
Clash of Civilisations: A World at War With Putin's Regime



By [Ludo Van der Heyden](#) , INSEAD

To defend democracy, the civilised world needs to stand with Ukraine in securing victory and continue to engage and pressure Russia to reform itself.

Ukrainians are not afraid to die. I hear it from my students in the Ukraine Corporate Governance Academy (UCGA), who are preparing to build a better Ukraine. Some of these current and future board members take days off from fighting to attend governance classes online. Some show up in military fatigues. They are everyday heroes paying an enormous price, united and determined to defend their country and see it emerge as a strong, democratic nation. Victory should be theirs. They deserve our full support.

The democratic world watched Russia develop into the “Wild West” of the 90’s. We should not miss this second opportunity Putin is offering us to stop the monstrous communist offspring that is Putinism. Russia needs to improve how it governs itself and the civilised world must support this change.

Putin's speech declaring a "special military operation" in Ukraine signalled yet another ruthless attempt to eliminate the nation's body and soul. In the last century alone, Ukraine suffered the Bolsheviks (in 1921), Stalin's Great Famine ("Holodomor", in 1932-1933), and Germany's "Drang nach Osten" (in World War II). Its ambition to be an autonomous nation is fuelling its current resistance and will lead to victory, with the support of the civilised world.

Putin's invasion has failed spectacularly. Ukraine, against all odds, has prevailed. The US and the UK have stuck to their commitments under the 1994 Budapest Memoranda that guaranteed Ukraine's territorial integrity. They have committed not only with words, but with plenty of weaponry. Europe has been remarkably united in supporting Ukraine too, albeit with less weaponry and less combative terms. Hopefully the Ukrainian trident will soon replace the Soviet hammer and sickle on the shield of the Motherland Monument in Kyiv.

But a bitter, cynical and ruthless Putin is doubling and tripling down. There seems to be no humanity left in the man and his regime. His wrath has now turned against his generals and his own countrymen, sent to die due to his recklessness and ineptitude. In a desperate move, Putin held **KGB-style referendums** to boast a fake victory. With this, he grants himself the right to use nuclear weapons, including on the "liberated territories." We have never been closer to Armageddon.

A welcome chance to correct errors of the past

Putin's display of aggression towards Ukraine, his own country and the world is growing by the day. No nation should accept ruthless assaults and annexations. **Turkey's Erdogan** and **India's Modi** have now told Putin he needs to negotiate his way out. They have demonstrated that they are on the side of the civilised and are playing their role in engaging Putin's regime. China's Xi should formally join their ranks.

War should not be rewarded. The civilised world came down too soft on Russia after the 2014 annexation of Crimea. It didn't help that Trump and Europe considered Russia a stable trading partner. The United Nations could also have done more to try Putin and his regime for Russia's atrocities in Chechnya, Syria and elsewhere. It did not, and here we are.

As Winston Churchill said while forming the UN after WWII, "Never let a good crisis go to waste". Now is the time to correct these errors.

Putin rattles that Russia is under threat and that legitimate assistance to Ukraine is a direct attack on its sovereignty. This is, of course, bull of the purest kind. Russia is not under any threat of attacks from NATO, Ukraine, or anyone else. Ukrainians are defending themselves to survive as a nation.

But Putin and the toxic ideology of Putinism are under threat. The battle is against Putin's tyranny, not against Russia, which must return to the community of civilised nations. We need to pressure and engage Russia to reform itself. It has a lot to offer – but not this.

The civilised world cannot stop now

UN experts have confirmed that Putin's soldiers committed war crimes, including rape, torture, and execution of Ukrainian women, men and children, in violation of the Geneva Conventions. These atrocities leave the civilised world no other choice than a repeat of the Nuremberg trials, presumably at The Hague. That will signal the end of Putin, and victory for a civilised world order.

Europe has again learnt a great lesson: economics, social matters and politics are closely interconnected. It was hoped that commerce with Russia would bring it closer to Europe and help it develop. Unfortunately, in typical Russian fashion, the leaders benefited and turned rogue, with no respect for those who made them rich. This is why the civilised world cannot stop sanctions until Russia's regime changes. Every statue of justice has a balance and a sword. Injustice needs to be sanctioned.

One institution that could play a greater role is the UN. It did well to **condemn the aggression at the General Assembly**. But where are its peacekeepers and observers to document the war in objective terms? Putin cannot be allowed to unfairly block resolutions intended to limit Russia's aggression when it is the main threat to world security. The UN needs to rapidly reform from a structure chosen by and for the winners of WWII to one for the world and for bolstering peace and the rule of law.

The Council of Europe is another institution that needs to make more noise. If its mission is to extend human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, why do we not hear more from its 46 member states? Why are they not pleading Putin and his clique to abandon their folly and return to the flock? The Council **tolerated Russia for too long** as a member in violation of its statutes. This only strengthened Putin's belief in the weakness of Europe. It

could have done more to bring the Russian and Ukrainian leaders to the negotiating table after 2014.

But the people who can most effectively stop Putinism are the Russians themselves, with the support of the global community's arsenal of sticks and carrots. Russians are ultimately responsible for their government, and they are the ones who can bring down the regime. The international community must help them understand why this war is wrong. The lines of young draftees leaving Russia and becoming refugees attest that they already know this. One does not leave one's country lightly, nor without cause.

We should welcome Russians, just as we welcomed others fleeing dictatorship in their country. At some point the Russian people will want a reset. We should be ready for this and communicate a vision of a future world that includes Russia, where its citizens are better off. Their country has gone dark. We must help them bring back the light.

The big price: The birth of a new Ukraine

The world, now in crisis, belongs to all of us; we are all responsible for it. The Ukrainian people are fighting for their survival and for a brighter future. We should help protect and ensure this in every way we can.

All nations deserve an equal opportunity to a better future, including Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. Wars are times of major transformation, as we saw in Japan and Germany after WWII. Our hope is that we will witness the same for a new Ukraine. And a new Russia.

The democratic world will help if Ukraine fully commits to being a true democracy. A military victory for Ukraine is the first step toward becoming its own state, continuing along the path it has travelled since the Maidan Revolution. It will also mark a victory for democracy, which is increasingly under threat.

Find article at

<https://knowledge.insead.edu/strategy/clash-civilisations-world-war-putins-regime>

About the author(s)

Ludo Van der Heyden is the INSEAD Chaired Professor of Corporate Governance and Emeritus Professor of Technology and Operations Management. He is the founder of the INSEAD Corporate Governance Centre.