

Putin finds himself more isolated, desperate and weakened

Assad is gone, Trump is back: A new year for Ukraine



Russia's Vladimir Putin and Ukraine war illustration by Alexander Hunter/The Washington Times Russia's Vladimir Putin and Ukraine war ... [more >](#)

COMMENTARY

By Gary Marx
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OPINION:

Two weeks ago, I traveled to [Ukraine](#) with a group of 15 Americans from various faith-based nonprofits and conservative think tanks. The Ukraine Strategy Summit on Conservative Policy and Religious Freedom gave us the chance to visit [Ukraine](#) in the third winter of [Russia's](#) invasion. We came away with new insights and a profound sense of the Ukrainian people's commitment to freedom and the price they're willing to pay.

On the day our delegation flew back to the United States, news broke that Syrian President [Bashar Assad](#) had fled his country, marking a devastating strategic loss for the Kremlin's influence in the Middle East. Now, as Americans await President-elect [Donald](#)

[Trump's](#) inauguration, Russian President Vladimir Putin finds himself more isolated, increasingly desperate and measurably weakened on the world stage.

[Ukraine](#) stopped Mr. Putin in his tracks in 2022 with unflinching courage in the face of [Russia's](#) imperial ambitions. While many Americans likely view this war as a territorial dispute between [Russia](#) and a former Soviet territory, the truth is that [Ukraine](#) is utterly distinct from [Russia](#) culturally, spiritually and politically.

On this trip to [Ukraine](#), our delegation met with faith leaders from the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, who work together to protect religious freedom in their country despite their deep theological differences. No such organization exists in [Russia](#).

We also met with members of Ukraine's Parliament and attended a prayer breakfast on the Day of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. At the prayer breakfast, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy took the stage with various Ukrainian religious leaders, including Greek Catholics, evangelicals, Muslims, Baptists, Jews, Pentecostals and Seventh-day Adventists. No such gathering would ever take place in [Russia](#).

While the Kremlin would like to paint [Russia](#) as a defender of conservative family values, many Americans don't realize that the Russian military has kidnapped more than 20,000 Ukrainian children since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Our delegation visited an orphanage outside of Kyiv where brave individuals such as Mykola Kuleba from Save Ukraine work tirelessly to return Ukrainian children to their parents. There, we met a 17-year-old Ukrainian girl with her infant child, conceived as a result of rape by a Russian soldier.

This is just one example of the many war crimes that Russian soldiers are committing against Ukrainian civilians, including children. Our delegation met with Ukraine's chief prosecutor in Kyiv, whose team is collecting data and preparing war crimes cases for domestic and international prosecution.

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American elected officials on both sides of the political spectrum have used [Ukraine](#) funding as a political football. Perhaps we should expect nothing less in such politically contentious times as these. When you take a step back from the political rancor, however, a few basic facts emerge.

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[Russia](#) is kidnapping children, using rape as a weapon of war and persecuting evangelical Christians in the occupied territories of [Ukraine](#). The Kremlin has joined forces with Iran, North Korea and China to attack Judeo-Christian principles and American values around the world. Ukrainians, meanwhile, will fight to the death for their homeland.

Now, America has been forced to make a choice. Are we going to abide by the tyrannical forces that want to destroy our way of life and simply hope that [Russia's](#) imperial ambitions end with [Ukraine](#)? Or are we going to stand strong for freedom, democracy and the rule of law?

Mr. [Trump](#) ascended to the presidency based on his acumen for striking deals between contentious parties and mediating solutions. I pray that Mr. Putin's abject failure to achieve his goals in [Ukraine](#) and Mr. Assad's departure from [Syria](#) will help pave a path toward a just peace. As Mr. [Trump](#) said on Truth Social the day our delegation returned home from [Ukraine](#), "the world is waiting."

• 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 file with the Department of Justice in Washington.