

News; International

Dozens Feared Dead In Bombing Of Ukraine Army Barracks; Ukraine Claims 14,000 Russian Troops Killed In Fighting; Drone Footage Shows Guttured Buildings In Mariupol; Diplomats Discuss Idea Of Neutrality For Ukraine To End War; War Refugees Spread Out Across Europe; Ukrainian Refugees Stuck At U.S.-Mexico Border; Push To Stop Companies Operating In Russia; E.U. Leaders Make Humanitarian Appeal To Putin; U.S. And Chinese Leaders Speak On Ukraine; Russian Orthodox Church Supports Putin; Toy Company Raises \$145,000+ With Zelenskyy LEGO. Aired 5-6a ET

Kim Brunhuber, Scott McLean, Fred Pleitgen, Ed Lavandera, Lucy Kafanov, Natasha Bertrand, Kaitlan Collins, John Berman, Delia Gallagher

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[05:00:00]

(JOINED IN PROGRESS)

KIM BRUNHUBER, CNN ANCHOR AND CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): -- diplomacy, quote, "without delay," warning, "Russian losses will be huge if the fighting doesn't end."

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYY, PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE (through translator): I want everyone to hear me now, especially I want them to hear me in Moscow. It's time to meet, time to talk, time to restore territorial integrity and justice for Ukraine or else Russia will face such losses that several generations will not be enough for it to rise back up.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BRUNHUBER: Ukrainian casualties are also mounting. Russian bombers struck army barracks in the southern city of Mykolaiv. Swedish journalists shot video of rescuers pulling one person from the debris.

In the besieged port of Mariupol, drone footage shows utter devastation by Russian forces. A huge shopping mall stands gutted and burned out.

In the U.S., the president spoke with China's President Xi Jinping, warning of unspecified consequences if Beijing assists the Russian side. We'll have more on that later this hour.

CNN has correspondents around the world, covering the story from every angle. We'll have reports from Scott McLean, Ed Lavandera in Poland, Natasha Bertrand in Brussels, Delia Gallagher in Rome and Kaitlan Collins at the White House. We begin with our Scott McLean live in Lviv, Ukraine,

Scott, let's start with the deadly attacks on the barracks.

What's the latest?

SCOTT MCLEAN, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Kim, this is remarkable footage taken by Swedish journalists, saying it looked like five Russian bombs were dropped on this military base in Mykolaiv. It's not clear how many troops were taking cover in shelters, underground, wherever.

And that would have a huge impact on the death toll. But in the immediate aftermath, it is clear there were casualties. You can see people from the barracks, rescuers, trying to frantically to pull people out. One man actually is pulled out, miraculously. He looked, actually, uninjured.

One soldier told that affiliate in Sweden that there were some 200 people present at the time. And he estimates that the vast majority of them would have been killed or injured. So it's possible that the number of casualties here is massive.

Again, we're not in a position to clarify at this point. Mykolaiv is an important part of the Russian advance in Ukraine. It is a strategic city in the southern part of the country. It's also a place that the Russians have really struggled to capture.

If they were able to take the city, they would be able to move west, open up a new front in Odessa or they'd be able to move north and attack Kyiv from the south. For the moment, it seems they're content to lob explosives into the city instead.

And military bases, military barracks, those have been par for the course for the Russians. Just a week ago, there was a military base struck not actually far from here, about 11 miles or so from the Polish border. In that attack, the Ukrainians say 35 people were killed; the Russian estimates, though, are a lot higher, Kim.

BRUNHUBER: All right. Let's turn to besieged Mariupol. We've seen dramatic images there.

What's the latest there and are there hopes that more people may actually be able to get out of that city?

MCLEAN: Yes, so in terms of the humanitarian corridors, it does seem that there's at least a trickle of people getting through. Satellite images show there's people moving west toward a city that's in Russian control right now and they're supposed to make their way to the city of Zaporizhzhya.

That is the good news. The bad news is, it appears people still trapped under the rubble of that theater that was hit, hit by a Russian airstrike. This is a place where Ukrainian officials say that some 1,200, 1300 people were sheltering underground.

And it actually had the word "children" written in large letters on the pavement outside to try to dissuade Russian bombers from striking that target; though, it appears it didn't have any impact.

Yesterday, we got word that some 130 people were pulled out of the rubble. We don't know their condition. We are hoping that there are more. But information has been sparse to come out of that area, in part, because local officials say the area has been shelled continuously.

They say that, some 50 to 100 times a day, there's shelling in that city. Kim.

BRUNHUBER: Yes. A really desperate situation there. Then finally where you are, in Lviv, after that attack yesterday in a city that's seen as a safe haven --

[05:05:00]

BRUNHUBER: -- for residents and refugees who have been coming there from across the country, what's the feeling there?

And are people scared?

Are they trying to leave from there as well?

MCLEAN: That is the fear, Kim. If you go out on the streets, life is still remarkably normal. This is one of the most beautiful cities. People are still running their errands, going for coffee, eating out at restaurants. So it appears that life goes on. But obviously, this city has been spared by Russian bombs that is until yesterday, when one struck near the airport here in Lviv.

It doesn't people that people from this area are too spooked because the airport is a place you'd expect the bombs to land. We've seen that in other cities. In Lutsk, a recent example, where airport infrastructure has been targeted.

So it appears many of them are staying put for right now. I actually spoke to one woman who just arrived from Kyiv, fleeing bombing there. I spoke to her and her daughter about how they were feeling here in Lviv, watch.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE (through translator): I'm also scared of the situation but I like it here in Lviv. I want to stay here for some time.

MCLEAN: You feel safe here?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE (through translator): Yes.

MCLEAN: Even after what happened this morning?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE (through translator): Yes.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MCLEAN: That's a 13-year-old girl. It's remarkable, even after the bombs falling, people still feeling remarkably safe just because things are so, so calm in the city center. Obviously, the concern, though, if people do choose to leave, you will have a whole new flood of refugees to the border. City officials say there are some 200,000 people taking shelter in Lviv alone, Kim.

BRUNHUBER: All right, I appreciate the reporting, Scott McLean, thanks so much.

Ukraine's military is claiming a major battlefield victory as it pushes back against the Russian army. CNN's Fred Pleitgen has the details.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

FREDERIK PLEITGEN, CNN SENIOR INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT: Another blow to Vladimir Putin's military, Ukrainian forces claiming they ambushed this convoy of Russian airborne troops.

While CNN cannot independently verify the information, Russian state TV, for the first time, acknowledged that a senior airborne commander and several soldiers have been killed.

While still outgunned, the Ukrainians feel they might slowly be turning the tide.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: (Speaking foreign language).

PLEITGEN (voice-over): "The Armed Forces of Ukraine continue to deliver devastating blows, at groups of enemy troops, who are trying to consolidate and hold the capture defensive lines," a Ukrainian army spokesman says.

The Ukrainians say they are launching counter attacks against Russian troops, this video allegedly showing an anti-tank guided missile taking out a Russian armored vehicle. They also claim they've already killed more than 14,000 Russian troops and shot down more than 110 combat choppers.

CNN can't confirm those numbers. But the Russians haven't updated their casualty figures in more than two weeks, instead claiming what they call their, quote, military special operation" is going as planned.

Russia's defense ministry released this video of helicopter gunships allegedly attacking a Ukrainian airfield.

PLEITGEN (voice-over): Still, Vladimir Putin, clearly feels the need to rally his nation, making a rare appearance at a massive rally at Moscow's main stadium, where a strange technical glitch cut off his speech but not before he praised Russian troops.

PUTIN (through translator): The best proof is the way our boys are fighting in this operation, shoulder to shoulder, supporting each other and, if need be, protecting each other like brothers, shielding one another with their bodies on the battlefield. We haven't had this unity for a long time. PLEITGEN (voice-over): But the Russians appear to be so angry at U.S. and allied weapons shipments to Ukraine they've vowed to target any deliveries entering Ukrainian territory.

And they're hitting strategic targets as well, firing several cruise missiles at an airplane repair plant near Lviv while a Russian cruise missile, dropped on a residential building in the capital, Kyiv, after being shot down by Ukrainian air defenses.

Former world heavyweight boxing champ and brother of Kyiv's mayor, Wladimir Klitschko, pleading for more help.

WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO, UKRAINIAN FORMER PROFESSIONAL BOXER: This is genocide of the Ukrainian population. You have to act now. Stop passively observing and stop doing business with Russia. Do it now.

PLEITGEN (voice-over): The Biden administration has said more aid and weapons are on the way, as Ukrainian forces continue to put up a fierce fight, preventing Russia's troops from further significant gains -- Fred Pleitgen, CNN, Lviv, Ukraine.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

BRUNHUBER: For more on this, William Taylor joins me. He's a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine and the vice president of Russia and Europe at the U.S. Institute of Peace.

[05:10:00]

BRUNHUBER: Thank you so much for being with us. You saw President Zelenskyy's message to Moscow, in which he said, frankly and clearly, it's time to talk.

Do you think, given how the war is going, that Russia will finally enter into good faith negotiations anytime soon?

WILLIAM TAYLOR, FORMER U.S. AMBASSADOR TO UKRAINE: Kim, I think as you just reported, it's not going great for the Russian military. The Russian military has underperformed. It is not doing well. It's not able to sustain itself, it's not able to feed its troops in a lot of these places around the big cities that they've not been able to take.

So as that happens, that will be the indication that there's a possibility of negotiation; that is, when it is clear to President Putin, who is the only decision maker on this question, when it is clear to him that it is not going well, when he is -- when his military has stalled and the only way out for him is to sit down for negotiations, then that will be the time.

President Zelenskyy has indicated he's ready to talk. President Zelenskyy has indicated that the Ukrainians are going to continue to fight and they are continuing to defend the capital and other cities. And

that's the key part of the question of negotiation. It's up to President Putin to decide. And he has to realize that his military is not accomplishing what he wants.

BRUNHUBER: But he's made so many unrealistic demands. But one thing which might move him, perhaps, has been some discussion among Ukrainian diplomats and Ukrainian officials about what it would look like if Ukraine assumes some form of neutrality.

Is that a viable off-ramp here?

And if so, what might that look like?

TAYLOR: So President Zelenskyy has made it clear that he is determined to secure Ukraine. He's determined to provide security for his people. He's been interested, of course, in NATO membership as a way to provide that security. And it's now clear to him that that's not a near-term solution. It's in their constitution.

But he's realized that, for now, it's not a solution. So he's looking for other ways, other formats, other examples of how European nations have provided security for themselves and have been secured.

One way is like Austria. But again, this is a question not for President Putin, not for Europeans; this is a question for Ukraine. This is a question for President Zelenskyy to decide if he wants to pursue this kind of an idea. He said he's open to it. He said he's open to it. And that's the right question.

BRUNHUBER: Yes, the Austrian model would be that they own the military but not join any alliance, right?

TAYLOR: That is correct. It's the Austrian model that says -- Austrians are members of the E.U.; that's important. They're not a member of NATO. They do have their military. And the Ukrainians will demand a strong military for all kinds of reasons.

They'll demand two things, one is assurances, not just assurances, guarantees from other nations, including the United States. Including Germany, including all of the members of the Security Council. They will demand those kinds of guarantees, number one.

But as a backup, as an insurance policy, they will demand to have a strong military. As we're seeing right now, this is a strong military that the Ukrainians have right now. They will demand to keep that.

BRUNHUBER: Let's pivot to China now. During the call with President Biden, Xi Jinping said both the U.S. and China have a responsibility for ensuring peace.

So when it comes to China, do you think that's likely?

Or is it more likely to support Russia, financially or even militarily, which would obviously deepen the conflict?

TAYLOR: It would deepen the conflict, no doubt. However, the Chinese have denied that the Russians have asked for this military support and financial support; just the fact that the Russians are asking for the support from China, that's a suggestion to me that President Putin recognizes he's in desperate shape. He needs help.

But on the Chinese -- they've not committed. In fact, they've said that they've gotten no such request, number one. Number two, the Chinese have been hesitant. They've held back any expressions of support.

When President Putin was in Beijing for the opening of the Olympics, they issued a long statement between the two presidents, President Xi and President Putin. They didn't mention Ukraine once. The Chinese would not allow Ukraine to be part of that announcement.

And last thing, Kim, is the Chinese have abstained twice in the U.N., in the Security Council and in the General Assembly. They have not supported Russia in either of the votes in the U.N.

[05:15:00]

BRUNHUBER: Yes. We'll see. Certainly, a strongly worded condemnation would go very far. So we'll see what happens, as they've been sort of going, playing both sides so far. That's all the time we have, Ambassador William Taylor. Thank you so much for joining us. Really appreciate your insights.

TAYLOR: Thanks, Kim. Good to be here.

BRUNHUBER: All right, coming up on CNN NEWSROOM, Ukrainian refugees fled across borders in hopes of reaching safety. We'll hear their stories of escape from the fighting now raging in their country. Stay with us.

(MUSIC PLAYING)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(MUSIC PLAYING)

BRUNHUBER: Refugees from Ukraine are spreading out across Europe. Hundreds reached Munich, aboard a train from Budapest on Friday. Most were women with children. Many others were elderly. Germany has received nearly 200,000 refugees so far.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

WOLFGANG SCHAEUBLE, MUNICH FIRE DEPARTMENT (through translator): They are being received and served food and drink. If they're being taken to accommodation, they're, of course, tested for COVID.

Given the problematic situation with the rapidly rising infection numbers in Germany, so they're being accommodated in emergency shelters where they can stay for now.

[05:20:00]

BRUNHUBER: So as you can see from this map, the exodus from Ukraine is taking place in nearly all directions. And Poland has seen more people cross into its territory than any other country. CNN's Ed Lavender is in Poland near the border with Ukraine.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

ED LAVANDERA, CNN CORRESPONDENT: It's been just over three weeks since Russia invaded Ukraine. And there are now more than 3.2 million people, refugees, who have left their home country of Ukraine, in to mostly Europe.

We have new figures that show more than 2 million of those refugees have entered the country of Poland. Staggering numbers that we continue to see unfolding here in Poland.

One of the things that really struck us in the last few days, as we have spoken with so many of the refugees arriving here in the border area of Poland and Ukraine, is that they're coming from the far eastern areas of Ukraine, cities that are seeing the worst of the warfare.

And the refugees describe to us a painful experience. We spoke with one family, two women, who had come with their -- a 6 year-old girl. They said they spent two days traveling from the city of Kharkiv to get to this border town in Poland.

They told the young girl -- they didn't describe it was a war; they said they were going to take a trip to Poland, just like some of her other friends had been doing.

And that is the kind of effort the parents have to do to shield their young children from the horrors of this war. What they describe, they had hoped they could wait out the war in the fighting, to be able to stay in their home city. But after weeks and weeks of constant warfare, they couldn't take it any longer.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: We hoped that everything would work out. We didn't want to leave our home. But we couldn't wait anymore. Four rockets hit our area.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Every day, every minute, every second, it's just terrible for everyone, for ourselves, for our children, for our families and loved ones. We still have relatives back home. Our grandmother, who is 100 years old, was too feeble to be physically removed.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

LAVANDERA: So here in the train station, where so many refugees have been arriving in the last few weeks on the border of Poland, we continue to hear these stories. And what's really striking about this situation is that they're coming from the hardest hit areas, where the warfare and the decimation of the cities has been the most extreme.

And these are really treacherous journeys that is taking many of these families longer and longer to get out of and very dangerous situations. And those are the kind of accounts that we can continue to hear over and over from the refugees that are arriving here in Poland -- Ed Lavandera, CNN, Przemysl, Poland.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

BRUNHUBER: Ukrainians who flee the war are having a hard time entering the U.S. Our Lucy Kafanov spoke to some refugees at the U.S.- Mexico border, who have been there for days.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

LUCY KAFANOV, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): At America's southern border, anguish and uncertainty for the war weary. Kristina was in Kyiv when Russia unleashed tear from the skies.

KRISTINA, UKRAINIAN ASYLUM SEEKER: I just wake up from bomb.

KAFANOV (voice-over): She fled first to Poland then France then Mexico, unable to bring her parents or brother along.

KRISTINA: They're just crying so much, just hugging so much. Goodbye and we don't know maybe they don't look each other anymore in this life.

KAFANOV: Too much.

KAFANOV (voice-over): Traumatized, shaken, waiting for a chance to apply for asylum in the U.S.

KRISTINA: Two weeks, two weeks.

KAFANOV: Two weeks at this border and --

KRISTINA: Yes.

KAFANOV: -- you have not been able to cross --

KRISTINA: Yes.

KAFANOV: -- despite the fact that you're fleeing (ph) more.

KRISTINA: Yes, and here we are currently third time.

KAFANOV: Third time at this border.

KRISTINA: Yes. And we just tried to go there.

KAFANOV (voice-over): Sergei Fenig (ph), his wife, Yana (ph), and their two little ones fled Kharkiv as soon as the invasion began, before the Russians turned their home to rubble.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: (Speaking foreign language).

KAFANOV (voice-over): He said they're really hoping they'll be able to cross. UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: The baby says he wants to go to America.

KAFANOV (voice-over): An unreachable dream for many, with the U.S. southern border largely closed off to asylum seekers for the past two years, thanks to a controversial Trump era COVID health order known as Title 42.

Shortly after we spoke, Kristina and other Ukrainians were allowed to cross but they weren't the only one seeking refuge from Vladimir Putin's wrath.

KAFANOV: There is confusion at the border here in Tijuana. We saw some Ukrainians allowed to enter including those that have been turned away several time. This group consists of mostly Russians. They have been here for days. Their fate remains uncertain.

Patia Yaden (ph) and then her two children came from St. Petersburg. Her husband was arrested for protesting the invasion hours after was announced. He feared prison or forced conscription into the war.

[05:25:00]

KAFANOV: She caught the last Aeroflot flight to Mexico hoping to gain refuge and safe haven in the U.S.

(Speaking foreign language).

You tried to cross.

What do they tell you?

KAFANOV (voice-over): She says they were promised entry then told to wait. Six days later, they remain in limbo. No access to funds because of sanctions. A Department of Homeland Security memo obtained by CNN instructs Customs and Border Protection officers to consider exempting Ukrainians from Title 42.

An agency spokesman said other vulnerable individuals could be accepted on a case-by-case basis but no other nationality was singled out in the new guidance.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

BRUNHUBER: And if you'd like to help people in Ukraine who may need shelter, food and water, please go to [cnn.com/impact](https://www.cnn.com/impact). You'll find several ways to help.

All right. Coming up, mounting losses and trails of destruction. We'll have the latest on the war in Ukraine, as Russia's invasion enters its fourth week. Stay with us.

(MUSIC PLAYING)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(MUSIC PLAYING) BRUNHUBER: Welcome back to all of you watching us here in the United States, Canada and all around the world, I'm Kim Brunhuber.

Fighting is ramping up for the control of the southern port city of Mykolaiv. Have a look here.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BRUNHUBER (voice-over): This is the aftermath of a Russian strike there on a Ukrainian base Friday. One of the surviving soldiers told Swedish affiliates that it appears most people inside were killed.

This as Ukrainian President Zelenskyy has a new message for Moscow, saying it's in Russia's best interest to negotiate for peace.

[05:30:00]

BRUNHUBER:

The U.K. defense ministry just released an intelligence update on Twitter, saying Russia has been forced to change its approach after being, quote "surprised" by the scale and ferocity of Ukrainian resistance, an angle we have been reporting on for weeks now.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin is in Bulgaria for talks with that country's leadership. He also addressed the news media a short time ago and strongly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Here he is.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

AUSTIN: Now Putin's war of choice against Ukraine has been tragic. Russia's invasion has taken a terrible toll on Ukrainian lives, including brave soldiers and far too many innocent civilians. Yet Russia's aggression has galvanized the Ukrainian people, NATO and the free world.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BRUNHUBER: Austin also said he and his Bulgarian partners are struck by the courage and determination of Ukrainian defenders.

Dozens of the world's biggest companies have cut back or ended operations in Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine. Several websites have sprung up to keep close tabs on which have cut ties with Moscow and which haven't.

Natalie Jaresko is involved in some of those efforts. She served as Ukraine's finance minister from 2014 to 2016 and joins me now.

Thank you so much for being here.

In terms of the Western companies operating in Russia, some have pulled out; some have suspended operations. There's a big difference there. Explain why. NATALIE JARESKO, FORMER UKRAINIAN FINANCE MINISTER: Well, frankly speaking, the point of the boycott, when we started it, was to make sure they ended, ceased their operations, severed all ties.

But many companies have chosen short-term fixes, like suspending, especially retailers like McDonald's, suspending operations and waiting for something better to happen, instead of understanding that in fact this is an environment in which you cannot work.

Financial losses are going to continue to grow. Reputational losses for every company will continue to grow.

And frankly speaking, in this world, where a new generation is growing up thinking about ESG principles and where do I want to work, what kind of company do I want to work for, these companies are putting their entire futures on the line for an environment and a percentage of profit that isn't that tremendously important to the bottom line.

BRUNHUBER: Right. And if they're staying there, they're still paying taxes, that are, in effect, supporting Russia?

JARESKO: It's the first issue that we work with. We try to explain, in all of our different websites and all of our efforts on social media, that they are financing the tanks that are running over civilians.

They are financing, with their business, with their taxes, with their incremental support for the economy there, they're financing the bombs and missiles that are raining on the heads of the maternity hospitals, kindergartens, orphanages, killing unbelievable numbers of civilians.

BRUNHUBER: So have been these grassroots efforts to sort of name and shame companies that are still operating in some capacity in Russia. And you've been involved with a few of them, boycottRussia.info and squeezingPutin.com. Tell me about the folks behind these.

Who are they, what type of people?

And why did you get involved?

JARESKO: Well, I was sitting on my couch with my daughter on the morning of the 24th in Ukraine when the bombs started hitting.

All I could think about is what could we do as individuals do to help stop the war?

I started to think about the ESG principles. I wrote an op-ed in the "FT," saying every country needs to stop. There's no way anyone can morally continue to finance an economy that has started an unprovoked war.

That led to working with colleagues in London, at Highgate. They developed boycottRussia.info, which focuses on top companies and gets everyone to look at companies that are the largest.

And then volunteers starting pouring in and squeezingPutin.com appeared because of volunteers keeping track of each and every company operating in Russia.

What they were saying, what they were really doing, to be able to parse through announcements -- not always clear -- and then they added recently what humanitarian efforts each of the companies are making to help Ukrainians.

BRUNHUBER: I guess it's hard to get measurables here.

But what effect do you think this is having?

JARESKO: I think that, for average Russians, the departure of the retailers. They're seeing shut down McDonald's, shut down Estee Lauder. And certain products are disappearing from stock. I think what's really important was the divestment of BP and Shell and Exxon from the energy sector.

[05:35:00]

JARESKO: But right now, what we're waiting for is the financial sector, which is at the very heart of the operations, so Citi, ING, Raiffeisen Bank, Barclays Bank, UniCredit, they all continue to finance both the companies remaining there, as well as the Russian economy.

So companies like Citi, which represent America globally, really need to take the time right now and make the right decision both financially for their company but morally for the entire globe and all of their customers, clients and shareholders.

BRUNHUBER: You were a finance minister after, I understand, after the annexation of Crimea.

What -- you know, seeing Putin celebrating the anniversary of the annexation, with a huge concert and so on, I mean, what did that feel like for you?

JARESKO: Oh, it reminds me of pictures of Nazi Germany. And we saw the stories on TV of many of the people being bused there forcibly. But many being there voluntarily.

What it tells is he has an enormous amount of support amongst his own people. The stories, the disinformation that's filled the airways in Russia over the last 20 years has been extremely detrimental to anyone's understanding of what's going on in Ukraine.

And the combination of his own disinformation and then shutting off all access to the outside world, to social media, to free press, kicking out the free press. A history of murdering journalists who have a voice and have delivered news that Putin didn't like has created an environment in Russia, where individuals just don't understand that there are no Nazis in Ukraine, that Ukraine was attacked unprovoked.

No one was planning anything. No one had any intention to harm Russians, Russian speakers or Russia. So I think, you know, this proves the ability of autocrats to feed disinformation to their populations and basically eliminate any possibility for any real decision-making.

BRUNHUBER: Yes. We only have a few seconds left. But I just want to ask you, because you were involved in rebuilding Ukraine's economy after that.

I mean, looking at the situation now, how big of a task will that be, even after this war is eventually over, going forward to rebuild yet again?

JARESKO: Ukraine will prevail. You can see from the fierceness of our defenders and the attitude of the people. They will not give up their existence. This is a war for a non existence. But the building is going to be unbelievably difficult.

It's hundreds of billions of dollars; all of the airports, the roads, the schools, the ports have been destroyed. This is nothing less, if not possibly more than a Marshall plan itself. This is going to require all the frozen assets of the Russian entities to be turned over to Ukraine for reparations.

Russia will have to pay with the frozen assets and others for the damage it's done and we're going to have to raise international support from all sides.

BRUNHUBER: Yes, a huge challenge ahead, as you say. Appreciate your time, Natalie Jaresko, thanks for joining us.

JARESKO: Thanks, Kim.

BRUNHUBER: Coming up, a stern warning to China not to bail Vladimir Putin out. What Joe Biden told Xi Jinping in their video call on Friday, that is coming up next. Please stay with us.

(MUSIC PLAYING)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[05:40:00]

(MUSIC PLAYING)

BRUNHUBER: The leaders of France and Germany have again appealed to Russia's president to end the bloodshed in Ukraine. Both French president Emmanuel Macron and German chancellor Olaf Scholz spoke on Friday, demanding a cease-fire and humanitarian access to the worst of areas, like Mariupol.

Our Natasha Bertrand is in Brussels with the latest on the diplomatic process.

You've been monitoring what the European leaders have been saying on that front.

What can you tell us?

NATASHA BERTRAND, CNN WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT: Yes, Kim, the French president and the German chancellor essentially reiterating the same message to Vladimir Putin in those calls yesterday, telling him to please implement a cease-fire and to allow the humanitarian corridors to remain open for people to escape safely.

These leaders have spoken to Putin many times and it does not seem that their warnings and calls have been heeded. We have seen the Russian invasion and attacks on Ukraine only become more and more brutal over the last several weeks, as it has become more difficult for the Russians to ultimately achieve their military objectives, which was to take several key cities around the country, including Kyiv.

The European and U.S. officials that we speak to are not particularly optimistic about the idea that Putin is going to pull back here.

In fact, we saw secretary of state Antony Blinken say last week that they expect Putin to escalate, that he might even conduct a chemical weapons attack on Ukraine and blame it on the Ukrainians, conducting a false flag attack there.

So clearly, the United States is not convinced that Putin is going to step away from the conflict. They are urging him to have meaningful peace talks with the Ukrainians. But Putin and Zelenskyy have not yet met. Zelenskyy has been urging Putin to sit down face-to-face, of course, because Putin is the main decision maker and his opinions and decisions are the only ones that matter.

But a senior Western intelligence official tells us, their assessment remains; despite the losses that Russia has incurred over the last month or so, the thousands of Russian troops killed, they believe that Putin is still determined to try to take the entire country of Ukraine -- Kim.

BRUNHUBER: Not what we want to hear. Natasha Bertrand, thanks so much.

Well, the White House says it is still concerned China could provide military or financial aid to Russia to help in its war on Ukraine. U.S. President Joe Biden warned his Chinese counterpart on Friday about the price it would pay if it does help Russia.

Biden and Xi Jinping spoke for nearly two hours, something they haven't done for months. Kaitlan Collins shows us what's at stake.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

KAITLAN COLLINS, CNN CHIEF WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): For an hour and 50 minutes today, President Biden spoke to Chinese President Xi Jinping as he seeks to deter him from bailing out Russia.

WENDY SHERMAN, DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE: China needs to stand on the right side of history. It needs to ensure that it does not backfill financially or in any other way sanctions that have been imposed upon Russia.

JEN PSAKI, WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY: He also conveyed and described the implications and consequences if China provides material support to Russia.

COLLINS (voice-over): Biden hoping to persuade the Chinese leader to distance himself from President Putin and find out whether China plans to answer the request for desperately needed military equipment.

SHERMAN: What's critical is for every nation all over the world to call on Vladimir Putin --

[05:45:00]

SHERMAN: -- to end this horrendous war of choice, this war of carnage. That's where we are.

COLLINS (voice-over): China has refused to call the invasion an invasion or condemn Putin for brutalizing a sovereign country. Today, Biden warned Xi of the consequences if China provides material support to Russia as it conducts brutal attacks against Ukrainian cities and civilians.

Chinese state media says President Xi told President Biden that conflict isn't in anyone's interest and quote, the Ukraine crisis is something we don't want to see.

The critical conversation coming as top U.S. officials are warning that Russia is spreading more lies, including ones that have been amplified by Chinese state media.

LINDA THOMAS-GREENFIELD, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS: This meeting and these lies are designed for one purpose and one purpose alone, deflect responsibility for Russia's war of choice and the humanitarian catastrophe it has caused.

COLLINS (voice-over): As the U.S. plans to send \$800 million more in military aid to Ukraine, Russia's foreign minister is claiming they'll view any shipment of weapons as a, quote, "legitimate target."

Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov says that Russia will view any weapon shipments into Ukraine as, quote, "legitimate targets."

What is the president's response to that comment?

PSAKI: That's a threat he has made before. We will watch closely if they follow up on that threat.

COLLINS (voice-over): As the U.S. tries to increase the pressure on Putin, top officials are making clear, their goal is not to oust him from office.

JOHN BERMAN, CNN ANCHOR: Does the United States support regime change in Russia?

SHERMAN: That is not what we are about. We are not -- this is a decision for the people of Russia.

COLLINS (voice-over): Kaitlan Collins, CNN, the White House.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

The mixing of religion and politics is creating a messy situation in Russia. We look at the Russian patriarch who calls Putin's government "a miracle of God" -- after the break. Stay with us.

(MUSIC PLAYING)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[05:50:00]

(MUSIC PLAYING)

BRUNHUBER: In a show of solidarity, former U.S. Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton visited a Ukrainian church together in Chicago. They both held a bouquet of yellow sunflowers.

Bush said, quote, "America stands in solidarity for the people of Ukraine as they fight for their freedom and their future."

One Russian religious leader is in full support of the war on Ukraine. And putting his blessing on the conflict is coming with controversy, costing him some followers. CNN's Delia Gallagher has the story.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

(MUSIC PLAYING)

DELIA GALLAGHER, CNN VATICAN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): The Russian Orthodox Church is playing an important role in Putin's war in Ukraine. Its leader, Patriarch Kirill, who once called the Putin era "a miracle of God," is firmly in favor of war.

The Russian Orthodox are Christian. But Kirill's version, like Putin's idea of Russia, is based on a nationalistic reverie of a once great Russian world. And that world used to include Ukraine.

In this nationalist view, the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church were founded together, around the year 988 with the baptism of Vladimir I, The ruler of Kievan Rus, a territory including parts of modern day Ukraine, Russia and Belarus.

The capital of Kievan Rus was not Moscow but Kiev. This is why Kyiv and Ukraine are so important to Putin and Patriarch Kirill. They want to return to the glory days of their medieval empire.

But Ukraine has been an independent country since 1991 and part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, for centuries linked to the Russian Orthodox Church, also officially severed ties to Moscow in 2019. Patriarch Kirill wants the Ukrainian church back.

"We must do everything we can to protect our common historical fatherland from all outside action," he said after the war began.

His influence is important for the roughly 100 million Russian Orthodox, who, even if they are not religious, identify deeply with the orthodox church. He accused Western countries, which he calls evil forces, of infiltrating Ukraine with liberal values in an effort to divide them from Russia.

He says the war is about quote, "a fundamental rejection of the so-called values offered today by those who claim world power," the test, he says, of which side you are on, is your country's willingness to hold gay pride parades.

The patriarch's support of the war is costing him followers. The Russian Orthodox Church in Amsterdam has severed ties; 12 Russian orthodox churches in Ukraine refuse to say his name during their divine liturgy. Around 300 Russian Orthodox priests and deacons signed an open letter, protesting the war, a risky act of disobedience in Russia.

The bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that are still connected to Moscow pleaded with him to call on Putin to stop the war. And the pope gave him an earful on Wednesday night via videolink, telling him there's no such thing as a just war and that, quote, "The church should not use the language of politics but the language of Jesus."

In 2019, the Kremlin spent tens of millions on lavish renovations for the patriarch's residence in St. Petersburg. On Sunday, Kirill presented an icon of Mary to the head of Russia's national guard in a Moscow cathedral as a blessing for the Russian troops in Ukraine.

A Christian leader in an unholy alliance with the president, blessing a war that is unleashing death and destruction -- Delia Gallagher, CNN, Rome.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

BRUNHUBER: A small toy company in Chicago is using little figurines to raise big money for Ukraine.

[05:55:00]

BRUNHUBER: Citizen Brick made unofficial Lego-like action figures of the Ukrainian president, 100 bucks apiece, the Ukrainian flag Molotov cocktail, \$20 each. The simple fundraising idea quickly sold out, raising over \$145,000 in cash going to a medical supply charity in the war-torn country.

And the company's owner says he is reserving some figurines for very special clients in Ukraine.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOE TRUPIA, OWNER, CITIZEN BRICK: There's a couple of kids who contacted me and said we're big LEGO fans. And we have had to scramble and seek shelter and we had to leave everything behind.

And to the one, they all say, when we win this war and everything settles down and goes back to normal, can you send us some?

I said, yes, I'll keep them for you. (END VIDEO CLIP)

BRUNHUBER: If you'd like to help people in Ukraine who need food, shelter, water, go to [cnn.com/impact](https://www.cnn.com/impact) and you'll find ways to help there.

All right, that wraps this hour of CNN NEWSROOM. I'm Kim Brunhuber. Our breaking news coverage continues on "NEW DAY" with Boris Sanchez. You're watching CNN.

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