Ukraine, Foreign Policy, and the Church

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Preacher: Dr. Jeff Bailey

[0:00] We have got an hour together. We're going to try and move quickly and make the most of this time as an opportunity just to get our heads around what is happening in the Ukraine and in Russia and in all of the different kinds of dynamics there.

Obviously, as Christians and as a church at Church of the Advent, we want to be thoughtful and engaged in what's happening around the world and trying to think through how do we engage with these kinds of challenging issues as citizens and also as Christians.

And sometimes those things overlap and sometimes they don't always seem to. And one of the things that we're conscious of is that we have a huge amount of expertise at Church of the Advent around all kinds of things that involve the country and the world in different kinds of ways.

And we want to really be able to tap into that. And that's really the aim of tonight is to be able to tap into some of the expertise that we have here at Church of the Advent.

If you are like me in times like this where you're taking in huge amounts of content and news and trying to stay up on rapidly evolving situations, you sometimes wish that you could sit down with somebody who's knowledgeable about these kinds of things and just have a conversation.

[1:18] Right. And just ask questions. And that's really what we want to do tonight is to pull in some experts on these kinds of matters with Russia and the Ukraine and just be able to have ask questions and have an informal time of conversation together here.

Over the next hour or so. So we're really glad to have Walter Meade here with us to talk about some of these matters with us. Many of us know Walter simply as a fellow member at Advent and as a friend and mentor to many.

But Walter also has this small side gig as a foreign affairs specialist and as a columnist for the Wall Street Journal and as a professor at Bard College and as a fellow at the Hudson Institute.

And so we're really grateful for Walter sharing his expertise and insight with us and also really glad to have other experts, folks with insight and expertise from Advent who will act as a kind of panel to respond to some of what Walter is bringing to us to ask some additional questions.

And we're also grateful in our broader community to have some folks on the call tonight from Ukraine. And that's a real privilege. And hopefully during the broader Q&A; time, they may have some insights or perspectives to bring in a real time kind of way for all of us here as well.

[2:37] So what we're going to do here, moving quickly over the next 50 minutes or so, I'm just going to spend a few minutes interviewing Walter just to draw out some of his particular insights and to tee up a conversation for the rest of us.

And then we'll pull in some of the panelists from Advent, let Walter respond to those briefly, and then we'll just open it up for Q&A.; So do be thinking of your questions or observations that you want to make throughout the call. Feel free to make use of the chat box as we're going. If you want to make a comment or ask a question, we can kind of register it there and then loop back to that as we have time during the Q&A; at the end.

So do feel free to use the chat box for that. So having said that, Walter, thank you so much for spending this time with us. Let me just start. I know that you wouldn't call yourself a Ukraine or Russia expert, but it is an area that you know some things about. You've spent some time there. Can you just give us a little bit of background in the ways that you've engaged with those countries, that part of the world, these issues over the last number of years in your career?

Sure. Well, I, you know, the first time I went to Russia, it was still the Soviet Union back in the 1980s. And I'll not forget one day I was talking to an official in the Kremlin, Victor Fallon.

And he says to me, you Americans just don't, don't understand Stalin. I think he saw the shocked look on my face. And he said, no, no, no, don't get me wrong. He said, I knew Stalin. He was a terrible person.

[4:16] So, you know, it's kind of so I say that I knew the Soviet Union back when it was still Soviet. Then in 1990, I actually drove across Ukraine. I was Harper's Magazine sent me to Europe for six months to look at how it was changing as the Berlin Wall had come down and so on.

And I decided I would drive around the Black Sea. And while the Soviets wouldn't let me go to Odessa, they actually let me travel pretty freely through the rest of the country. And I've seen quite a bit of Ukraine then. And I've been back several times, mostly to Kiev, most recently about four years ago.

To Russia, been, again, many times, I've been, I was banned from Russia about four years ago. And the college I teach at Bard College, which had operated a program with the Smolny Institute at the University of St. Petersburg for many years with great success.

It's actually, it's criminal now for a citizen of the Russian Federation to collaborate with Bard College or any of its work. So I'm sort of double banned in Russia.

And I, you know, I've been, been a bit in Siberia. So I've seen a good bit of the country. Yeah, that's very far from being an expert, though. Yeah, of course. Well, I'd be curious to know, from where you're sitting, with engaging with this part of the world, but also against the larger backdrop of your understanding of analysis of affairs.

[5:55] From where you're sitting, there's so much information that's already being generated. There's a lot of unknowns. It's obviously happening quickly. Lots of, a lot is, a lot is changing quickly on the ground.

From your perspective, what are the key things that we should be paying attention to right now? Of all the information that's out there, what to you stands out as what we should be especially looking at?

Right. Well, I think the big thing is, you know, quite simply, the progress of the war. It, you know, is, will Putin succeed, will his forces succeed, basically in occupying and holding large chunks of Ukraine, if not the whole country?

At what cost? Will he, and I think this is, in some ways, the question we're at now, is his original plan for conquest, the decapitation of the Ukrainian government, so to speak, installing a puppet regime with a lightning strike in Kiev and so on.

Because this is obviously, this is obviously out of reach. What, where does he go next? Yeah. And I'm afraid the logic seems to give him two choices.

[7:11] One would be to move toward true Stalinist repression, both in Russia and in Ukraine, to force obedience so far as he can.

And the other would be some kind of negotiated, somewhat humiliating surrender. And there is also then the possibility of some kind of internal coup in Russia.

So will he make the choice for massive repression? And if he does, will he have the means to do it? Will he actually, you know, if he gives orders to arrest tens of thousands of people in Russia or to fire into crowds of protesters in Ukraine, will people follow those orders?

And do, what is your sense of where the larger Russian populace is at this time, in terms of how much time will they give him if the sanctions begin to have their effects so that it's affecting the middle and the lower classes?

If different kinds of news reports begin to filter in, do you think, how much time do you think he has with the Russian people? I think we may be overestimating his domestic political vulnerabilities in the sense that, you know, the Russian people have been living through a time of gradually increasing repression and intimidation.

[8:40] And it is, you know, it is not, many of them buy, if they don't buy the whole narrative that Putin has constructed about an evil NATO constantly scheming against Russia and so on, they buy large parts of it.

And there has been a real atomization of the opposition. The last remnants of a free press have closed down.

Interesting, somebody was pointing out today that with the credit card companies no longer operating in Russia, it means that Russian citizens won't be able to pay for the VPNs that allow them to break the firewall.

So, and, you know, and Russia is fundamentally not a democracy. People don't, like, look at what the unemployment rate is or their rise or fall of real wages and then cast their vote at the next election.

And if Putin, so, again, it's how effective, it's not, will Putin ride a huge surge of Russian support? And he may, he may get some support.

[9:56] I see that the patriarch of Moscow is back, man. He, he just needs to avoid the opposition coalescing in such a way as to cause either a street revolution or a palace coup.

Yeah, yeah. But hopes for some sort of broad populist uprising are ill-founded, you think? I think we have not yet seen them happening. And I would, I would guess that if it happens, it's unlikely to happen in a timeframe that would affect the outcome of hostilities in Ukraine.

Yeah. That is one way or another. He will have either conquered Ukraine or failed to conquer Ukraine before we would see an uprising in Russia.

Yeah. And do you see, in terms of, at least in the first two weeks, things aren't going as well as it would appear that Putin was assuming it would. Do you see, if that were to continue to be the case, any kind of face-saving off-ramp for Putin that he would potentially consider?

So far, he's shown no interest in any off-ramps. He's essentially repeating the same demands he's made from the beginning.

[11:15] And in some ways, he's actually increased his demands or his threats. He said that Ukrainian resistance endangers the future of the Ukrainian state.

I think in the beginning, his idea was to sort of turn Ukraine into a kind of a Belarus, where the leader remains in power because he has Putin's support.

But he now, you know, he's at least threatened raising the possibility of, in some ways, integrating Ukraine into something more formal.

So, you know, anything is possible. But it would be very, very difficult for Putin to accept a compromise. Thinking about the U.S. response and the Western European response, it's a delicate dance to, on the one hand, respond forcefully, and yet recognizing that even if Russia is not the superpower that it once was, if it's kind of a petro power of some sort, that it is a massive disruptor and a nuclear armed one.

And from a U.S. perspective, how do we do that dance of appropriately calibrated responses that don't potentially provoke some kind of nuclear reaction on the part of Russia?

[12:45] Well, I think so far we've done a really excellent job of telling him he has very little to worry about from us militarily. So that we have basically said, we are deterred from a no-fly zone.

And we've also said, and by the way, we're really not interested in sanctioning your energy production. So we've been, I think, probably been too hasty in such a way that, if anything, the signal may come in Russia that we're giving off a vibration of fear, even as we tell ourselves we're being very resolute and statesmanlike.

Not that I'm necessarily recommending either of those courses, but I generally speaking think it's a mistake to take option.

You want your enemy to be, and at this point he is our enemy. We want him to be worrying about what we might do to him rather than worrying about what he might do to us.

It would appear from Congress and from other voices, there is certainly some appetite for cutting off energy supplies.

[14:02] Whether or not the White House ends up going in that direction is an open question. There's some debate over no-fly zones in terms of what that effectively does.

Do you have opinions about that in terms of what that potentially provokes? Or is your point simply that rhetorically, strategically, diplomatically, we shouldn't be taking that off the table?

I don't think we should take it off the table. I also think it really doesn't matter whether the U.S. bans imports of Russian oil. We don't use that much. Really, the question is whether Europe is going to include sanctions on oil and gas.

And here I think the problem is they're not. I mean, you know, there's, and it's not, I would say, you know, given the dependence in Europe on Russian oil and gas, and the inability to really substitute quickly here, it's almost economic suicide.

And so, you know, they're certainly quite reluctant to do it. It puts their economies on a real war footing. And I think, again, from Putin's point of view, this just vindicates his original view of how weak the West is.

[15:21] You know, some of the other sanctions, I think, particularly on the central bank, have been more surprising. And certainly Ukrainian military resistance has been far greater than what he would have expected.

And his own military performance has been worse. But I am not sure that he is as impressed with our, with what we keep telling ourselves is our gloriously successful.

I mean, if you can imagine, you know, the Munich conference in 1938, if all the allies ended saying, boy, we really displayed great unity at Munich and Hitler still gets Sudetenland.

You know, we, there, there's a danger that we're awarding ourselves participation trophies without looking at the reality that, that on the ground, he may end up getting all or most of what he, he wanted.

Yeah. Let me pull the lens back a little bit further out in terms of what these new realities signal for U.S. foreign policy more generally.

[16:31] So if we've moved from what was a kind of bipolar world during the Cold War to a kind of post-1991 unipolar world with the dominance of the U.S., does this suggest we are moving towards a kind of multipolar world in regards to Russia and China and Iran and the Middle East and a whole range of different actors that suggest we have to rethink our approach to foreign policy again in this, you know, if we are, in fact, in a kind of post-Wilsonian world, where, where are we and where do you think we need to go in light of all of this?

Well, I wrote a piece for Foreign Affairs back in 1914, 1915, 2014, 2015, that was called The Return of Geopolitics. And I basically said in that piece, following the Crimea business, I believe that the fantasy that we had, that history was over.

And from now on, it was just about building and deepening the beautiful liberal world order was mistaken, that the world had entered a new era. I actually would say that we've moved from a pre-war era to a post-war era in about 2014.

And sorry, post-war to pre-war, right? And that in a post-war era, international politics is mostly about resolving the leftover problems from the last war.

In a pre-war era, the internet, international politics is about dealing with problems that if they aren't solved, will lead to a, could lead to a new war.

[18:17] And that, I think, is where, is clearly where we are. And it's, it's not where most Americans thought we are. It's not where they expect it to end up, but it is where we are.

Yeah, it's good. Let me pull the lens back a little bit further, Walter, and then I want to begin pulling in some of our panelists, other folks from Advent.

In terms of trying to think about this through a Christian lens, and assuming that there is not a, quote unquote, Christian foreign policy, right?

There's a whole range of potential avenues, both from a theoretical and theological perspective, as well as what events present to us, the forms of government that we have.

But I do wonder your perspectives on what, what does, is there anything distinctive that a Christian perspective should bring to this?

[19:15] Or as Christians who are trying to think and engage in this, either through our vocations or simply, again, as informed citizens. Where, where does that come into these, these kinds of issues?

I'd say the first place, I think, is that we as Christians should really have some humility coming into this. Because over the last hundred years, Christians have been pretty terrible in terms of their record in foreign policy.

No one was more pacifistic in the 20s and 30s as Hitler and Stalin, as, you know, as sort of the world was changing, Japan was rising. Christians were still talking about the Christian campaign for disarmament.

As Nazi and Soviet terror was killing tens of millions of people. So Christians, generally speaking, have not exhibited particularly strong judgment.

Now, individual Christians have made serious contributions to statecraft. And so I think all of us really should begin with what the church has been doing.

[20:23] And you can talk about the sort of, you know, right-wing populist, nationalist, evangelical Christianity, or the more sophisticated, liberal, mainline Christianity, or whatever.

Generally speaking, questions like, I find a lot of Christian leaders, and you can see this today in response to what's going on in Ukraine, are a little bit like sort of rabbis in a food factory saying, that's kosher, that's not kosher, that's what they would like to do.

But I don't think they're particularly good at it. And in general, when I hear the Archbishop of Canterbury give his opinion about war or some other foreign policy issue, I don't pay attention, because Archbishop of Canterbury are so predictable and platitudinous, it's just not worth it.

There are other things one should do to pay attention to be a good citizen. So what should I think, what do I think as Christians we should do, and then what do we have to offer?

What we should do is, number one, be informed. Foreign policy is hard and complicated. The sort of Christian who comes chittering into the room, well, you know, I've read the Ten Commandments.

[21:45] I've even like read something about just war, so I'm now going to tell you what to do about Bosnia. He's a fool. She's a fool. Don't realize it, which makes them a bigger fool.

You know, don't be that person. Study history. Read a lot of history. Diplomatic history as well.

You know, to get some sense of how these decisions are made and what they are. Look, you know, look at ways in which Christians in the past have been right and Christians in the past have been wrong.

Appreciate the ironies of history. The subtleties of history. Above all, the unpredictability. We don't know what's going to happen in Ukraine.

We can't know. And yet the decisions that policymakers have to make are necessarily grounded in this imperfect knowledge.

[22:44] That's the human condition. And so the kind of dogmatism that everyone would like to sort of impose, like, I know, you know, one should never X or one should always Y.

This is not how things really work. You couldn't raise kids that way. And frankly, foreign policy is almost as hard and almost as complicated as raising kids.

And by the way, it's almost as useless to read books of IR theory as it is to read parenting books to understand how to raise kids.

So that's one set of things I think we should do. But where Christians can bring, and at our best, maybe we do bring something to the table that otherwise would be missing, is first of all, a kind of a theological intellectual clarity about humanity.

Reinhold Niebuhr, probably the Protestant theologian who had the greatest impact on American thinking and American foreign policy. George Kennan, for example, was a huge fan of Reinhold Niebuhr.

[23:59] Arthur Schlesinger said he wanted to found a chapter of atheists for Niebuhr. I don't, not many Protestant theologians that have had that kind of impact. You know, one of his big contributions was bringing the idea of original sin, a Christian doctrine, into practical politics.

That is to say, understand the individuals in a, in any particular conflict are flawed. They are both, you know, there's both great good and great evil.

And that's true of causes. Nationally, it's true of like labor versus management. They're both flawed, and yet they both have something real in there. Countries too, that you're, and that when a country is the most confident of its righteousness, that's often the time when original sin has blinded them.

And yet at the same time, it can make you cowardly when you should be brave. But, but also that in an imperfect world where all the entities, all the causes, all the forces are, are imperfect.

One must still act. Yeah. And sometimes one must still act with boldness. I think if we think through other Christian doctrines that we believe are theologically true, and we start thinking, well, they're also historically true.

[25:25] They're true of humanity as a group. Whether they're believers or not, they're still, these things still act as forces. We can use that to help develop stronger analytical frameworks about what's happening in the world.

But we can also perhaps by demonstrating their utility to non-believers, maybe make a few friends for the church, which would not be perhaps a bad thing at this time.

Super. So helpful, Walter. So much to respond to there. Let me pull in our panelists from Advent just to react and pick up on some of the themes that you've been talking about here and make this a broader conversation.

Brant, let me turn to you. If we can spotlight Brant on here. Brant Siegel. We'll talk to Brant and to Ryan Poole and to Juliana Stowes, who many of you all know here at Advent.

I just learned they're all in the same core group, the Advent core group together. So I'm not sure how that happened, but I'm sure there are some interesting foreign policy conversations going on in that core group during the week.

[26:34] So anyway, Brant, he's worked in U.S. foreign policy in Europe since 2008. He serves with DTRA, which is the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, which works with the DOD on issues related to weapons of mass destruction and other kinds of emerging threats.

And he has traveled and worked in Ukraine extensively since about 2015 until very recently. So, Brant, so good to have you here.

Can you just take three minutes or so and just give us some observations from where you're situated and what you've observed and to add on to what Walter's been talking about here? Yeah, thanks.

Thanks. So, yeah, I got a lot of thoughts from what I heard from Walter. Very, very interesting, very interesting discussion. I guess there are a couple of there's one sort of sort of 100 year arc that I'd like to call attention to.

And that is, you know, the relationship of Russia to Ukraine in the 20s and 30s and the persecution of the Ukrainians.

[27:42] The denial of Ukrainian identity by the Bolsheviks and Stalin and how, you know, really there was just impunity.

Stalin had it could just starve essentially four million people to death or send them to the gulags. And I come back to that history.

And if you're interested, there's a great book called Red Famine about it. And it details it quite, quite in vivid detail. And that that sort of impunity is something that, to my mind, I'm concerned is at play now and that Putin can act with impunity within the borders of Ukraine.

And I'm afraid that we're starting to see that and may see that even more. I wanted to pick up on Walter's concept of pre-war.

We're in kind of a pre-war era. Without knowing the full concept, that resonates a lot with me. But I wonder if Walter would also, if I could suggest maybe that pre-war may be even before the annexation of Crimea.

[28:51] But even in the 2008 war that Russia launched in Georgia against, you know, using, again, separatist regions, Abkhazia, south of Syria, to generate this war in Georgia.

And these other frozen conflicts that he has leveraged to great advantage in Moldova, in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

And, you know, used essentially, again, being able to act with impunity in those regions. Add to that Belarus and Kazakhstan, where really no one has stopped Putin since 2008.

And it isn't until recently that we have had cohesion in, you know, among the U.S., European nations nearby and then across the world to start to even say something that this is not okay.

So I find it, you know, in those two regards, a long arc reminiscent of early 20th century, which is alarming.

[30:07] And then, you know, even in the last, say, 15 years, this has been going on for quite some time. This has been building, I would say, to this point.

And Putin has had this in mind. And if you could go back and look at his speech in Munich, it was before 2008. And he basically outlined his view, his worldview that he is now implementing.

Thanks for that, Brant. Super helpful. We'll circle back in a moment, Walter, to give you a couple of minutes just to respond to the points that our panelists are making. So, but let me turn to Ryan Poole.

Ryan studied politics in Russian at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He's currently a U.S. Army Special Forces officer deployed here in D.C. He has deployed and served in the past in Africa, Europe, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East.

And in 2017, he served as a director on the National Security Council at the White House. And subsequent to that, he served as a military attache at the U.S. Embassy in Kiev, in Ukraine.

[31:13] So, Ryan, really glad to have you joining us and sharing your perspectives. You want to just jump in and have some quick reflections? Yeah, just a couple of things. The part I took from your question on the key things to focus on, and Walter replied, the progress of the war.

And for me personally and professionally, that's mostly what I am focused on right now is the progress of the war. And I think collectively, the U.S., the European allies, the media overestimated Russia's military capabilities and underestimated the Ukrainian military capabilities.

I spent two years training Ukrainian military in Ukraine. And they were a great partner. And we got them up to certain units up to NATO standards.

And going to the point of we got them to a standard so that they could fight when this type of event would happen with the understanding that NATO is not going to come to their rescue because they are not a NATO ally.

And I'll stay out of the political reasoning for that. But from the perspective of why I personally think the Russians are underperforming and the Ukrainians are overperforming, from the Russian perspective, historically, we've always thought that post-Soviet collapse, the Russian military, under the current chief of the general staff, Valery Gerasimov, would incorporate this Gerasimov doctrine, which is focused on hybrid warfare, information warfare, which the Russians successfully used in Crimea in 2014 and Georgia in 2008.

[33:00] I think we expected to see it again. And I think what we're more seeing is the Soviet deep battle theory, which was they're going to send a lot of troops in to disrupt their enemy forces, cause disorganization amongst the enemy.

But with that comes all the support and supply trains that is necessary to maintain that type of military doctrine, which the Russians just don't have.

And so that I think was surprising. As far as the Ukrainians overperforming, as someone who trained them, I would say from all the partner forces I've worked with, they're the most capable partner force that I've ever worked with from a non-NATO country.

And I think what we're seeing is their willingness to fight, their extreme nationalism, their love of country, and their hatred for the Russians based on the history that Brant just talked about has allowed them to fight in a way that we didn't expect.

And I'll end with my personal expectation. And I think best case scenario would be that, you know, 2020, the 2020s in Ukraine become like the 1980s in Afghanistan for the Russians, where the Ukrainians are similar to the Mujahideen, and they're able to attrit Russian forces over the next several years until the Russians have to make an embarrassing exit or withdrawal.

[34:37] Brian, thanks for that. So, so helpful, bringing those perspectives in. Let me turn to Juliana Stowes. Juliana is a program officer in the Eurasia Division at the International Republican Institute, and she oversees implementation of democracy promotion projects in the country of Georgia.

Before this, she worked at the National Endowment for Democracy, where she managed a portfolio of grants supporting civil society and independent media in the South Caucasus. And so, again, bringing a different perspective from the others that we've heard here.

Juliana, so glad to have you joining us and bringing your thoughts here. Thanks, Jeff. I would just echo what Brent said, that I really think that this dates back to prior conflicts in 2008 in Georgia, and even some lessons that have been learned from the conflicts in Chechnya over the past couple decades.

And that what we're likely going to see as a result of this more drawn out conflict is a narrative coming out and being disseminated to countries that are more open to Western and European integration, such as Georgia and Moldova, that the West and NATO are not going, are not and cannot and will not help you, and that that can have much broader implications beyond just the specific conflict between Russia and Ukraine, because it will have policy implications within those countries.

Which, as someone who monitors Georgia especially, I've already seen that with the government trying to thread the needle, because we're seeing the Russian leadership articulate very clearly, these are the red lines.

[36:40] And if you cross that, then you are in the other camp, which for Russia's neighborhood has meant many of the post-Soviet, many of the former Soviet republics have tried to stay largely silent and try to stay under the radar because their populations are genuinely concerned that they could be next.

Or that this could ultimately result in a much more challenging geopolitical situation for them, if nothing else, which Russia feels that it can act with greater impunity, depending upon the lessons that it's able to draw from this case.

I would also say that a major component of this is the fact that Russia is a kleptocracy, and that the oligarchs in the country are largely able to continue to operate as they please, and are able to leave the country and operate in environments where they are not subject to the sanctions or where they are able to run the sanctions or where they are able to funnel their funds through their family members.

And that if we just have more broad sanctions, those end up hurting the Russian economy and the Russian people greater than those who are able to then have decision making power within the political elites in the country.

And it can ultimately create a fire sale where the oligarchs are able to buy a greater portion of the country and greater power within Russia's borders, regardless of how this turns out.

[38:28] I've seen also some questions about the Russian Orthodox Church and its relationship with the government, and I've done a bit of research on this topic myself.

And I would say that a big factor of this is the concept of symphonia within Orthodoxy, which looks at two spheres of influence that the government is tasked with administration of the state and ensuring the status of the church within this broader Orthodox Russia, while the church is tasked with the moral authority within the country.

And that may have been the case in Tsarist Russia, and there are themes where Putin tries to emulate some of that Tsarist power.

But that because Russia, in its current state and constitution is a secular nation, and the Orthodox Church, given its history with the Soviet Union, is unwilling to enter into a more vulnerable relationship with the state where it could open itself up to some of the trauma that it experienced under Soviet rule.

Instead, the Orthodox Church has a much more informal status within the Russian state and is acting as a political actor in order to lobby on its own behalf.

[40:08] And so the patriarchate, as a result, especially the Russian patriarch himself, are thus used by Putin in order to further the state's goals, including geopolitically.

For example, in Georgia, the Georgian Orthodox Church has not had the full ability to voice opinions on the conflict over its occupied regions because of the very overt threat that the Russian Orthodox Church would then recognize the autocephaly of the Apostian Orthodox Church, and that they would lose that connection with that part of their faith.

Thanks, Juliana. So, so helpful. I feel like I'm learning a huge amount here in a short space of time. I want to, we've got a ton of questions from people, but Walter, can I ask you just to, I mean, this is completely unfair, right?

Because we've just heard a huge amount of incredible input from folks with real expertise here. But can you just take a minute or so just to, something that stands out from you that you might respond to. And as you're doing that, folks, as you have questions, the easiest way for us to see you when we have this many people on a call is to use that little raise your hand icon there in the Zoom box.

So go ahead and just use that. And can I ask, when you ask a question, just make it really short. We want to get through as many as we can here because there's a lot of great questions and a lot of ground to cover.

[41:41] But Walter, as folks are doing that, any just quick responses to what you heard here? Well, you know, I think, I mean, there was so much good stuff there. Yeah. I guess I would emphasize the historical roots of what we're seeing that a number of you raised.

And, you know, the impact of not just 20th century Russian history, but 19th century Russian history, where there's real suppression of Ukrainian nationalism, Polish nationalism.

We're kind of aware in the U.S. in some ways that roughly 2 million Jews were driven out of Russia between 1880 and 1910.

And 95 percent of them really ended up in the U.S. And that's where the overwhelming majority of American Jews came from as refugees from Russia. Another roughly 2 million, roughly the same number of Muslims were driven south from Russian persecutions in the Caucasus and so on.

All part of the sort of Russian nationalism linked to the Orthodox Church in many ways is they're trying to create and impose an identity on this sprawling empire.

[42:54] So there are, you know, deep roots. And Russia has shaped the reality of the contemporary world far more deeply, often than we understand.

And a crisis like this should take us all back to the history books. That's great. Absolutely. Thanks, Walter. Really helpful. I want to open it up to broad Q&A.;

So if you can use the, raise your hand there and then give us a kind of succinct question for either for Walter and or the panel to speak to.

But as you're doing that, I'm just reading here in the chats, lots of good questions in the chat, chats. And I do want to, I don't see Yuri on my screen here, but I'm seeing in the chat.

I want to make sure that we loop in Yuri Barofsky, who is a member of Advent and who is Ukrainian and has a number of different perspectives on this.

[43:55] Yuri, are you, I don't see you on my screen here, but can you, can you just give us a sort of, we want to leave time for as many questions as we can, but it'd be great to get a minute from you in terms of your, where you're situated in this, in this regard.

Thank you. Yeah, I just came on the video. And thank you very much for your prayers today, Church. I just want to support the United States that Ukraine received so far. I think a couple of things I want to mention is, you know, the Democratic government on all the sex.

Where Ukraine had a lot of pressure from the West, particularly economic pressure and then diplomatic pressure. Decided to be the good guy and give up weapons of mass destruction and nuclear warheads.

Ukraine did not have the missiles to deliver the warheads. So they were kind of useless, but they were real dangerous. Ukraine was the third of most dangerous nuclear warheads.

Ukraine gave up communication agreement. And that's a great question.

[45:05] And independence. Audio is not working. Yuri, I'm so sorry, but we're only catching a few of your words. I'm not sure what's happening with the audio there.

So, but we are capturing your comments in the chat box. I do encourage everybody to go and actually read in the chat box there because Yuri has, has offered some really, I think, helpful perspectives from this that are really valuable.

I'm not sure what's happening with the audio there, but we were only catching a few words. So, David Noel, you've got your hand raised there. Hi.

So I have a question mostly for Ryan, but also just kind of for the panel. I think Ryan said something about like best case. This kind of turns into like Russia's Afghanistan or something like that.

And of course, Afghanistan was like essentially destroyed by decades of war. And so I'm curious, how should we think about both in general and from a Christian perspective, weighing the prospect of perhaps a shorter war that has a less just in versus a longer war that brings with enormous amounts of human suffering?

[46:21] I mean, ultimately, I think that's up to the Ukrainians. It's not our place to tell them that fight, but what should we be rooting for? And how should we think through those factors? Yeah.

One just kind of quick comment on that, David. So I'd say best case scenario, that's just based on the fact that I think no one knows what's going to happen. We don't know what Putin is going to do.

And as Walter mentioned, there haven't really, really been any off ramps that have been designed for Putin. So if Putin decides to continue this war for a significant period of time, based on what we're seeing with the Russian resistance and the unified Western response of supporting with lethal aid, I think that's probably the most likely outcome as far as that would be the best likely outcome.

As far as the question related to the Christian response to a quick and brutal fight, or a long and destructive fight, I don't think it's really in our, unless we choose to go to war with Russia, which that is outside of, that's just, I think that's off the table.

Unless they trigger Article 5, then this is in the hands of the Ukrainians, and it's in the hands of Putin, essentially. Thanks, Ryan.

[47:49] Any of our other panelists want to jump in on that? Otherwise, we'll go to the next question. I'll jump in real quick, just for clarification. Article 5 is a NATO article that essentially says that an attack on one NATO nation is an attack on all NATO nations.

And that's a really important point that Ryan brought up. And it's why our government has stated that they will not send troops into Ukraine because Ukraine is not a NATO member.

So back in 06 or 07, we tried to get Georgia and Ukraine admitted to NATO. And back then, there were no separatist regions in those countries.

But the Western allies, particularly Germany and France, important note, they basically stood in the way of US and Britain pushing for, pushing very hard for what's called MAP, Membership Action Plan.

And, you know, that's, I think that Yuri mentioned one thing that Ukraine also did, a program that I'm a part of, the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, disarmed the nuclear warheads in Ukraine in exchange for an agreement between Russia and the United States for Ukraine's territorial integrity.

[49:11] You all know how that went. So the whole, you know, intervening very, very quickly escalates into some scenarios that are, that would be really concerning.

Even now, I, things that I, I worry about that I watch are escalatory actions. Say it's a cyber attack from Russia intended for Ukraine, but perhaps there's collateral damage in, in Poland or an errant missile that lands in Romania or something like that.

And one of those countries invokes Article 5. What is NATO going to do? Then they're going to be in this scenario where either we respond and escalate or NATO ceases to have its raison d'etre, its reason for being.

It, it, it essentially, the Article 5, you know, an attack on one is an attack on all, just dissipates. And then what is NATO? And then that is like a huge domino effect for us and for, you know, the post-World War II Roosevelt-Truman kind of era that we've been living under.

Um, with some relative peace, at least in some regions of the world, especially in Europe. Um, so that's where like the stakes of this, um, are just so high, um, that it's really, um, and to, and coming back to Ryan's point, like this ends up being a fight between, you know, Putin and the Ukrainians and their will to fight.

[50:56] Um, that's great. Thanks for that. So here's what I want to do. Um, we are supposed to finish at nine o'clock and I want to honor that for people. I know it's a Sunday night and people have kids and work and everything like that, but, um, there are so many good questions here.

And my phone is blowing up with texts saying, can we keep going a little bit longer, please? Um, so, um, what I'd like to do for those that are able to stay until nine 15, we'll keep going until nine 15.

However, I want to do a kind of end point for those that do need to hop off now. Um, I want to ask one of the things that we were talking about as a team is, um, obviously there's a deep desire to help in some kind of practical and tangible way.

So Jeff Simpson, I'm going to ask if you can just, um, point us in the right direction as a church for what we can do for, uh, for Ukraine. Um, and then Tommy, I'm going to ask if you would just, um, uh, any comments that you want to make.

And then if you would just, um, lead us in a prayer for Ukraine and for all who are involved in this. Um, and that'll take us here to that nine o'clock point, but then we're going to keep the call going for another 15 minutes until nine 15.

[52:07] Um, and that will just give us time to get to so many of the questions, um, and the, and the interest, I think, and the energy around this, um, to, to stay on.

Um, so Jeff and then Tommy. Thanks everybody, uh, for sharing. I've really enjoyed listening in tonight. Um, I think one of the questions that you may have been asking in the past couple of weeks and even maybe even during the event tonight is how can I help people who have been affected by this?

Um, how can I help people who are suffering as a result of all this? And so we just wanted to highlight a few practical ways that you can do that. Um, the first is that you can directly support, uh, something called the Anglican Relief and Development Fund, uh, which is a, um, a fund that can help Anglican local churches all around the world.

Uh, the money will go directly to local Anglican churches, pastors, congregations that are ministering to those who are in need on the front lines. And so we'll put that link in the chat for you if you'd like to give to that.

Um, we'd also like to provide a couple opportunities for you to help people in our congregation who are, um, directly, um, directly tied to what's going on.

[53:18] And so you heard from Yuri earlier, um, and we got Yuri and his wife's permission to share about, um, a need they have. Um, Yuri's mother, um, immigrated to the U.S.

A couple, um, a month or two ago and, uh, is from Ukraine and, uh, and now is likely that she will be here longer, um, than expected. And so, um, Yuri and Colleen have highlighted some needs, um, assistance for helping her with things like, uh, documents for her immigration status, um, medical insurance, um, figuring out various issues related to housing.

And so if you have any resources, expertise in the area, um, love to highlight that for you. You can email admin at adventdc.org. Uh, we'll also put that in the chat if, uh, if you would like to, uh, assist with that.

Um, and then Veronica and David Kerr, uh, also have some close family and friends connections in Ukraine. Um, and so if you would like to help with what they're doing and support what they're doing, uh, you can email them as well.

And I'll put Veronica's email in the chat. So I'm going to turn it over to Tommy. Great. Thanks, Jeff. And thanks to all of you who are joining tonight.

[54:27] Those who have shared from your own experience, what, what a privilege to be able to have this conversation with you. So really, really appreciate that. Um, let's pray the Lord be with you.

Let's pray Lord. We, this, we lament, we lament with those who are suffering what is happening right now in Ukraine. We lament the murder, the destruction, the senselessness of this war.

Lord, uh, we, we pray, we, I, we, we, we think of your words in Psalm two, where you, where you say, therefore you Kings be wise, be warned you rulers of the earth, serve the Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling.

Kiss the sun or he will be angry. And your way will lead to your destruction for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. Lord, we, we, we pray those words into this situation, uh, in particular for the leadership of Russia and, and Putin, Lord, we, we think of the words in James four, what causes quarrels and what causes fights among you.

Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you, whatever inner war there is in Putin's heart and the heart of the other leaders and generals that drives this outer war.

[55:50] Lord, we, we pray for a ceasefire of that inner spiritual war, uh, Lord, whatever, whatever leads, whatever motivates the destruction and the killing Lord, we pray for an end of that.

Um, we pray for all of those who are displaced, all of those who are, um, forced to leave their country. We pray for all of those who are staying to fight. We pray for families who are separated.

Uh, Lord, we pray for those who are in fear, uncertainty, Lord, uh, Lord, uh, in all of these situations, we pray that you would present that you would be present and that your mercy would be, uh, palpable Lord.

Um, we pray for a swift end to this. We pray that Russia would give up and go home, Lord. We pray that these beautiful cities and culture and people, this, um, this society would be preserved Lord from, from destruction.

Um, summon your power. Oh God, show us your strength. Oh God, if you have done before rebuke the beast. Waste among the reeds, the herd of bulls among the calves, humbled. May the beast bring bars of silver, scatter the nations who delight in war, Lord, to the extent that this nation, this Russian nation delights in war, scatter them, weaken them, Lord, and bring a swift end to this, uh, needless conflict.

[57:08] We pray this and we pray that you would lead us to follow your will, uh, Lord, and that you would open to us ways that we might support and love and care for people who are affected by this, um, including the people in our own midst, Lord.

We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Thank you so much. So I encourage you to stick around. We're going to go for another, we're going to go to nine 15.

So another 11 minutes here. If you do need to hop off, do feel free. Um, but we've got, um, time here, um, for, uh, for some more questions and to dig into this a little bit more deeply.

So, um, uh, Jeff Goodman, I have seen your hand raised there and, uh, thanks. Um, uh, one con I'm concerned that, uh, I get the NATO agreement of like, we're only going to attack if it's been a NATO country.

But at the same time, I feel like Putin's called our bluff a little bit because, and what does this say to other countries with maybe similar ambitions? If basically we can attack non NATO countries and continue to make progress around the world and they won't do anything about it.

[58:19] Um, you know, they're, I'm concerned about that. You know, I'm just curious what your thoughts on that. You know, I'm not saying it's easy to just go in obviously to a nuclear power.

It's just, it's really hard to not see this emboldening. Um, yeah, they're similar minded folks. Thanks, Jeff. Who wants to take that on? Well, I do think I remember writing back in the 1990s that if you, if you put up no fishing signs on one side of the lake, uh, you're making a statement about the other side of the lake as well.

And that, um, and that NATO expansion that didn't go right up to Russia's border would, you know, everywhere would create exactly this problem. There'd be this indeterminate, insecure zone.

Um, and we do seem to be there, uh, exactly there. Um, I think Moldova is, is worried and quite rightly. Um, yeah, uh, look, it's actually not true of course that we, that we only defend NATO countries when Kuwait was attacked by Iraq, um, in the, in the first Gulf war, we went right in.

So, um, but, you know, but we act where we think our interests lead us to act. And it was interesting that, that the one thing that probably could have deterred Putin, which would have been a quick bilateral security deal between the U S and Ukraine, one that would not have required the rest of NATO to, to exceed to it and then send 50,000 American troops to, uh, Ukraine was off the table because nobody in either party thought that American public opinion would have accepted it.

[60:07] Um, you know, you could talk to very liberal anti-Russian senators and talk to very conservative anti-Russian senators. And that's exactly, you know, you would hear the same thing. It's just impossible.

It's not on the table. So what, what seems to have happened is that Putin understood the gap between, he didn't understand the Ukrainian military or even the Russian military, but he understands the gap between our rhetoric, um, you know, and our sort of moral posturing about our beliefs and our values, and then what we're actually willing and able to do.

And so it's in that gap that he operates very effectively. That's good. Thanks, Walter. Uh, Rob, Rob Vest.

I saw you, you've got your hand raised there. Yeah. Um, does that, I had asked the question in the chat. Um, there's a, an undertone from a lot of people about, uh, this has to be stopped, you know, the reference to Munich and, and other comments.

Do you think that this has to be stopped rises to the level of NATO engaging in a war with Russia? And if it does, what risk does that pose, you know, militarily, you know, to those who's living here in the capital of the U S Thanks.

[61:31] Well, I mean, you're right. It, it poses exactly that threat and that's why, um, there's very little call in the U S for us to start a war with Russia.

It's why I talk about things like no fly zones that could be, that could, uh, significantly increase the, the chance of a war between NATO and Russia, uh, are, are so, you know, there's so much opposition at the same time.

You know, as, as was noted during the panel, I forget which one of you made the point, it's really good that, that, you know, suppose Russia fires a missile and it hits a target in Poland, even though it wasn't intended to, um, you know, simply, uh, our decision that we won't deliberately take an action that provokes launches a war doesn't mean that we won't be in a situation where a war starts.

And, and that's something I think we should all keep in mind. And to some degree, you could argue that the less Putin is afraid, the more Putin thinks that NATO is going to do everything possible to stay out of a war with Russia, the more likely he is to make a miscalculation that accidentally gets us into exactly this kind of a war.

So it's not a, it's not a simple don't provoke Russia. And then we won't have a war situation. It's actually a really messy thing in a very kinetic environment where a lot of things are happening that people don't control very well.

[63:10] Isn't that exactly what we've done though, is kind of telegraphed that we're not going to get involved. We've done our best to do that.

Yeah. Right. And as a result, Putin has then taken the opportunity to push farther. Because he knows that, you know, the risk of a retaliation is less.

So that, for example, if he was afraid that NATO might come into the war, he might stay out of Western Ukraine. Right. But if he's convinced that no matter what he does, NATO is going to continue to try to stay out of the war, that would increase for him the attractiveness of moving into Western Ukraine.

And the closer he gets to those borders with NATO, the bigger the chance there is that the war overlaps those boundaries in some way. So it's not like there's some kind of like magic button you can hit that makes this problem go away.

Yuri Barofsky, let's hope your sound, we can hear you here. Let's jump in there with a question. Thank you. Can you hear me now? I joined on the phone. Yes, we can. Wonderful. Walter, thank you for your really deep perspective.

[64:26] You really laid it out really well. I think one other question that hasn't been unpacked is to what extent Europe has appetite for Ukrainian refugees? Because at this point, the stem of refugees is continuing.

It's picking up. And at some point, Europe is, there's only a certain capacity and an appetite for it. Would that potentially push NATO for action?

And another very quick question for experts. Is there a legal way that Ukraine can request NATO to close the airspace?

The whole confrontation with Russia's side, is it even legally possible for a sovereign nation to ask someone else to control its airspace? Okay. First question, you know, appetite for refugees.

People have spoken of, have compared what may be coming, not to the kinds of refugee flows we saw at the end of World War II, where there were literally, you know, more than 10 million refugees wandering through Europe.

[65:30] People are speaking of up to a fourth of the population of Ukraine fleeing. If the war goes forward, that'd be about 10 million people. So, you know, Europe would not really be well able to do that.

I don't know how the politics would work because there is a huge revulsion against Putin. But I think, I hate to say this, it's not a compliment to human nature, but I think the European reaction, if the end of their capacity for refugee absorption was reached, they would close their frontiers before they would start a war with Russia.

You know, so again, if I were advising people in Ukraine who were thinking of leaving, I would advise them to leave early. They say, by the way, in banking, there are two rules.

The first rule is don't panic, because if nobody panics, there won't be a run on the bank. But the second rule is panic first, because that way you'll get your money out of the bank if there's trouble.

So panic first is probably good advice. On the second question, Ukraine has already asked NATO countries to impose a no-fly zone, and they've refused.

[66:52] My understanding is that there could be a request for the UN to implement a no-fly zone, but that would require the Security Council to agree to it, which we know they're not going to because of Russia's permanent standing member status.

Yeah. Well, I'm looking at the time here and realizing we could go on for a much longer, but it's 9-14, and I do want to make sure that we end at our readjusted closing time here.

I think the interest that is here and the reality that this is going to extend for who knows how long means that perhaps this is something that we do again in the future as events change on the ground and as there's more to talk about.

I think this exemplifies exactly the kind, Walter, as you were saying, that the most important thing that Christians can do is be informed and to educate themselves in terms of these kinds of matters. And I think this kind of conversation that we've had tonight is a good example of the kind of work that we want to be able to do as a church and as Christians, both now and going forward.

So my hope is that we might be able to do more of this in the future and to pick up where we've left off here. But with that said, let me give a huge thanks, I think, on everyone's behalf.

[68:15] Thanks to Walter for your perspectives and wisdom and knowledge on all of this, and also for our panelists, for Brant and Ryan and Juliana.

Thank you for joining us with this and adding to this. This has been incredibly rich and a real privilege to be able to think together with all of you.

We're really grateful for you bringing your experience and expertise to bear on this. Thank you all for joining us. And again, we'll look forward to doing more of these in the future, but really grateful for this time together tonight.

Thank you, everyone.