

Opinion

From Ukraine to Southern Illinois, it's closer than you think

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

Ukraine and Russia are on the opposite side of the world, away from our view but not our thoughts in Southern Illinois.



Grubaugh

that left me with a lasting impression.

My wife and I were fortunate to enjoy a cruise to the Caribbean this last month aboard the Regal Princess.

Cruise-goers will tell you that they get to know the ship's staff quite well on such adventures. Waiters, for example, wear name buttons, complete with their countries of origin. It prompts many conversations.

That is how we met Khrystina of Ukraine. She was a server in the ship's wine bar.

For me, the unreasonable, inhumane, and world-altering war boils down to one tender moment I experienced in one of the most unexpected places. It was a chance encounter

It was the first day of our cruise – and the 12th day of the invasion. Khrystina came to our table, and I stared at her badge, trying to make out where she was from. Finally, I asked. My reaction must have been one of shock.

"I'm sorry," she said, as if she were sad to be the bearer of bad news in such a happy setting. We quickly segued into more positive topics.

Later in the voyage, I talked to her more about the situation. Turns out, she and her family had moved some years ago to the neighboring country of Moldova. That is far enough to be out of battles, but close enough to know how close they are.

Aboard a nautical melting pot that is a cruise ship, it is easy to meet people from around the world. There are 195 countries on the planet, and the cruise industry is a golden opportunity for young, free-spirited, working-class people to travel the globe on their voyage to get ahead.

The industry is a wonderful example of how multiculturalism works on a small, but effective scale.

In some way, Ukrainians are all of us. Russians, too, for that matter, save apparently the one madman bent on destruction and those he's managed to sway.

Most of us are peace-loving individuals. And most of us root for the underdog. So, it is only natural that we feel for the brave Ukrainians amid the massive destruction. Still, the U.S. can't justify a more active role in the conflict, which at this writing is just a hot button push away from a world war.

Joe Biden's measured restraint and his ability to build alliances have been admirable. As big a boondoggle as was the hurry-up, U.S. military pullout of Afghanistan, the approach being used in eastern Europe has been methodical. Our part of this war must be won without more blood and treasure than is already being spent. That is going to take time as the sanctions set in.

For years, Vladimir Putin has had world impact, and he has had a bead on the United States his entire adult life, despising us and other countries like us for our democratic values. His sphere of influence has affected the global economy, political outcomes, and the fate of individual nations. Most of it has been negative.

Because of him, the Russian people are now losing more than they ever did and will the longer this goes on.

Meanwhile, the ramifications for

the people you actually know — your friends, neighbors, family, and coworkers, etc. — are many. A protracted conflict is going to continue to affect the price of commodities, the shipping of goods, the way U.S. companies do business around the world, and more. Add to that the setting of nuclear proliferation and the fact that we are one lob away from mutually assured destruction.

Yes, only a madman would stir this pot. And he alone is to blame.

It's hard not to think about these things when you gas up your car and flinch, when you turn on your television, and when you read the daily recaps. The war could end tomorrow, but the aftershocks will be felt for generations. It's simply impossible not to relate to the victims of war and those so touched by it.

Our cruise-ship server Khrystina is worried, too. She may have been a mere wine server, but in some ways, she is all of us.

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There is a reason freedom of the press was the first amendment

By ALAN J. ORTBALS

Gun enthusiasts often claim that the Founders created the Second Amendment to guard against the rise of a tyrant



Ortbals

and forbids state and local law agencies from cooperating with the Feds on the enforcement of those laws. They have often made the claim that the first thing a tyrant does is confiscate guns. This is both a bastardization of the Second Amendment and misreading of history.

When the Founders convened to write a constitution for their new country, they wanted to make sure that they corrected the abuses prevalent in the Old World. European monarchs maintained large professional armies to exert their authority and enforce their will upon the populace.

and therefore fight vigorously against any attempt to regulate or curtail the free flow of guns. Missouri, for example, passed what they called the Second Amendment Preservation Act last year, which invalidates all federal gun control laws

The Founders wanted none of that. Instead, America would have a citizen army. The standing army would be small and provide a trained nucleus around which to build an army. So, it was essential that men be ready when called upon. The opening phrase of the Second Amendment is clear, "A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state..."

And it is further borne out by the two Militia Acts of 1792, which required every free, white male citizen between the ages of 18 and 45 to own a rifle, a bayonet, a powder horn, ¼ pound of gunpowder, 20 rifle balls, a shot pouch, and a knapsack.

So, the idea wasn't so that the citizens could take up arms against their own government but to prevent a president from using a professional army to cow the populace. But I digress.

The first thing that wannabe tyrants do is not to confiscate guns. No, they take control of the media. If they can control what people read, see, and hear, they can control what they think. They don't need to come for your guns because, sufficiently indoctrinated, you'll take up arms to do their bidding on your own (see January 6, 2021).

History is clear on this point. Shortly after seizing power in November 1917, the Bolsheviks issued a Decree on the Press that prohibited printing any articles critical of the new regime.

Similarly, Benito Mussolini established a High Commission for the press in 1929 under which journalists were expected to actively participate in the "education" of the people. Il Duce believed that Fascism required "militant journalism" and wanted the nation's newspapers to act as a solid bloc committed to "the cause."

Adolf Hitler didn't become chancellor of Germany until January 1933, but he was thinking ahead when he called upon Joseph Goebbels following the July 1932 Reichstag elections and informed him of his plan to create a new Ministry of Propaganda with Goebbels as its head. Once Hitler came to power, he shut down hundreds of newspapers, seized printing plants and equipment, then began cranking out radio, press and newsreels to stoke fear and used that fear to seize complete control.

Because of our First Amendment, Donald Trump was not able to actually outlaw media outlets he didn't like but he worked tirelessly to convince people that they were "Fake News" and "Enemies of the People." If you cannot believe traditional journalism, then you can be made to believe anything. Those who attacked the capital on January 6 had an entirely different perception of reality than other Americans and that's because of the information they consumed.

While people around the world watch

aghast at the destruction and carnage that Vladimir Putin is raining down on the people of Ukraine, 70 percent of Russians support the "special military operation" and Putin's approval rating jumped up 7 points immediately following the invasion. How can that be?

It's because Putin, like other tyrants before him, has exerted dictatorial control over the media. He's shut down independent radio and television stations, blocked Facebook, Twitter and TikTok, and he has criminalized "Fake News." Anyone not toting the party line will get 15 years in prison.

The Russian people are told that their troops are acting to protect Ukrainian citizens from a neo-Nazi government, that they are supplying aid and helping refugees to safety. Any videos to the contrary that might slip through, showing the destruction and devastation of Putin's war, they are told, are actually the doings of the nefarious Ukrainian government.

There is a reason that freedom of speech and freedom of the press was the first amendment. But with that freedom comes responsibility. There is truth and there is "Fake News." It's incumbent on us to tell the difference.

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