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Ukraine will need ‘Marshall Plan’ to address human toll of war

Regardless of the geopolitical issues at play, the time to address the global humanitarian catastrophe emanating from Ukraine is now.

By Anna Nagurney | Apr 5, 2022, 7:00pm EDT

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People stand next to a mass grave in Bucha, on the outskirts of Kyiv, Ukraine, Monday, April 4, 2022. Russia is facing a fresh wave of condemnation after evidence emerged of what appeared to be deliberate killings of dozens if not hundreds of civilians in Ukraine. | AP

In the weeks since Russia invaded Ukraine in late February, the news and social media platforms have been filled with images, video and stories of countless tragedies and atrocities involving children, men and women. The lives of many families have been destroyed, along with their homes, businesses and the economy.

Ukraine is the bread-basket of the world. Its rich soil produces grains and crops for more than 300 million people, many of whom live in developing countries. Thirty percent of the world's wheat comes from Ukraine and Russia. Fifteen percent of the world's corn comes from Ukraine. The country is also a big exporter of barley and sunflower oil.

The country's exports sustain people in China, Egypt and Turkey, among other nations.

Opinion

But due to the vast destruction throughout Ukraine, millions of crops won't be planted, fertilized, and harvested this year. Vast fields will lay bare, and this will have a direct impact on those millions of people who depend on those crops to live.

At home, Ukrainians are the innocent victims in a devastating, unprovoked war. Many of those who have survived and remain in Ukraine endure relentless shelling and bombing, with their apartments, hospital rooms and schools targeted. The injuries, the loss of life, the suffering has been devastating.

Many Ukrainians are without food, medicine, electric power and water. Sickness and illness and hunger are becoming increasingly commonplace.

Ukrainians are being displaced as they seek safety and refuge. Nearly **three million Ukrainian refugees** have already fled the country, making this the most rapid and sizable movement of refugees in Europe since World War II. Almost **six and a half million Ukrainians are internally displaced**.

Regardless of the geopolitical issues, the time to address the global humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine is now.

To prevent or minimize further harm to developing nations from reduced Ukrainian food exports, systems need to be put in place to feed those people from alternate sources.

To address the human toll of war on the Ukrainian people, systems must be created for what could be a long-term commitment.

To help the millions of refugees fleeing to neighboring countries and elsewhere, some temporarily and others for life, the solution cannot be simply transient settlement camps. Supply lines in Ukraine must be reinforced and humanitarian corridors honored.

The humanitarian case for ending this war is irrefutable. Meanwhile, governments, foundations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals must focus their support on the people still inside Ukraine and the country's refugees.

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Supply chains for critical products, including medicines, cannot be disrupted. Infrastructure must be put into place throughout the West, including the United States, to meet these rising humanitarian needs. This is not a one-off. The solution must be comprehensive, crafted with the long-term in mind — not unlike the **Marshall Plan** after World War II.

This plan must take into account, from the outset the need to resettle Ukrainians back to their homeland if possible and desirable. Many Ukrainians fleeing this war want to go back to Ukraine once it is liberated.

But that will be just the beginning. Ukraine will need to be rebuilt. The stronger, more efficient and strategic that rebuilding effort is, the quicker it is, the greater the chance of avoiding another invasion and another humanitarian catastrophe. This all starts now. It starts with our commitment to meeting our obligations from human to human.

Without such a comprehensive approach, the ripple effects will lead to many more years of millions of people without adequate food supplies coming from those rich Ukrainian fields. There will be a food scarcity crisis with rising hunger on different continents. We will see continued regional economic instability and military tensions. One way or the other, Western nations will have to shoulder the consequences.

In all of this darkness, it's important to remind ourselves that Ukraine can be a great, free and prosperous nation once again. But it cannot be so without each of us identifying a problem where we can help right now and then doing something about it.

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