

Bill Kaplan: Senator Baldwin is right about Ukraine

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Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin has led in condemning Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Baldwin said: "Putin has violated international law, invading a sovereign and democratic nation that wants peace and independence." Baldwin, a lawyer, is right about Ukraine. The United Nations Charter is crystal clear: "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state" Russia has besmirched international law principles.

Moreover, Russia formally agreed to the 1994 Budapest Memorandum which committed it "to respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine" and "to refrain from the threat or use of force" against Ukraine. In return, Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons and signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Russia was also a party to the post-WWII Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals. The Nuremberg Tribunal charges included - "Crimes against peace: namely, planning, preparation, initiating or waging a war of aggression"

In early March, Baldwin joined a bipartisan group of senators to condemn the Russian aggression and Russian war crimes and crimes against humanity. The resolution later passed by a voice vote. In the aftermath of Ukrainian troops defeating Russian forces around Kyiv, the world gasped in horror. Mass graves of civilians murdered during the Russian occupation. Indiscriminate slaughter of Ukrainians, rapes, torture, looting and destruction of hospitals and schools. Russia has torn up the Geneva Conventions: "Parties to the conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations against only military objectives."

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However, it gets much worse. Russian state TV, media figures and government leaders have increasingly adopted 'genocidal rhetoric' (Washington Post). There is a persistent Russian rejection of Ukrainian statehood, language and history. Ominous talk of reeducation and concentration camps for Ukrainians. Russian troops have forcibly removed Ukrainian civilians to Russia. Putin is violating the Genocide Convention: "In the present convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: Killing members of the group; Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part"

President Biden leads in responding to these horrors. He has united NATO, and rallied the world to oppose Putin's aggression. Biden has stood up calling Putin out for war crimes and genocide. Importantly, giving Ukraine billions of dollars in military assistance. Most recently, artillery, armored personnel carriers and helicopters. Intelligence is being provided and the U.S. will train Ukrainian troops outside of Ukraine. However, it is unlikely the war will end militarily. Senator Baldwin supports the continuation of tough sanctions against Russia and military assistance to Ukraine. But a diplomatic peace settlement is imperative to end the slaughter, prevent a wider conflict and avoid a catastrophic nuclear war.

- Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.