

“Light will win over darkness”



Source: The Guardian

Democratic values and the humanistic spirit are indestructible, but the price we are paying for our general complacency is very, very high. May we never take them for granted again.

[The commentary below reflects strictly my own personal views]

The events of the last few weeks undoubtedly have shaken all of us to the core. Probably none of us have slept well in days. I stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and condemn in the strongest possible terms the unprovoked and indefensible actions by the Russian military against a peaceful neighboring country. The cruel and indiscriminate attacks against civilians must cease immediately.

War is hell: The apocalyptic images of destruction, with millions of people fleeing for their lives, resurrect memories of the violence and crimes we had hoped never to see again in Europe. We already knew that peace is an elusive treasure in most parts of the world. The Kremlin's saber rattling of employing nuclear weapons is sheer madness.

Like most people, I feel a mixture of shock, grief, outrage, and plain fear. All those who coddled Putin and his cronies, who looked the other way, motivated by opportunistic self-interest, bear responsibility for what he has now wrought.

But we cannot let emotion overwhelm us. The question is – what can we do?

I am sure in recent days we have all turned our thoughts to other mass atrocities, like the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, where members of the ethnic Hutu majority slaughtered 800,000 people, most belonging to the Tutsi minority; the mass executions of 8,000 Muslim boys and men in Srebrenica (Bosnia) in 1995; as well as the Chinese government's current efforts to wipe out its minority Uighur community in the most cruel way. Unfortunately, there are many other such examples where the world mainly stood by and did not act – in Darfur, Syria, Yemen, the list goes on. I think back to World War II, to the massacres of Babyn Yar, when German Nazi forces in two days executed almost 34,000 Ukrainian Jews; and Katyn, where Soviet authorities ordered the execution of nearly 22,000 Polish officers; and, of course, very much to Hungary, where in 1944 the country's Jewish population faced a similar barbarity. 500,000 of the country's Jewish citizens were deported and murdered in a period of just six months. Repeated pleas to bomb the railways lines to Auschwitz fell on deaf ears.

Words fail to express the horror. And yet, in this darkest hour, when any hope seemed elusive, a young Swedish businessman left behind his comfortable life in Stockholm to jump right into the fray. Raoul Wallenberg must have felt desperate, discouraged and afraid countless time, and yet he followed an almost reflexive impulse to come to the aid of his fellow human beings. With his humanistic spirit, fierce determination, and extraordinary courage – both physical and moral - Wallenberg came to represent what is best in us. Most importantly, he demonstrated the power of hope and possibility: that rescue *can* indeed be attained, that one person *can* make a difference.

Even though all our human ideals seem lost and buried under the brutal onslaught of Russia's war machine, it is evident that Wallenberg's legacy shines brightly in the compassion and hands-on assistance offered by millions of people to Ukrainian refugees, as well as those who somehow find the courage to defend their homeland, to shout down the invaders, or to protest in the streets of Moscow and St. Petersburg, knowing full well what may follow. What we need to do most urgently right now is what these individuals have already started - to unleash an avalanche of resistance, to overwhelm the forces of repression with sheer numbers, as Alexey Navalny, in his appeal from prison, has asked everyone to do, especially in Russia. Inaction and paralysis are our greatest enemies. They are not easy to overcome, but we are not helpless or without power.

At the same time, we must avail ourselves of every possibility of de-escalation and negotiation, however fruitless they may appear at the moment. The West is obviously far from blameless in precipitating the current crisis. Mr. Putin has shown himself to be a master of exploiting our internal divisions, seemingly boundless greed, and often mindboggling hypocrisy. Nevertheless whatever Mr. Putin's real or (mostly) imagined grievances may be: His mask of a ruthless but "rational" actor has irrevocably slipped. In a bitter irony of fate, he will find that in his thirst for power, he has most likely brought about the one thing he feared most: His own personal downfall and destruction, as well as that of his regime. In cold defiance, he is trying to reduce a people and a culture, and potentially all of us, to ashes. But life, beauty and culture will rise again. You can destroy buildings and human beings, but you cannot kill an idea. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has it right: Light will eventually win over darkness.

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Susanne Berger

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sberger37@hotmail.com