

AS we mark today's fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine finds itself emerging from what may well have been its toughest winter yet. The country has endured a relentless campaign of strikes on critical infrastructure and residential neighbourhoods – attacks of a scale and intensity not previously witnessed in this war.

These assaults coincided with some of the harshest weather Ukraine has seen in decades, with temperatures plunging below -20C across the country.

Images that have circulated across the world tell a story that statistics alone cannot capture.

Families have been forced to put up tents inside their own flats to preserve heat, children sleeping fully clothed in ski suits beneath thermal blankets while frost crept across the shattered windows.

Others have cooked meals outdoors over improvised fires, surrounded by deep snow, guided only by torchlight and candles during prolonged power cuts. These are scenes no one would expect to witness in a modern 21st century country.

Last year witnessed some of the most brutal attacks on civilians since the invasion began. According to data from the Ukrainian Air Force, 56,700 drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles were launched toward Ukrainian territory – almost four times more than in 2024.

An extraordinary rate forces us to confront an uncomfortable question – how many European countries today could withstand such sustained bombardment?

Yet if the suffering of the Ukrainian civilians is evident at such scale, the realities faced by Ukrainian soldiers are almost beyond comprehension.

In frozen trenches and battered defensive positions, they continue to hold the line against an enemy with often superior weaponry and manpower. Winter is not yet fully behind them, and military officials describe this period as one of the most severe tests Ukraine has faced. War exhaustion is unmistakable.

Nearly four years of continuous mobilisation have accumulated a heavy toll – grief from human loss, economic strain and the psychological burden of uncertainty regarding negotiations.

Undoubtedly, Ukrainians are tired. But they are in no way ready for a defeat.

What they face is not merely a territorial dispute but a conflict many observers have characterised as genocidal in nature.

Reports gathered by humanitarian organisations, human rights lawyers and investigative journalists describe acts that chill the blood: torture chambers, systematic starvation, sexual violence and the deliberate targeting of civilians.

These are not the excesses of an undisciplined few, they form part of a broader pattern that underscores the moral stakes of the war.

Among the most shocking aspects has been the kidnapping and forced transfer of Ukrainian children into Russia – an issue which has reverberated globally.

Campaigners, non-governmental organisations and political leaders alike as well as newspapers such as the Daily Express with its campaign Return The Stolen Children have sought to draw attention to the plight of these young victims.

Even figures such as the US First Lady Melania Trump have used their platforms to return abducted children to their families. Each successful reunion is a moment of relief, yet the scale of the tragedy remains immense.

And still, despite these horrors, Ukraine

Ukraine is fighting for its life... and for the peace of the world



Ukrainian troops on front line in Kharkiv. Inset, children shelter from air raid, soldier carries shell and civilian is evacuated. Below, Vladimir Putin

Lord Ashcroft Guest Columnist



shows no inclination to retreat. After nearly four years of full-scale warfare, Russia has captured far less territory than many analysts predicted in the invasion's early days. Major cities in the north of Ukraine such as Kharkiv and Sumy continue to stand – scarred, bombarded, but unbowed.

The southern front on the Black Sea coast is also a daily target for Russian attacks and yet remains undefeated. Meanwhile the contested eastern region of Donbas remains outside complete Russian control despite being the focal point of fighting since 2014. These facts matter. They demonstrate that Ukraine is not merely surviving – it is denying Moscow the decisive victory on the battlefield.

Encouragingly, recent weeks have brought flashes of operational success. Ukrainian forces achieved their fastest battlefield gain in two and a half years, retaking more than two hundred square kilometres in a matter of days.

Analysts suggest Kyiv capitalised on disruptions to Russian communications

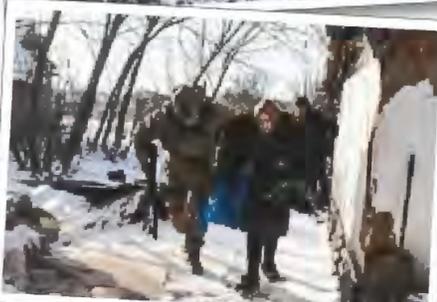
and positioning – including issues linked to the satellite network operated by Starlink – to mount a swift and coordinated offensive.

The lesson here is unmistakable – when opportunity arises, Ukraine acts. Its military has repeatedly demonstrated adaptability, learning faster than larger and better-funded forces. From the integration of drones into everyday tactics to the rapid deployment of technological solutions, it has evolved into one of the world's most innovative defence environments.

THIS is precisely what policymakers in the United States must understand as negotiations and strategic priorities are being debated. Ukraine does need assistance in bringing Russia to the negotiating table – but assistance must never become coercion.

There is a profound difference between supporting peace and pressuring a nation into capitulation. History's judgment can be unforgiving. Future generations of Americans may one day ask whether their country remained faithful to its tradition as a defender of liberty or whether it faltered at a decisive moment.

To hand Russia what it has failed to con-



'Four years on, Ukraine is no longer merely a recipient of aid... it is becoming a contributor to the future of defence'

quer on the battlefield would not simply reshape Ukraine's destiny – it would reverberate throughout the global security architecture. The stakes extend well beyond Europe. If aggression is rewarded, deterrence weakens across the globe.

Yet amid the destruction lies a remarkable, often overlooked development – Ukraine has surged ahead in defence innovation. What began as an improvised wartime necessity has matured into a rapidly expanding ecosystem of start-ups, engineers and battlefield-tested technologies. The sector has seen a surge of 218% in growth since 2022 and its estimated value now reaches \$35billion (£26bn) – a testament not only to Ukraine's resilience but to its ingenuity and strategic foresight.

For Western partners, this presents an opportunity rather than a burden. Investment, joint ventures and industrial cooperation could strengthen collective security while ensuring that democratic nations remain at the forefront of military technology. Ukraine is no longer merely a recipient of aid – it is becoming an undeniable contributor to the future of defence.

The first testament to this came as President Volodymyr Zelensky visited the first Ukrainian drone factory operating in German Bavaria.

The economic prospects are not limited to military matters. As Ukraine progresses on its path toward integration with the European Union, vast prospects are emerging – from reconstruction and infrastructure renewal to energy projects and the development of critical minerals essential for modern industry.

Those who view support for Ukraine

solely through the lens of cost, overlook the long-term strategic and commercial dividends that stability would bring.

REBUILDING a country devastated by war is not charity, it is an investment in a safer and more prosperous Europe. The alternative would carry far higher costs. Of course, none of this should obscure the immediate human reality. Every missile intercepted represents lives saved, every power station repaired restores not only electricity but dignity.

Ukrainians are defending more than their territory – they are defending the principle that borders cannot be redrawn by force. It is worth recalling how many predicted Kyiv would fall within days of the invasion. Instead, Ukraine endures.

Its society has adapted to air raid sirens and blackouts with a stoicism that commands admiration.

Volunteers deliver supplies to the front, teachers conduct lessons in underground shelters and communities rebuild even as the threat persists. In the last four years, I have written stories of many brave men and women defending their country. The future is, quite literally, being forged

under fire. As we mark this sombre anniversary, the question facing the West is not whether Ukraine is weary – it undoubtedly is – but whether its partners possess the strategic prowess to match its resolve.

Democracies often struggle with long wars – attention drifts, domestic pressures mount and competing crises crowd the agenda. Yet, some moments demand persistence precisely because the consequences of disengagement would be so severe. Ukraine's struggle has always been about more than Ukraine.

It is about the rules that underpin international order, the credibility of alliances and the message sent to authoritarian regimes watching closely.

Four years on from the invasion, we would do well to remember why this fight matters. Not simply for the survival of one nation, but for the preservation of a world in which sovereignty is respected and freedom is defended. Ukraine has shown extraordinary courage.

The question now is whether the rest of us will show equal resolve.

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