



FACES OF THE RESISTANCE



A Film by Oleg Tolmachov
Assistant Director Emilé Ghessen

STUDY GUIDE

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Faces of the Resistance

Inspiring stories from Ukraine about the impact of the war on ordinary people, and their fight to protect their homeland and one another. We witness the resilience and solidarity of the Ukrainian people, as well as their unwavering commitment to self-determination and their right to live in a free and peaceful nation. Despite the challenges of war, people are finding creative ways to contribute to their nation. Whether it's providing medical aid, or food and clothing, rescuing stray pets, or expressing their resolve through art and the spoken word, they embody the spirit of Ukrainian unity and serve as a testament to the strength of the human spirit.

About Ukraine

Ukraine is located in eastern Europe. It is the second-largest country on the continent, after Russia. Its capital is Kyiv, which is in the north-central part of the country. Ukraine has a population of more than 43 million people. While the majority of them are Ukrainian, there are also a number of other ethnic groups including: Russian, Belarusian, Moldovan, Crimean Tatar, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Polish, and Jewish.¹ The country's official language is Ukrainian, however, a significant percentage of people there also speak Russian. Ukraine shares a border with Russia to the east, Belarus to the north, Moldova and Romania to the southwest, and Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland to the west. The Sea of Azov and the Black Sea are on its southern border. Almost all of the country consists of level plains that average just over 500 feet above sea level. These plains have highly fertile soil, and Ukraine is often referred to as the region's "breadbasket."

History of Ukraine and Russia

Ukraine and Russia have many things in common. They share a Slavic heritage, and they both trace their origins back to the same place; a civilization called Kievan Rus, which was based in Kyiv. However, there is also a history of tension between the two nations.

In 1793 most of what is now Ukraine became part of the Russian Empire. In 1917, Russia underwent a violent revolution where the monarchy that had ruled for centuries was overthrown and a socialist government was instituted. Ukraine declared independence from Russia at this time. However, not long after that, it was taken over by Soviet forces. In 1922, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was incorporated into the Soviet Union.

Ukraine was an important part of the Soviet Union. Of the fifteen Soviet republics, it was the second most populous. It was an important agricultural producer and had many other resources including iron and coal deposits. However, under Soviet policies, Ukraine suffered from a number of negative effects. For instance, there was a widespread famine in 1932 and 1933, and it is estimated that close to 4 million people died. This famine is also known as Holodomor, which means death by starvation." Holodomor is widely considered to be a genocide. Soviet rule also included a campaign of "Russification," which was an attempt to promote the Russian language and culture in Ukraine.

¹ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ukraine/>

In 1991, the Soviet Union dissolved, and Ukraine declared its independence. This was supported by 92 percent of Ukrainians, according to a national referendum. Ukraine became a democracy.

In 2014, tensions between Russia and Ukraine flared after there was a mass protest in Independence Square in Kiev. Pro-Russian prime minister Viktor Yanukovich was forced out. More than 100 people were killed during the protest. Russia responded by occupying and annexing Crimea, which is a peninsula in Ukraine, located on the Black Sea. Many of the residents of that area are ethnically Russian. Over the next few years, thousands of people died in that conflict. Russia also backed a separatist uprising in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas. Secessionists later declared independence as the Donetsk People's Republic, and the Luhansk People's Republic. Conflict in that area continues, and more than 10,000 people have died.

At present, Volodymyr Zelensky is the president of Ukraine. He was elected in 2019, in a landslide victory. He campaigned against poverty and corruption, and also promised to end the war in the Donbas region. Vladimir Putin is a politician and former Russian intelligence officer who has been president of Russia since 2000. He has stated that he believes that Ukraine should be part of Russia.

The Current Conflict

In early 2021, Russia sent tens of thousands of troops to its border with Ukraine, staying vague about its intentions. It continued the troop buildup in early 2022. Then, on February 24, 2022, it invaded Ukraine in a large and devastating military operation. Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, Putin made a speech where he said that Ukraine was never a real nation of its own. He said "Ukraine never had a tradition of genuine statehood." Instead, he argued, "Modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia."² War between Russian and Ukraine continues today, with Russia occupying parts of Ukraine, and Ukraine continuing to resist. Numerous countries, including the United States, have imposed sanctions on Russia, and have provided aid to Ukraine.

In Ukraine, there has been widespread destruction and loss of life as a result of the war. As of June 2023, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) estimates that there has been a total of 24,862 civilian casualties in Ukraine since February 24, 2022, which includes 9,083 killed and 15,779 injured. Additionally, it notes, "OHCHR believes that the actual figures are considerably higher, as the receipt of information from some locations where intense hostilities have been going on has been delayed and many reports are still pending corroboration."³ It estimates that as a result of the war, in 2023, more than 17 million people in Ukraine will need humanitarian assistance.

The agency also says that there have been many human rights violations in the conflict. For instance, it states, "More than 90 per cent of Ukrainian prisoners of war that my Office interviewed said that they were tortured or ill-treated, notably in penitentiary facilities, including through so-

² <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/extracts-putins-speech-ukraine-2022-02-21/>

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/06/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-19-june-2023>

called – it is an awful phrase – ‘welcoming beatings’ on their arrival, as well as frequent acts of torture throughout detention.”⁴

In addition, the conflict has led to a refugee crisis. USA UNHCR explains that 6 million people have been internally displaced in Ukraine, and 8 million more have fled to neighboring countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Moldova. It reports that Poland has accepted the greatest number of Ukrainian refugees.⁵



⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/03/ukraine-high-commissioner-turk-details-severe-violations-and-calls-just-peace>

⁵ <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/>

Additional Resources

Books

- Gordon M. Hahn, *Ukraine Over the Edge: Russia, the West and the “New Cold War.”* Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2018.
- Serhii Plokhy, *The Frontline: Essays on Ukraine’s Past and Present.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press for the Ukrainian Research Institute, 2021.
- Anna Reid, *Borderland: A Journey Through the History of Ukraine.* New York: Basic Books, 2023.
- Karl Schlögel, translated by Gerrit Jackson, *Ukraine: A Nation on the Borderland.* London: Reaktion Books, 2022.
- Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: What Everyone Needs to Know.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Online Resources

- Center for Preventative Action, “War in Ukraine,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 14, 2023. www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine
- Congressional Research Service, “Russia’s War on Ukraine: U.S. Policy and the Role of Congress,” January 30, 2023. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12277>
- Ukraine NOW, “Origins and History of Ukraine,” February 22, 2022. <https://ukraine.ua/explore/origins-history-of-ukraine/>
- USA UNHCR, “About the Crisis in Ukraine,” no date. www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/
- World Economic Forum, “1 Year On: A Timeline of the War in Ukraine,” February 23, 2023. www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/02/ukraine-war-timeline-one-year/

Contact

For inquiries, please contact:
EPF Media
(888) 570-5400; (323) 301-3663
info@epfmedia.com

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