

Tsunamis in the Black Sea, Spring 2022

As we shed tears for Ukraine, and bemoan the harm which the war there is doing to Europe, it would be good to remember that the war's effect is already far wider. As of early May, the fighting itself is beginning to spill over in to Moldova and Russia. All Europe is tense with expectation over what may happen next, wondering how long the war will last, and praying for quick and stable peace and security. Even in the United States, people are feeling the effects in the form of higher food and energy prices. In our country, we may have to rethink how we use our corn crop, along with our daily diet. At present, 40 percent of our corn crop goes to making ethanol for gasoline, another half goes to livestock feedlots which spew excrement into our rivers and streams, and only 10 percent for direct human consumption.

All those anxieties are small compared to what is happening in and immediately around Ukraine, and in other, far distant parts of the world. Left to itself, Ukraine is a bread basket to the world, capable of feeding nine times its own population. Left to itself, it produces 80 percent of the world's sunflower seed, which is used both for food and cooking oil, 20 percent of the world's wheat, and 50 percent of the world's barley. No more: packed with those bombed out of their homes, with its ports closed to incoming or outgoing shipping, it is now a bread line. The war has reduced its forecast harvest for this year 50 to 70 percent. Those who used to farm are now on the battlefield. Add to that the ongoing pandemic. So it happened a century ago, in and after World War I. So it is happening now.

Next to the Ukrainians themselves, the people who will suffer worst are those in the poorest parts of the world. The United Nations' World Food Program, which feeds 185,000,000 people, has reported drastic cuts in the aid it can provide, a direct result of rising grain prices, decreasing buying power, and the shrinking Ukrainian harvest.

In response, Russia speaks of nuclear weapons and the US/NATO alliance aims at a weakened Russia: annihilation on one hand, and humiliation and impotent resentment on the other. The chief offerings from the United States and NATO are weapons, swollen military budgets, and geopolitical pieties. Before we preach too much freedom, maybe we should remember that Freedom House ranks the United States behind sixty other countries in its degree of democracy, and the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance calls the United States a backsliding democracy, comparable to Hungary. Do as we say, not as we do.

War comes with the other three horsemen of the Apocalypse, famine, disease, and death. In modern warfare, especially this time, most of the casualties are innocents. This year, more people worldwide will starve. It's an ugly way to die, and ugliest with children. While he fights, Volodymyr Zelensky is looking for ways to negotiate. We need to pay attention.

We need to talk.