

News; International

**Ukrainian Forces Stage Counteroffensive, Retake Several Cities; More Than 3.8 Million Refugees Have Fled Ukraine; Biden Says Putin Cannot Remain In Power. Aired 3-4p ET**

Fredricka Whitfield, John Berman, Salma Abdelaziz, Ivan Watson, Ed Lavandera, Ron Brownstein, Arlette Saenz, Stephanie Elam, Carolyn Manno, Drew Griffin

7,076 words

27 March 2022

CNN: CNN Newsroom

NWSRM

English

Content and programming copyright 2022 Cable News Network, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Copyright 2022 ASC Services II Media, LLC. All materials herein are protected by United States copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, published or broadcast without the prior written permission of ASC Services II Media, LLC. You may not alter or remove any trademark, copyright or other notice from copies of the content.

[15:00:39]

FREDRICKA WHITFIELD, CNN HOST: Hello again, everyone. Thank you so much for joining me. I'm Fredricka Whitfield and I'm also joined by my colleague, John Berman in Lviv.

John, we'll get to you in a moment.

We begin this hour in Ukraine where a potential new stage of the conflict is happening on the ground. Ukrainian officials say their forces have launched a series of new counter attacks, liberating some villages in eastern Ukraine that had been taken over by Russian forces.

Meanwhile, Russia is carrying out new assault on Western Ukraine, which has largely been spared from the bombing so far. Emergency crews finally putting out the flames at a fuel depot in Lviv hit by a Russian airstrikes (plural) yesterday. Russia's Ministry of Defense now confirming the attacks on Lviv.

And Ukrainians continue to flee the carnage. On Saturday alone, more than 5,200 escaping through humanitarian corridors, most of them from the besieged city of Mariupol. The U.N. says more than 3.8 million refugees have now fled to other countries.

President Biden now back in the U.S. following his whirlwind European trip, which ended with his off the cuff remark saying Vladimir Putin cannot remain in power. The White House quickly clarifying those remarks. We'll have a live report on that straight ahead.

All right, let's turn now to CNN's John Berman anchoring our coverage from Lviv, Ukraine and moments ago, in the last hour, we were hearing lots of sirens. What's happening now?

JOHN BERMAN, CNN HOST: So it was just a few minutes ago, the air raid sirens went off for the first time today. The way this works, the sirens go off, the people here in the city ask people to go shelter inside in their safe places and then you wait. And then when the city officials deem that it is safe, they set off the sirens again to let you know that the all clear has sounded. That hasn't happened yet. We're waiting for the all clear.

I will say we haven't heard anything ominous since the sirens first went off. But obviously, we are waiting and watching very carefully. In the meantime, I want to bring in CNN's Salma Abdelaziz.

Salma, you've been covering the situation all over the country now and notwithstanding the air raid warning that we're in right here, a lot of the news today seems to be this continued success the Ukrainians are claiming in some of these counter offensive operations.

SALMA ABDELAZIZ, CNN REPORTER: Yes, so a counteroffensive that is being described as nimble, as tactical, as creative on the ground. Remember, they are aided now by anti-tanks from the West, by Turkish drones, by stinger missiles from the United States, and they have been able to claw back some territory around Kyiv. They are pushing Russian forces back, we understand also, in the east of the country.

There is a major counter offensive around the suburbs of Kharkiv, the second largest city, also in the southwest of the country, north of Mariupol, essentially, you're starting to see a push there. But these are small gains. That's what's important to emphasize here.

What we're looking at really is a war of attrition. Russia has announced the second phase of its military operations, saying it is going to focus on the east, although we saw obviously missiles land in the west just yesterday and what we are seeing more and more from Russian forces is as their offensive on the ground stalls, slows as they make battlefield miscalculations as they lose troops. They're relying on these long range missiles to hit military infrastructure, to try to starve Ukrainian forces of the supplies.

And then of course, there is the other front, right, on the political landscape, the Russian separatist movement saying that it is going to go ahead potentially, with a referendum in one of the separated areas.

So Russia continues ahead with its attempts here to claim as much of the east as it can.

BERMAN: And as that is happening, we have this new round of talks between Ukrainian and Russian officials tomorrow.

ABDELAZIZ: Absolutely. So it is the fifth round of talks. I don't think anyone is holding their breath, John, let's be honest. None of these talks have bore fruit so far. You're going to hear another call for a ceasefire, you can guarantee that. You're going to hear that from Turkey. You're going to hear that from President Zelenskyy. They're going to say we want the guns to fall silent. But I can't imagine that President Putin is quite ready to do that yet.

And yes, you do have Recep Tayyip Erdogan one of course of Turkey who has been a very strong mediator. He gets direct information from President Putin himself on what he wants and President Putin has been clear, he is not ready for talks. He is not ready to lay down arms, he wants a lot more than what we're looking at right now, so he is not ready to come to the table.

[15:05:08]

BERMAN: Sometimes even though there has clearly not been an agreement yet, sometimes the language that emerges from these talks, even if unsuccessful, can be somewhat revealing. We'll wait for that at least.

Salma Abdelaziz, thank you so much for being with us.

So, reaching safety has become this harrowing journey for so many Ukrainians. CNN's Ivan Watson is at an evacuation site in Zaporizhzhia where residents from the besieged city of Mariupol are fleeing the violence.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

IVAN WATSON, CNN SENIOR INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT (voice over): Volunteers are putting the sign "lyudy" that means people on the side of a bus. They are hoping to be able to go to the besieged Russian port city of Mariupol to help evacuate people.

The parking lot of this Ukrainian Superstore has become an unofficial gateway for evacuees fleeing the combat zone. So, you see cars that have made the dangerous journey with homemade signs here that say "ditey" that means children and the name of the city that is being battered by Russian forces, Mariupol there.

Here you see a van that has the word evacuation written on the windshield here, and then you can also see that some people are tying little white flags and rags on their cars. These are all desperate attempts to try to protect civilians from coming under fire from the combatants that are arrayed in the nearby countryside.

This superstore has been turned into an improvised Support Center for newly arrived evacuees from the war zone. So there are lots of donated clothing for people who perhaps had to leave and didn't have enough time to pack everything they needed. They're provided with hot food and warm drinks, it's still quite cold in this part of Ukraine.

And then there is a volunteer effort here, psychological support, as well as information about how to get a ride deeper into Ukraine into safer Ukrainian cities. Also, medics standing by to help people out, and I want to point to this bulletin board because there are postings here, for example, offering free repair of shattered windows of cars, a lot of cars that we've seen have been bashed up by Russian artillery, and very moving requests for information about missing loved ones.

And all of this, I want to highlight is very precarious because I'm told that the Russian military, its positions are just about a half hour's drive from where all of this is located.

Ivan Watson, CNN in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

BERMAN: And our thanks to Ivan for that report.

Yesterday alone, one of the 5,200 Ukrainians escape through humanitarian corridors, most of them from Mariupol. CNN's Ed Lavandera joins me now live. And Ed, here is with me in Lviv. He was -- you were in Poland right now. Where -- what -- two million Ukrainian refugees has crossed over the border. You know, it's interesting to see Ivan in Zaporizhzhia, that's in the eastern part of the country. Now, in Poland, a lot of the refugees who are finally getting there are from the far eastern areas.

ED LAVANDERA, CNN CORRESPONDENT: And that's what -- you know, I'm watching his story there, and one of the things that we've done over the last few weeks in speaking to refugees, first question you ask them is, where are they from? And what has changed so much in the last couple of weeks is that the people you're seeing now at the border in Poland, these are people who have seen war up close.

Early on, it was people who were instantly fleeing, but now, you're talking to people who have endured, in many cases, some pretty horrific scenes trying to escape that. They thought they could wait this out, and that is what they were hoping for, and then it's become evidently clear that that's not a safe option at this point.

And we are hearing stories of, you know, initially, people coming from Eastern Ukraine might take a day or two to get to the Polish border, that has changed. You know, sometimes you're hearing stories of four or five days because of the checkpoints. They describe landmines, Russian forces controlling certain paths in and out, so there's concern of, you know, being killed on the way out, but these are the kinds of things that these refugees are dealing with right now.

BERMAN: They have suffered the most, the people you're seeing there now, they have the least and they really need the greatest amount of assistance at this point.

LAVANDERA: Yes, and I think that assistance is holding strong, you know, when you see the amount of aid organizations that are there helping them navigate the process of finding shelter, either immediate shelter for one or two nights and then some longer term shelter, and I think that will continue.

But you know, you start kind of thinking about where is this headed? Are we talking a couple more weeks or are we talking months where they're going to have to depend on the goodwill of neighbors here in Europe by helping them through all of this.

You know these are the kind of questions that are starting to sink into them.

[15:10:07]

BERMAN: Yes, and it is impossible for them to know. I think so many people leaving don't know the answer to that. They wanted to get out. Their imperative was to get out quickly, and they weren't thinking beyond tomorrow.

LAVANDERA: Right. Get out, and then we'll figure out the rest later.

There are some -- you know we've seen stories of some people who have gotten to Poland and it's too quiet, it's too peaceful. They sit there and they are consumed with the news from their home. And some people want to get on a train and go right back and do whatever it is that they can to help. Mostly those people wanted to get their children situated in safety, and then they want to go back and help.

BERMAN: There is a feeling of helplessness right now.

Ed Lavandera, great to see you here.

LAVANDERA: Great to see you.

BERMAN: Thank you so much for your reporting.

I want to bring an Oleg Pynda to discuss this further. He is the Executive Director of the Ukrainian Community Center of Washington State and, Oleg, like, I just want to say, you're from Lviv where I am now.

First of all, what a beautiful city, in the best of times, and even in the worst of times now, it is still a beautiful city that is suffering so much. I'm just wondering what you think when you saw the airstrikes here yesterday, what was going through your head?

OLEG PYNDA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UKRAINIAN COMMUNITY CENTER OF WASHINGTON STATE: Well, it's rather difficult, you know, seeing the places where we've been born, where we've been walking, you

know, enjoying and see now all this destroyed especially the first strike that hit, actually the factory where I used to work almost 10 years, which was destroyed, but yes, it hurts my feeling and it makes me sad.

BERMAN: Oleg, President Biden said the United States will welcome up to 100,000 Ukrainians fleeing Russian aggression. I know it sounds like a simple question, but if you're Ukrainian trying to get out of this country right now, out of the country where I am, how would you get to the United States? What's the process of getting where I am to where you are?

PYNDA: Well, this is a difficult and lengthy process, unfortunately. Because first of all, you have to petition in order to be processed as a refugee within the United States, and you have to have the relatives who would petition and sponsor you there, and then the whole process of checking background. There is my organization, you know, relations and stuff like that.

So it takes a lot of time. So when President Biden stated that 100,000 Ukrainians would be welcome to the U.S., my hope and prayer of all Ukrainians and relatives there, you know, and fellow Ukrainians here in the U.S. is that there should be done some expedited way to help those refugees to be admitted into the U.S.

BERMAN: I've had Americans ask me: Hey, we want to host a Ukrainian family. Is there any process for that? And how is your agency helping in this complicated process?

PYNDA: Absolutely. We, in our agency, daily, we have over a hundred phone calls from fellow Ukrainians who are asking questions how to help their relatives, as well as the Consul of neighboring Americans who are calling our office and saying that they're willing to shelter Ukrainian refugees and will give up their homes.

So, so far, we are just compiling the list of the volunteers who would be available to host the refugee families because so far we don't have any new arrivals except those who cross the Mexican border, and we are collecting goods, making sure the financial situation will be an appropriate level.

We are working -- Seattle and Washington State is very welcoming state for the refugees and we are working with the government with the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance of Washington State, the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Affairs of Seattle. You know, we are securing funds to help to immediately address the immediate needs, as well as to address mental health state of the refugees because most of them who arrived here with posttraumatic stress and so many other issues, depression.

We have seen a lot of depressed and anxious people right now here in the U.S. who needs their mental health issues to be addressed. So there are many things to do. We are preparing for that, you know, and we are waiting -- anxiously waiting when the first refugee will start to arrive in the Washington State.

BERMAN: Am I right that Washington State has received more Ukrainian immigrants over the last 10 years than any other state?

PYNDA: That is absolutely true. Washington State received the most Ukrainian refugees than any other state and this wave of refugees began since 2014 when the war in the eastern side of Ukraine started, and refugees started getting into the U.S.

[15:15:13]

PYNDA: We have a large Ukrainian community here, you know, and I'm proud to say that new arrived refugees in Washington State, they're not looking for public assistance. They are ready to go into employment field, you know.

They are working, they are paying taxes, and now, our community is looking at what's going on in Ukraine, we understand that, you know, given a chance for Russia to win this war, or even having a stalemate in this war will not only bring Ukraine into solid era, but you know, it will destroy and overshadow and reverse all the progress that American western core has made on every socioeconomic equality and climate issue.

So we have to be strong. And you know, we have our answer to Putin to stop, you know, that is our comment.

BERMAN: Oleg Pynda, I really appreciate you being with us, and I hope you don't mind, but I'm going to give out the name of your organization to all these people who have been asking in the United States: What can we do to help? Because I think people want some answers to this.

I really appreciate it.

PYNDA: Thank you. Thank you. And yes, please check our website, people who would donate would call us, contact us, and we'll be more than happy to provide information and assistance.

BERMAN: Excellent. To our viewers out there, for more information about how you can help the humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, go to [cnn.com/impact](https://www.cnn.com/impact).

At this moment, crowds gather in Washington, D.C. in a show of support for Ukraine and to rally against Vladimir Putin's brutal invasion. Much more of our special coverage, ahead.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[15:21:02]

WHITFIELD: All right, President Biden is back in Washington, D.C. after a high stakes trip to Europe to meet with allies and shore up unity with NATO countries as Russia's war on Ukraine rages.

The President delivered a major speech from Poland's Royal Castle, which seemed to call for regime change in Russia.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOE BIDEN (D), PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: For God's sake, this man cannot remain power.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

WHITFIELD: The White House and Biden's top Cabinet members quickly tried to walk back that comment.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JULIANNE SMITH, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO NATO: In the moment, I think that was a principal human reaction to the stories that he had heard that day. But no, as you've heard from Secretary Blinken and others, the U.S. does not have a policy of regime change in Russia, full stop.

ANTONY BLINKEN, U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE: We do not have a strategy of regime change in Russia or anywhere else for that matter. In this case, as in any case, it's up to the people of the country in question. It's up to the Russian people.

SEN. AMY KLOBUCHAR (D-MN): First, the White House has clarified that he was talking about the region and that he was talking about that Vladimir Putin has got to stay out of NATO countries.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

WHITFIELD: Ron Brownstein is a CNN senior political analyst and senior editor for "The Atlantic." Ron, always good to see you. So, do you see this unscripted moment as damaging to the President? Or can the argument be made effectively that he was making a moral statement that universally resonates?

RON BROWNSTEIN, CNN SENIOR POLITICAL ANALYST: You know, when Michael Kinsley was the editor of "The Republic," he famously defined a Washington gaffe, as someone saying out loud what he actually believed, and I think this is really a classic example of that.

Would have he been better off not saying it? Probably. But you can -- I think people are way overestimating the practical impact of these comments on anything in the real world. We don't have a policy of regime change in Russia, and we don't have the capability to pursue regime change in Russia.

It's not like I think Putin all of a sudden is going to be concerned that, you know, we have a serious effort to force him out.

And at the same time, it is -- you know, it seems to me inconceivable that this is going to change Putin's war aims in Ukraine one way or the other. I mean, what's going to decide that are the facts on the ground.

WHITFIELD: Additionally, Biden has called Putin a war criminal, and a butcher -- his words during this trip -- but these words, "he cannot remain in power" comment. I mean, it has drawn sharp rebuke from a Kremlin spokesperson who says it's not up to Biden to decide who the President of Russia is.

So, what does this mean, the road ahead? Does this mean the U.S. cannot effectively be part of any kind of peace talks with Russia?

BROWNSTEIN: Well, look, I think that -- you know, I think that Putin -- you know, I am not trying to get into the mind of Putin. I think Putin recognizes that we have neither, as I said, the strategy nor the capability to actually try to remove him from office. I think Biden has articulated well the revulsion of essentially the entire civilized world at this unprovoked, brutal attack that is replete with war crimes and attacks on civilian areas and an attempt to break the will of the Ukrainian government by imposing so much pain and loss on noncombatants.

And I think all of that is for the good for Russia to be clearly isolated in the global community and to be called out. It is hard to imagine that we would be seeing this kind of clarity under the previous administration, which was talking about leaving NATO in a second term as John Bolton has told us.

So, I think all of that is positive. I mean, this was probably in the long run an unfortunate comment, but I really don't think it's going to have much impact one way or the other on the course of events in Ukraine and Putin's calculations and decision making.

[15:25:04]

WHITFIELD: Okay, so how pivotal of a moment is the handling of what is taking place in Ukraine in terms of the U.S. commitment, unity with NATO. This is what President Biden's trip was all about, signaling that there is this unification. How critical is this for his leadership for his administration, the handling of bringing -- helping to bring the global community together as it responds to how Russia is invading Ukraine?

BROWNSTEIN: If you watch really the entire way that the President has orchestrated the Western response, it really calls into question what your mother always taught you when you're a kid, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. In fact, this really is Biden's reset on his promise as a candidate.

As a candidate, he promised he was going to remit together the alliances and coalitions on which we have allied since World War Two. He didn't really handle that very well in Afghanistan. Not only was withdrawal chaotic, but the process was chaotic and allies felt slighted. In this case, however, he has been much closer to the Biden that he promised on the campaign trail where he has worked effectively to keep the Western -- the broad Western world together, united in outrage against what is being done, moving forward on severe sanctions that go beyond what were considered possible, I think, you know, before all of this began channeling a significant flow of arms into Ukraine, and in some ways of being very deft about allowing other leaders in Germany and France the opportunity to play leading roles themselves, and not trying to have everything runs for him, kind of hidden hand presidency, as they said of Eisenhower in the 50s.

So this has been, I think, much closer to what he said he was going to be kind of the seasoned elder statesman, bringing together the Western world.

Now there are limits to what even a unified response can achieve, and certainly the lion's share of the credit for preventing Russia from, you know, achieving all of its aims goes with the Ukrainian people and military, but I think he has delivered a much closer approximation of the Western unity that he said he would restore.

WHITFIELD: All right, all fascinating. Great points. Thank you so much, Ron Brownstein. Always good to see you.

BROWNSTEIN: Thanks, Fred.

WHITFIELD: All right, still ahead, President Biden is expected to announce a tax plan tomorrow targeting the richest Americans.

We're live at the White House with details on that next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[15:35:05]

WHITFIELD: As President Biden returns to Washington from his trip in Europe, the White House is set to unveil a new tax plan tomorrow that targets billionaires.

For more on this, CNN's Arlette Saenz is at the White House.

Arlette, what's this all about? ARLETTE SAENZ, CNN WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT: Well Fred, the White House is set to unveil a new tax targeting the super-rich in the country tomorrow as they unveil President Biden's budget proposal for the next fiscal year.

The White House is calling this the Billionaire's Minimum Income Tax, and it essentially would require that households worth more than \$100 million pay a tax rate of 20 percent. That would be on their full income including unrealized gains in value in assets like stocks and bonds.

The White House is projecting that this would reduce the deficit by \$360 billion over the next decade, and they are also expecting that the majority of the revenue from this tax would be coming from billionaires themselves.

Now, this really presents the first proposal from the White House to try to tax those billionaires, something that really gained some traction, especially during the Democratic presidential primary back in 2020. But what

is really unclear with this proposal is whether there would be enough support to actually get this passed into legislation up on Capitol Hill, especially as you have seen some moderates like Senator Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema really balk at the proposals of raising taxes on corporations and individuals in the past.

Now this tax rate would for those who are already paying at least 20 percent, there would not be any new additional taxes, but those individuals paying less than that would have to give top up payments basically, to reach that tax rate.

The White House is arguing that this proposal would ensure that the wealthiest Americans are paying their fair share in taxes compared to others, and this will be part of the President's budget proposal unveiled tomorrow that is going to outline his defense and nondefense spending for the coming years -- Fred.

WHITFIELD: All right, Arlette Saenz at the White House. Thank you so much.

All right, also here in the U.S., a custodian at a Covington Georgia Elementary School, who is Ukrainian and has family there got a beautiful surprise from students and staff.

As a show of support for Mrs. Lana, as she is known to all the students there, students covered the walls with drawings of sunflowers, which are a symbol of hope in Ukraine; and another wall was covered with a blue and yellow paper Ukrainian flag with a message, "We love you, Mrs. Lana," and along with a large sign that included the names of her family members in Ukraine, Mrs. Lana's reaction, well, it's said it all.

She was thrilled.

And we will be right back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

WHITFIELD: Lin-Manuel Miranda says he won't be at tonight's Academy Awards. The playwright and director who is up for an Oscar this year says he is skipping the Awards Show after his wife tested positive for COVID.

CNN's Stephanie Elam gives us a preview of the big night tonight.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

AMY SCHUMER, COMEDIAN: Are you ready to host the Oscars?

STEPHANIE ELAM, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice over): The hosts are back, the red carpet is back. And of course, so are the stars.

Best bets this year include Will Smith in "King Richard" for Best Actor as the father of Venus and Serena Williams.

WILL SMITH, PORTRAYING RICHARD WILLIAMS, "KING RICHARD": Now, I don't mind you saying, we are hard on these kids, you know why? Because we are.

[15:40:10]

MATTHEW BELLONI, FOUNDING PARTNER, "PUCK NEWS": I think the consensus around him is that this is the performance that the Academy wants to honor him for. It's sort of a shock that he does not have an Oscar.

ELAM (voice over): for supporting actress, Ariana DeBose has all the momentum for her role in "West Side Story."

ELAM (on camera): Are you having the year?

ARIANA DEBOSE, ACTRESS: I don't know if it is the year, but it is a year and dagnabbit, it's special.

ELAM (voice over): Expect the stars to support Ukraine. The colors of the Ukrainian flag have been a staple on other red carpets.

BELLONI: The fact that Mila Kunis, who is Ukrainian is going to be presenting, I've heard that there is going to be a nice moment with her doing a tribute to the country.

ELAM (voice over): Diversity this year includes deaf actors with "CODA" up for Best Picture.

TROY KOTZUR, ACTOR (through translator): I never thought I would get to this moment.

ELAM (voice over): "CODA's" Troy Kotzur is a favorite for Best Supporting Actor.

KOTZUR (through translator): We've been separated for so long and there has been a communication breakdown between the hearing community and the deaf community, so we've pulled them both together.

ELAM (voice over): A dark horse could be Kodi Smit-McPhee for "The Power of the Dog." His quiet performance helped the film gain Awards momentum.

ELAM (on camera): You know what I call you, Mr. Slow Burn.

KODI SMIT-MCPHEE, ACTOR: I like that. I'll take that.

ELAM (voice over): "The Power of the Dog" has one key Best Picture awards leading up to Oscar, but it was shut out at the Screen Actors Guild Awards.

BELLONI: "The Power of the Dog" has a lot of fans, it also has a lot of detractors. "CODA" is much more of a consensus film.

ELAM (voice over): To save time, some Oscars will be handed out off the air then edited for television and of course, the hosts: Regina Hall, Amy Schumer, and Wanda Sykes promised to entertain.

ELAM (on camera): Was it time to bring host back to the Oscars

BELLONI: Last year's show was a disaster on many different levels. One of which is that there was no through line, there was nobody guiding you through the show.

ELAM: This year, there is an audience award as the Academy appeals to voters who may not have seen all of the nominated films, but it's not an official Oscar. Fans chose the winner online.

In Hollywood, I'm Stephanie Elam.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

WHITFIELD: Can't wait.

All right, March Madness will continue for Dukes' legendary Coach K, the next stop on his farewell tour, the Final Four in New Orleans.

Carolyn Manno has more in today's Bleacher Report.

CAROLYN MANNO, CNN SPORTS CORRESPONDENT: Well, there isn't anything left to prove for head coach, Mike Krzyzewski, Fred. He is considered to be the greatest college basketball coach of all time. He already has five national championships to his credit, but anything is possible and he is now two wins away from heading out the door with the ultimate prize, another National Championship.

And his team, the Blue Devils looked like they were on a mission against Arkansas last night, one of the best defensive teams in the tournament, Duke cruising to a 78-69 win to secure a record 13th trip to the Final Four for Coach K.

He is now the first head coach in Division One history, men's or women's, to reach a final four across five different decades.

But Krzyzewski says this moment belongs to his team. (BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI, COACH, DUKE'S BLUE DEVILS: There is nothing like being a regional champ and going to Final Four and playing on that Saturday with three other champions. It's an amazing day.

I'm on their bus. I'm on their bus, they're not on mine. And Mike, you should interview him.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: He is the gold right here.

KRZYZEWSKI: No. No. Shut up.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MANNO: Dukes' next game in New Orleans next Saturday guaranteed drama, they will either face their archrival, North Carolina, the team that beat Coach K at home in his final regular season game, or they will face the biggest Cinderella of all time in the tournament, the 15-seed of Saint Peter's.

Villanova is headed to their third Final Four in the past six tournaments. The veteran laden squad becoming the first team to book a spot in this year's Final Four with a win over Houston. It wasn't easy though, Fred.



Houston slicing the deficit to two off a late 11-2 run that Villanova showing a lot of poise down the stretch responding with some very big shots to escape with a six point win.

And the cheerleaders coming to the rescue at the NCAA Tournament once again. The ball getting stuck on top of the backboard during the Duke- Arkansas game last night and before the floor crew could even get out the broom, the Arkansas cheerleading team leaping into action, Bella Shelly standing on the shoulders have her teammate knocking the ball loose. This is the second time that a cheerleader has rescued the ball. Earlier in the tournament, an Indiana cheerleader did the same thing.

So Fred, some teamwork on display on the floor over the course of the NCAA Tournament and also on the sidelines as well.

WHITFIELD: Awesome. Go, cheerleaders. Thanks, Carolyn.

All right, still ahead. A Ukrainian man tells CNN that he tried to sink the yacht he worked on because the vessel had ties to a Russian oligarch.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[15:48:57]

WHITFIELD: President Biden unveiled more than 300 new sanctions against Russian lawmakers last week. That's on top of the already unprecedented sanctions targeting Putin and ultra-wealthy Russian oligarchs.

Among the targets, luxury yachts owned by oligarchs loyal to Putin. CNN senior investigative correspondent Drew Griffin reports on one nautical engineer and his effort to sink one oligarch's yacht and save Ukraine.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

DREW GRIFFIN, CNN SENIOR INVESTIGATIVE CORRESPONDENT (voice over): Taras Ostapchuk, a 55-year-old nautical engineer says he spent the past 10 years serving on the Lady Anastasia, an aging luxury yacht sailing the Mediterranean.

TARAS OSTAPCHUK, NAUTICAL ENGINEER (through translator): We had a crew of nine people, including a chef and a waiter.

GRIFFIN (voice over): He says the yacht's current owner and only user is Alexander Mijeev, a sanctioned Putin connected oligarch and the CEO of a major Russian state-run company that rakes in tens of billions of dollars selling munitions, everything from weapons to ammo, to aircraft.

Yacht engineer Ostapchuk went from cruising an oligarch luxury to a bunker in Ukraine.

[15:50:14]

GRIFFIN (voice over): Our interview just began, stopped by an alert of an incoming Russian attack.

OSTAPCHUK: Okay, sorry. See you next time. Bye-bye.

GRIFFIN (voice over): His life changed in late February when the yacht was docked in Spain and Russia invaded his home country.

GRIFFIN (on camera): Welcome back. Thank you.

OSTAPCHUK: Nice to meet you again.

GRIFFIN: So good to see you, my friend.

OSTAPCHUK: Yes, yes. I am safe here.

GRIFFIN (voice over): Safe once again, Ostapchuk explained he was spurred to action when he saw this image of a Russian military strike in an apartment building in his hometown of Kyiv.

OSTAPCHUK: My role has started. Yes.

GRIFFIN (voice over): At that moment, he knew he had to do something to retaliate, sink the Lady Anastasia.

OSTAPCHUK (through translator): Water began to fill up the engine room and the crew space. After that, there were three crew members left on board, I announced that the boat was sinking and that they should leave the ship. I did this on my own.

GRIFFIN (voice over): The other crew members also Ukrainian didn't want to risk their own jobs. He said, instead, they sounded the alarm, called authorities. He was arrested and the Anastasia saved, although damaged.

In Court, Ostapchuk denied nothing. Instead, declaring he would return to Ukraine where he picked up arms and join the military.

OSTAPCHUK (through translator): Now a war has begun, a total war between Russia and Ukraine, and you have to choose either you are with Ukraine or not. You have to choose will there be Ukraine or will you have a job? I made a choice. I don't need a job if I don't have Ukraine.

GRIFFIN (voice over): Back in Spain, Spain's Ministry of Transport has agreed to the provisional detention of the yacht, Lady Anastasia while it confirms its real ownership and determines if it falls under European Union sanctions and can be seized. It's one of a long list of suspected Russian oligarch yachts now frozen in European ports in an effort to apply pressure on Putin through his inner circle of oligarchs to stop this war.

Taras Ostapchuk says others working for oligarchs around the world should expose them and their assets, his effort to make the profiteers of Vladimir Putin's regime pay for what they are doing.

OSTAPCHUK (through translator): I think what I did is absolutely 100 percent correct. I tried to sync the boat as a political protest of Russian aggression because its owner is connected to the production of Russian weapons.

They should be held responsible because it is they who with their behavior, with their lifestyle, with their unquenchable greed, they precisely led to this. In order to distract the people from the real plunder of Russia by these rulers, they arranged diversionary wars with other countries that are innocent.

GRIFFIN (on camera): Is there any message that you would like the people of the United States to know right now?

OSTAPCHUK: Send us arms, please. Send guns to Ukraine, please. We must stop with this war. We must win.

GRIFFIN (on camera): Taras Ostapchuk says he has no doubt that the military equipment made by the Russian defense firm linked to his boss is right now being used to kill civilians in Ukraine, it is why he did what he did.

As for the yacht and its likely owner, we received a cynical response from that Russian defense firm, saying it does not comment on the personal lives of its employees or their property.

Drew Griffin, CNN, Atlanta.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

WHITFIELD: And in the middle of the devastation and Ukraine, this ray of sunshine for weary Ukrainians.

(VIDEO CLIP PLAYS) WHITFIELD: Sounds from an underground concert are ringing out through the tunnel of a Metro Station in Kharkiv that has been used as a shelter and one of the orchestra members said it was his way of helping his country and to send the message that Ukrainians are fearless and strong.

Let's add resilient.

All right, thank you so much for joining us today. I'm Fredricka Whitfield and for my colleague, John Berman as well, who continues to be overseas.

The NEWSROOM continues with Jim Acosta right after this.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

JUAN PALACIO, CEO AND FOUNDER, BLOOMSYBOX.COM: I love flowers. I want my customers to discover new colors, new textures. My name is one policy, and I am the founder and CEO of bloomsybox.com in Florida.

We offer hundreds of flower varieties. The most common are roses, tulips, tropical flowers. My love for flowers began back in Colombia, my country, they would grow in the wild. I immigrated to the U.S.

When I came here, I didn't know how to speak English, which is a really hard one, so I started knocking on hotel doors in Miami Beach saying, "Hey, do you need flowers?" People tell me no soliciting. But eventually I became good at it.

[15:55:11]

PALACIO: I learned about these cosmetic subscriptions back in 2013 and I was blown away by the model.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: BloomsyBox delivers every two weeks to my front door fresh flowers, and I love it.

PALACIO: Our customers never receive the same flower variety. Sustainability is very important for us. We only work with Rainforest Alliance Certified Farms.

It is very important to treat your workers well because they are the very essence of your business. BloomsyBox has been doing tremendously well and we are looking into expanding into international markets as well.

I am so proud to be shipping all of these beautiful bouquets to our customers. I hope my experience and my story inspire people to chase their vision.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[16:00:00]

Content and programming copyright 2022 Cable News Network LP, LLLP. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Prepared by VIQ Media Transcription, Inc. No license is granted to the user of this material other than for research. User may not reproduce or redistribute the material except for user's personal or internal use and, in such case, only one copy may be printed, nor shall user use any material for commercial purposes or in any fashion that may infringe upon Cable News Network LP, LLLP's copyright or other proprietary rights or interests in the material; provided, however, that members of the news media may redistribute limited portions (less than 250 words) of this material without a specific license from CNN so long as they provide conspicuous attribution to CNN as the originator and copyright holder of such material. This is not a legal transcript for purposes of litigation.

Document NWSRM00020220328ei3r0002t