars should be a thing of the past. Unfortunately, over the past thirty years, following the end of the Cold War, this has been more of an aspiration than a fact: the ruling on China's claim to maritime territoriality in the South China Sea was just one of the rulings ignored by a powerful nation. The invasion of an independent country by Russia is yet another breach of the rules of international engagement.

As we journey into the fourth month of the Russo-Ukrainian War, one thing is becoming clear: the longer this war is allowed to continue, the worse it will be for all concerned. Furthermore, it is easy to get carried away by focusing on the heroic Ukrainian defenders fighting for their country or on the comical incompetence demonstrated by Putin and his high command in prosecuting their invasion of Ukraine. There is, however, a subplot to this drama that should have us all very, very concerned.

COVID-19 has transformed the world in disruptive and tragic ways. The human toll of the pandemic was and continues to be felt, even though we've concluded that we must live with this awful disease. There are parts of the world that are doing well in managing its worst effects and parts that have not. What COVID-19 has done is radically change the way we live: altering the nature of work, trade, and commerce. Global supply chains that formed the basis of international trade and wealth since the 1990s are now straining to keep imports and exports moving. The old notion of global markets paving the way toward recovery and never-ending growth, the utopian vision of many neo-Liberal economists, is waning. Global supply chains relied on people moving goods between countries 'just in time'. But with fewer workers manning docks, timely supply and distribution of goods are becoming problematic. For some commentators, the era of Globalisation appears to be over. Whether an alternative economic model will take its place is unknown, but the transformation, when it does take place, will be as disruptive to our lives as the advent of COVID-19. The fact that Russian President Vladimir Putin decided to launch his 'special military operation' against Ukraine during a time of international fragility may work out to be his most brilliant strategic manoeuvre in a war that has hardly covered the Russian state in glory.

Whether Putin understood the West's reaction to his invasion or how far-reaching international economic sanctions against Russia would go will be for historians to pick over. Suffice to say, Russia is under one of the harshest sanctions regimes ever placed on a modern state. But in a supreme twist of irony, the sanctions have yet to have affected Russia's behaviour in Ukraine. The Russian Army is running out of components to make its weapons work and running out of weapons, but as the larger country, Russia can still prosecute its war – even at a suboptimal pace. The recent Russian successes in Mariupol and the one they might be on the cusp of in Severodonetsk may give Putin and his General Staff hope that they can weather the economic storm and grind on to victory.



The West and Ukraine are in different positions.

While Putin has the advantage of single-mindedly doubling down on a flawed strategy until it works, Ukraine is not so fortunate. First, we must remember that while intelligence estimates of Russian losses are easy to come by in the media, there's been little said publicly about Ukrainian losses. These losses must be hurting Kyiv at some fundamental level. Historically speaking, in a war of attrition, the smaller side often comes out worse for wear. And the longer this war goes on, the more diplomatic problems will compound over time. For instance, NATO unity today does not guarantee NATO unity 6-months from now. Why? For Europe, it's all about energy. The web of West European dependence on cheap Russian oil and gas is hard to break. Sure, we can hope that US tankers will load up and sail across the Atlantic to alleviate potential energy shortfalls in Europe as the EU attempts to trade energy dependence on Russia for energy dependence on the US. Still, it is yet to be demonstrated that the Biden administration can ramp up shipping capacity to replace Russian energy supply delivered through Russian pipelines. What effect an occasional surfacing Russian submarine next to an American flagged LNG tanker will have on European supply is anyone's guess. Still, such a situation may well force Biden to escalate its crisis with Russia or back down. Any disruption or shortfall in Western Europe's energy supply will have adverse economic effects as European industry and internal transport will degrade, unable to be adequately fuelled. And then there's Europe's reliance on power-hungry air conditioning. When people become excessively hot in summer and cold in winter and can't rely on air conditioning and heating to keep themselves comfortable through a far more variable climate, people will get angry and take to the streets.

But far more catastrophic will be the issue of food security.

The Russian war on Ukraine has meant that things that were once taken for granted, the supply of affordable food, will come to the fore. The international sanctions on Russia have indicated that it is now more difficult for Russia, a prominent international grain and fertiliser supplier, to get its products to market. Ukraine is Europe's 'breadbasket' and an internationally significant supplier of global grain and cooking oil. The war has disrupted Ukrainian agricultural production and internal transportation. Without Russian & Ukrainian grain, cooking oil and fertiliser, especially potash, making their way to countries with marginal agricultural capacities, people in parts of Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East may find themselves on the receiving end of the world's first global famine.

When the existential threat of starvation faces people, they will likely leave their countries searching for richer pickings among the advanced economies. The refugee flows can only be imagined under this scenario, and they will be completely unmanageable. Moreover, they will put the more prosperous Western nations under increased pressure. In this world, international borders will have no meaning, and while chaotic, this could lead to a war between the global North and South where every person will have to fight for themselves, either to retain what they have or to



take what isn't protected. Stark though this scenario is, this is the background that faces us if we do not attempt a peace settlement between Russia and Ukraine. The only thing that could avert this worst-case scenario is an immediate Russo-Ukrainian ceasefire and the rapid reintegration of the Russian and Ukrainian economies back into what is left of the international community.

The *Economist* magazine has looked at the Western nations and divided them into two broad camps: the *Justice* camp and the *Peace* camp. In the former group, the predominant driving force is not to let Russia and Vladimir Putin get away with this significant breach of International Law. In contrast, the *Peace* camp wants peace at any price, even at the expense of rewarding Russia with a large slice of territory formerly within the legal borders of Ukraine. Many nations within this group are keen to restart normal relations with Putin based on trade and national interests – true inheritors of the Palmerstonian doctrine^[1] to recover supplies of commodities such as oil and gas and renew commercial activities and return to a status quo ante. This demonstrates the *Peace* camp's real reason for seeking an end to the hostilities.

This allows the *Peace* camp to return to a more stable world, and if we can ensure Putin does not go unpunished, the *Justice* camp will have some element of satisfaction.

If Putin retains power in Moscow after the Russo-Ukraine War ends, there'll be no war crimes trial in The Hague. And we should not entertain petty thoughts of vengeance, for it was this mistake last century after World War I that led to the rise of Hitler in defeated Germany and the violent and complete overturning of the international order. But as part of any reparations package, the Russians would have to accept Ukrainian membership in both the EU and NATO. The Ukrainians, for their part, might have to accept the permanent Russian occupation and annexation of occupied territory. Neither Russia nor Ukraine would get one hundred per cent of what they wanted. Still, Russia cannot be allowed to fester on the sidelines, and the country's economy is too important to destroy just because Vladimir Putin is in power. A UN-brokered set of peace talks between Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky would have to seal this deal. Blue helmets would patrol a recognised demilitarised zone separating Russian from Ukrainian forces.

Talking about peace while two sides are still shooting at each other will not be popular. Especially when one side, Russia, is the aggressor.

These sorts of contests are polarising by their very nature. While we may all want to see the end of Putin's regime, has anyone thought through the consequences of a Russia in political chaos following Putin's untimely death or removal from office? People have speculated that it'll be like the chaos Russia experienced during the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. But like with most false historical analogies that have dogged the Russo-Ukrainian War to date, the ramifications of Putin's absence from Moscow might well be far worse than expected. It would be better to see an orderly transition of political power in the Kremlin rather than a complete collapse of



Moscow's authority over the vast expanse of Russia – its underpopulated resource-rich regions and vast nuclear weapons stockpile.

One of the bastions of the post-war regulatory framework was the guarantee exercised by the UN Security Council (UNSC). This very body is ham-strung in this situation because of the five permanent members, two Russia and China, will refuse to countenance anything against the aggressive ambitions of Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin. Yet, without agreement between the UNSC five, no resolution over Ukraine or anything else of global importance can stick. President Zelensky has admitted that the war can only end with a negotiated peace treaty which the Ukrainians would want to be guaranteed by the West. The West needs to step up to the plate to ensure that the realities of the war are fully understood both in Russia and China. It will take months rather than days to move from the battlefields of the Donbas to the halls of Geneva; if the West falters, the future will go to the authoritarian, corrupt and autocratic. We owe our children better than that!

Endnotes

[1] We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow. Speech, House of Commons, 1 March 1848

**Views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of
SAGE International**

