Opinion
NCR Voices



Rescuers work at the site of a residential building in Kharkiv, Ukraine, Jan. 23, 2024, that was heavily damaged in a Russian missile attack. (OSV News/Reuters/Sofiia Gatilova)



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This coming Saturday, Feb. 24, marks the second anniversary of Russia's second invasion of Ukraine in this century. The first invasion started 10 years ago next week , on Feb. 27, when Russian troops took over key installations on the Crimean peninsula and began fomenting revolts in the Donbas region. Across the span of history, Ukraine has often been under Russian or Soviet control.

These are grim anniversaries to be sure. No one knows how many people have been killed in the conflicts. The Ukrainian government closely guards the number, fearing it would hurt morale, but a civic group last year estimated there had been 24,500 combat and non-combat deaths among Ukrainians, with 15,000 missing. It is likely many of those reported missing are dead as well.

The number of Russian dead is vastly larger, and mostly combatants. The United Kingdom's Ministry of Defense estimates that there have been 50,000 Russian soldiers killed, and another 20,000 from the Wagner Group. The ministry also estimates there have been 240,000 Russian soldiers wounded, and another 40,000 wounded from the Wagner Group. In the fight against tyranny, a new casualty was added last week: Aleksei Navalny died in a Russian prison. He was not Ukrainian by birth but their fight was his fight.



A firefighter works at the site of a residential building in Selydove, in Ukraine's Donetsk region, that was destroyed in a Russian missile attack Feb. 14, 2024. (OSV News/National Police handout via Reuters)

In addition to the casualty lists, there is the trauma that has afflicted the population of Ukraine, from the children who are forced to attend schools underground to the fear among all civilians when Russian bombs target urban population centers at night. Countless families remain separated as mothers and children have fled the country while fathers stay to fight.

Yet the flame of Ukrainian national identity burns as brightly as ever. Morale has dimmed a bit since the heady first days of the war, when Ukrainian forces turned back what the world thought would be an easy, successful Russian attack on Kyiv. Ukrainian troops may be slogging it out in the Donbas but sea drones have reportedly sunk or disabled a third of Russia's Black Sea fleet. Russia is not in a position to be able to replace so many warships in what retired Lt. Gen Mark Herling calls "the pride of the Russian Navy."



Polish President Andrzej Duda and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy attend a service to commemorate victims of World War II Valhynia Slaughter at St. Peter and Paul Cathedral July 9, 2023, in Lutsk, Ukraine. (OSV News/Reuters/Alina Smutko)

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has aged these past two years, but he continues to be a leader of astonishing moral gravity and political finesse. Not since Benjamin Franklin went to Paris has one man so successfully carried his nation's diplomatic ambitions on his solitary back. Zelenskyy was in Paris last week to sign a bilateral security agreement with French President Emmanuel Macron. He also attended the Munich Security Conference in Germany and met with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Europe has not abandoned Ukraine to its fate.

The United States is a different story. Of all the really despicable things today's Republican Party has done, its willingness to abandon Ukraine is the worst. Speaker of the House Mike Johnson said the House will not be "rushed" into passing the foreign aid bill that passed the Senate, as if he was talking about a waiter who brings the entrée too quickly after the soup. Ukraine does not have the luxury of

going on recess from the war, as Johnson allowed the House to go on recess without passing or even debating the foreign aid bill.

"Every day that Speaker Johnson causes our national security to deteriorate, America loses," White House spokesman Andrew Bates said. "And every day that he puts off a clean vote, congressional Republicans' standing with the American people plunges. Running away for an early vacation only worsens both problems."



Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow President Vladimir Putin, and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, are pictured in a 2018 photo. (OSV News/Sputnik/Alexei Nikolsky/Kremlin via Reuters)

Bates is both right and wrong. There is no doubt that American national security is harmed if we abdicate our moral obligation to assist Ukraine. Johnson, however, faces a more immediate and a larger problem: Will he allow Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene and Tucker Carlson set foreign policy for the Republican Party, forging an alliance with Vladimir Putin and abandoning not only Ukraine but NATO? Will Johnson

allow the craziest of the crazies to rule the roost?

Meanwhile, the brave soldiers and citizens of Ukraine carry on the fight to defend their homeland. Shame on us if we do not help them in their struggle, and more than shame. Allowing Putin a victory would destabilize Europe to its foundations. Let House Republicans ponder that. In this case, it is both our interest and our honor that is at stake.

This story appears in the **War in Ukraine** feature series. View the full series.