

## In the War Over Ukraine, Expect the Unexpected

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Every war brings surprises, but what is most striking about Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine — and indirectly against the whole democratic West — is how many of the bad surprises, so far, have been for Putin and how many of the good surprises have been for Ukraine and its allies around the world.

How so? Well, I am pretty sure that when Putin was plotting this war, he was assuming that by three weeks into it he'd be giving a victory speech at the Ukrainian Parliament, welcoming it back into the bosom of Mother Russia. He probably also assumed that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky would be in exile in a Polish Airbnb, Russian troops would still be removing all the flowers from their tanks thrown by welcoming Ukrainians, and Putin and China's President Xi Jinping would be high-fiving each other for having shown NATO and Sleepy Joe who's going to set the rules of the international system going forward.

Instead, Ukrainians have given Russians a tutorial on fighting and dying for freedom and self-determination. Putin appears locked into his own germ-free isolation chamber, probably worrying that any Russian military officer who comes near may pull a gun on him. Zelensky will be addressing the U.S. Congress virtually. And, rather than globalization being over, individuals all over the world are using global networks to monitor and influence the war in totally unexpected ways. With a few clicks they're sending money to support Ukrainians and with a few more keystrokes telling everyone from McDonald's to Goldman Sachs that they must withdraw from Russia until Russian soldiers withdraw from Ukraine.

Here's another surprise few saw coming — especially China and Russia. China relied on its own vaccines to fight Covid-19, along with a policy of zero tolerance and immediate quarantine to prevent spread of the coronavirus. Alas, the Chinese vaccines seem to be less effective than other Covid vaccines. And because China's quarantine strategy has left it with little immunity from prior infections, the virus is now spreading like wildfire there. As The Times [reported](#) Tuesday: "Tens of millions of residents in Chinese provinces and cities including Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen are under lockdown amid an outbreak of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. Travel has been cut off between cities, production lines have

What is that doing? It's killing demand for, and tanking the price of, crude oil — which, after approaching \$130 a barrel because of the war in Ukraine, fell below \$100 on Tuesday. And what country desperately needs high oil prices because it has so little else to sell to the world to fund its war? Putin's Russia. So, China's Covid strategy is hampering Putin's oil price strategy — probably hurting him as much as anything the U.S. is doing. We're all still a lot more connected than we might think.

Now that we've passed the opening phase of this war, the surprises just keep on coming. For me, the three biggest are the extraordinary acts of cruelty, courage and kindness that this war is revealing and inspiring.

I never had any illusions that once Putin launched this war, he'd stop short of doing anything to make sure that he could claim to be the "winner." Nevertheless, it is stunning to watch how quickly he has tied himself into knots. In the space of three weeks, Putin has gone from saying that he came to liberate Ukraine from its "Nazi" leadership and bring Kyiv back to its natural home with Russia to crushing its cities and indiscriminately shelling its civilians to break their resistance to his will.

How does a leader go from one day saying Ukraine and its people are integral parts of the soul and fabric of Russia — with shared languages, culture and religion — to, when rebuffed, immediately pivoting toward turning the place to rubble — without any explanation to Ukrainians, the world or his own people?

It's the kind of vicious madness that you see from a spurned lover or in an "honor killing." And it's shocking and petrifying to see it manifested by the leader of a superpower with some 6,000 nuclear warheads. There is something about this guy that portends more ominous surprises.

I am always amazed by the courage that seemingly average people manifest in war — in this case, not only by Ukrainians, but also by Russians who refuse to buy Putin's lies, knowing that he is turning them into a pariah nation. So I marvel at the breathtaking courage demonstrated on Monday evening by Marina Ovsyannikova, an employee at Russia's Channel 1, a state-run television channel, who [burst](#) into a live broadcast of Russia's most-watched news show, yelling, "Stop the war!" and holding up a sign behind the anchorwoman saying, "They're lying to you here." She was interrogated and, for the moment, released — probably because Putin feared making her into a martyr.

*Marina Ovsyannikova* — remember her name. She dared to tell the czar that he had no clothes. What courage.

And finally, wars also reveal extraordinary acts of kindness. In this war, some came spontaneously and by leveraging a platform in ways that no one expected — the room-sharing site Airbnb. Executives at Airbnb say they basically woke up in early March to discover that members of their community were spontaneously using their platform in a novel new way — transforming its booking technology into a homemade, people-to-people, foreign aid system.

In about the last two weeks, according to the company, people from 165 countries have booked more than 430,000 nights at Ukrainian homes on Airbnb with no intention of using the rooms — but simply in order to donate money to these Ukrainian hosts, most of whom they had never even heard of. Airbnb has temporarily waived all guest and host fees for bookings in Ukraine, so those reservations translated into \$17 million going directly to the hosts. Guests from the U.S., Britain and Canada are the biggest bookers. Australia, Germany and several other European countries round out the top 10.

In addition, as of Sunday, about 36,000 people from 160 countries signed up through Airbnb's nonprofit affiliate, [Airbnb.org](#), to welcome refugees fleeing Ukraine to their homes.

There is no way that America's giant Agency for International Development, USAID, could have such an impact so fast.

Many of the Ukrainian hosts who have received these booking-donations have written back to the donors, forging new friendships and enabling foreigners to understand the impact of this war much more deeply. There is nothing like personally communicating with people in Ukraine who are hiding in their basement, while you are explaining why you are happy to rent that basement but never use it. It creates a community of kindness that alone cannot defeat Putin's tanks, but it can help buttress those determined to resist them by reminding them that they are not alone — Putin is.

I do not find any of this surprising. I have always argued that globalization is not just about trade. It is about the ability for countries, companies and now, increasingly, individuals to connect and act globally. Human beings are hard-wired to want to connect, and the hard-wiring of today's world is making it easier and cheaper for them to do so every day.

All that said, what makes the pleasant surprises in this war so surprising is that they were surprises to the people who were responsible for them. Just one caution, though. There will be more surprises — and they won't all be pleasant.