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Stopping Putin, witnessing miracles and saving children

Insights from the Yalta European Strategy Conference in Kyiv



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COMMENTARY

By Gary Marx

Monday, September 30, 2024

OPINION:

In mid-September, I was blessed to travel to Kyiv with a delegation to participate in the Yalta European Strategy conference alongside former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, former Sen. Rob Portman, retired Army Gen. Wesley Clark, former Ambassador John Herbst, former Ambassador Kurt Volker and retired Army Gen. David Petraeus, to name a few.

I last traveled to Kyiv for Ukraine's National Prayer Breakfast in June, where I was struck by the spiritual courage of Ukrainian evangelicals as they suffered under Russia's unprovoked attack on their country. At the conference, I came away with several new insights into the faith of Ukrainian soldiers, the unthinkable evil of the Russian military, the plight of kidnapped Ukrainian children and the goodness of God.

On the front lines, Ukrainian soldiers place a premium on protecting churches, and they regularly go into the evacuated, sometimes half-destroyed sanctuaries to pray for protection between shifts of duty. Russian troops, in stark contrast, intentionally destroy Ukrainian churches, with evangelical churches being their main target. As evangelicals, we recognize a higher power than the state, which runs counter to the Soviet mindset that is alive and well in Russia. The Russian military's attempts to crush the spirit and destroy the culture of Ukraine prove that this is a spiritual battle, not just a conflict over territory.

Amid the chaos, God is doing miracles in Ukraine. I met with pastor Oleg Bondar while in Kyiv, who delivered bread, water and Bibles to soldiers on the front lines. He told me stories of getting caught in heavy fire, with shells landing and exploding around him on all sides, but God protected him.

I heard other stories of Ukrainian soldiers running from heavy artillery through extensive minefields, praying that each step wouldn't be their last. I heard about miraculous changes in the weather at just the right time to stop the Russian army when all hope seemed lost.

In one story, Russian forces had dug miles of trenches in the sand near Odesa on the Black Sea, and a huge storm arrived, the worst in nearly a century, and washed all the trenches away, giving the Ukrainian army a chance to regroup and protect Odesa. In contrast, Russian ships had to fall back.

God is performing miracles for Ukraine because of the unthinkable evil of Russian leader Vladimir Putin, whose forces have kidnapped at least 20,000 Ukrainian children since the beginning of the invasion. Imagine being a parent and arriving at your child's school or summer camp only to be greeted by Russian soldiers who tell you your child is gone, shipped off to a "reeducation camp" in Crimea or Moscow or Siberia, and you have no recourse.

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That is the reality for thousands of Ukrainian parents as we speak. Only one side is behaving like that in this conflict: Russia. The Russians are not only kidnapping innocent children, but they're also using rape as a weapon of war.

As we approach the anniversary of Hamas' attack on Oct. 7, a day that will live in infamy, it's important to note that Russian forces are doing the same things that Hamas terrorists did that day in Israel. And Iran is supplying the same weapons to both.

Ukrainians have a profound sense of calling, purpose, determination, and resilience. The conference concluded with all participants further cemented in their views that the West must support Ukraine and stop Mr. Putin in his tracks.

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We must keep supporting Israel for the same reasons. In both conflicts, religious freedom, democracy and Western civilization itself hang in the balance.

• *Gary Marx is president of Madison Strategies and former executive director of the Faith and Freedom Coalition. This material is distributed by Madison Strategies on behalf of Kyiv Global Outreach. More information is on le with the Department of Justice in Washington.*

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