

PM article on Ukraine: 6 March 2022

We must do more for Ukraine

Over the last week, in response to the gut-wrenching scenes in Ukraine, Western unity has been impressive and heartening. I know from my near-daily conversations with President Zelenskyy that this has provided Ukrainians with some comfort in their hour of need.

Never in my life have I seen an international crisis where the dividing line between right and wrong has been so stark, as the Russian war machine unleashes its fury on a proud democracy. Russia's reckless attack on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant reminds us just how grave the stakes are for everyone. Millions of people are fleeing from the violence, towards an uncertain future.

President Biden has displayed great leadership, consulting and convening allies, exposing the lie that America's commitment to Europe is somehow diminished. The European Union has undertaken a remarkable effort to align behind severe sanctions on Russia. Dozens of European countries are now sending defensive equipment to Ukraine's armed forces. But have we done enough for Ukraine? The honest answer is no.

Putin's act of aggression must fail and be seen to fail. We must not allow anyone in the Kremlin to get away with misrepresenting our intentions to find post-facto justification for their war of choice. This is not a NATO conflict and it will not become one. No ally has sent combat troops to Ukraine. We have no hostility towards the Russian people and we have no desire to impugn a great nation, a world power and a founding member of the United Nations. We despair of the decision to send young innocent Russians into a bloody and futile war.

The truth is that Ukraine had no serious prospect of NATO membership in the near future – and we were ready to respond to Russia's stated security concerns through negotiation. I and many other Western leaders have spoken to President Putin to understand his perspective. Mr Putin to understand his perspective. The United Kingdom even sent emissaries to Moscow before Russia's invasion to deal directly with Defence Minister Gen. Sergei Shoigu and the chief of the general staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, who are spearheading this awful campaign.

It was now clear diplomacy never had a chance. But it is precisely because of our respect for Russia that we find the actions of the Putin regime so unconscionable. He is attempting the destruction of the very foundation of international relations and the United Nations Charter: the right of nations to decide their own future free from aggression and fear of invasion. His assault on Ukraine began with a confected pretext and a flagrant violation of international law. Now it is sinking further into a sordid campaign of war crimes and unthinkable violence against civilians.

Though there can be no comparison with the assault on Ukraine, we in Britain know something of President Putin's ruthlessness. Four years ago, we endured the outcome of his order to his operatives to use chemical weapons to assassinate people in Salisbury in 2018 – and our allies rallied to our side. In our defence and foreign policy review, published a year ago, we warned that Russia remained the most acute security threat and we announced the biggest increase in defence spending since the end of the Cold War.

We also warned that the world was changing for the worse, entering into a period of competition in which authoritarian states would test the mettle of the West in every domain. Last year's agreement between Britain, America and Australia to build nuclear submarines for the Australian navy demonstrated our shared resolve to meet these challenges in the Indo-Pacific. But we must restore effective deterrence in Europe where, for too long, the very success of NATO and of America's security guarantee has bred complacency.

We have failed to learn the lessons of Russian behaviour that have led to this point. No one can say we were not warned: we saw what Russia did in Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014 and even on the streets of the British city of Salisbury. And I know from speaking to my counterparts on recent visits to Poland and Estonia just how acutely they feel the threat.

It is no longer enough to express warm platitudes about the rules-based international order. We are going to have to actively defend it against a sustained attempt to rewrite the rules by force and other tools such as economic coercion. What happens in Europe will have profound implications worldwide.

We are pleased to see more nations now beginning to grasp this hard reality. In January, the UK was among a handful of European countries sending defensive aid to Ukraine. Now, more than 25 countries are part of that effort. Defence spending is going up, though it will take time for that to translate into capability.

These are welcome developments, but not going to be enough on their own to save Ukraine or keep the flame of freedom alive. Russia has overbearing force and apparently no regard for the laws of war. We need to prepare now for even darker days ahead.

So must begin a six-point plan for Ukraine, starting today.

First, we must mobilise an international humanitarian coalition. On Monday I will meet the leaders of Canada and the Netherlands in London to talk about creating the widest possible coalition to expose the outrages that are taking place in Ukraine. On Tuesday, I will host the leaders of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic, now on the frontline of a refugee crisis. The UK has 1,000 troops on standby for humanitarian operations on top of £220 million of aid. We must all work together to establish an immediate ceasefire and allow civilians safe passage, food and medical supplies.

Second, we must do more to help Ukraine to defend itself. More and more nations are willing to provide defensive equipment. We must act quickly to

coordinate our efforts to support the legitimate government of Ukraine.

Third, we must maximise the economic pressure on Putin's regime. We must go further on economic sanctions, expelling every Russian bank from SWIFT. We must go after the oligarchs, as the UK is doing – sanctioning over 300 elites and entities including Putin himself and giving our law enforcement agencies unprecedented powers to peel back the façade of dirty Russian money in London. But these measures will be insufficient unless Europe begins to wean itself off the Russian oil and gas that bankrolls Putin's war machine.

Fourth, no matter how long it takes, we must prevent any creeping normalisation of what Russia does in Ukraine. The lesson from Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and seizure of Crimea in 2014 is that accepting the results of Russian aggression merely encourages more aggression. We cannot allow the Kremlin to bite off chunks of an independent country and inflict immense human suffering and then be allowed to creep back into the fold.

Fifth, we should always be open to diplomacy and de-escalation, provided that the legitimate government of Ukraine has full agency in any potential settlement. There can be no new Yalta decided over the heads of the people of Ukraine by external powers.

Sixth, we must act now to strengthen Euro-Atlantic security. This includes bolstering NATO's eastern flank but also supporting non-NATO European countries that are subject to the same Kremlin playbook, such as Moldova, Georgia and the nations of the Western Balkans. And those who participate or enable Russian aggression, such as Belarus, will be subject to maximum sanctions.

Ukrainians have bravely defended their country. It is their valour that has United the international community. We can't let them down.