

Statement on the Ukraine Conflict for the Mountain View Friends Meeting  
by David Chandler and Iskra Ivanova, March 5, 2023

At the Meeting for Worship last week a concern was raised for the devastating effects the Russian invasion, which started last year, has had on Ukraine. (We have heard similarly stated sentiments expressed informally around the Meetinghouse.) Iskra Ivanova, who is from Eastern Europe with some knowledge of the history of this conflict, stood and objected to the framing of this issue and urged people to look behind the events of 2022 to the events of 2014. In both of our views what we actually have in Ukraine today is a proxy war between the US and Russia which is using Ukrainians as pawns.

We have a few observations.

1. Humanitarian concern by Quakers is entirely appropriate, but language that frames the conflict, and assigns blame, following the dominant media narrative without an appreciation of the historical realities encourages “us vs them” thinking that is questionable.
2. We are living in a time where media propaganda and censorship of dissenting views are a very real fact of life. We need to be cognizant of that fact and not take the truth of the dominant narrative for granted. Propaganda and censorship distort our perceptions. Appropriate engagement with the world requires awareness of and openness to diverse sources of information. It also requires critical thinking.
3. From conversations after the Meeting it became apparent to us that some, perhaps many, Friends are unaware of the larger context of this conflict.

If the reference to 2014 does not ring a bell for you, it would be important to be aware that at that time there was a coup in Ukraine, with heavy involvement by a number of US politicians and the CIA, that led to the overthrow of an elected government that was trying to keep Ukraine neutral and the establishment of a government that was strongly anti-Russian and pro-western. A large segment of the Ukrainian population (some estimate ~30%), especially in Eastern Ukraine, is ethnically Russian and resisted the coup-imposed government. The war really started in 2014, and has been ongoing for the eight intervening years. An estimated 14,000 people died in civil conflict between 2014 and 2022, which involved heavy bombardment of the Donbas region by the Ukrainian military. Russia sought to bring an end to this conflict through the Minsk Agreements, which involved Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany, but the West has never implemented the agreements. Russia repeatedly called for the implementation of the Minsk agreements prior to its invasion. (Former German Chancellor Merkel has admitted that from the West’s perspective, the Minsk agreement was merely used to buy time for Ukraine’s arms build-up.) There is a reasonable case to be made that the 2022 Russian invasion was, at least in part, an intervention to bring an end to the abuse of the ethnic Russian population in Ukraine.

We would recommend anyone who is unfamiliar with these background events to watch the documentary by Oliver Stone, titled “Ukraine on Fire,” available on YouTube. (Open YouTube and search on the title, or follow the link, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKcmNGvaDU>. Note: YouTube has an obnoxious warning screen. Just click “**I understand and wish to proceed.**”) Also check out some of the many thoughtful comments below the video.

Another documentary about the conditions in the Donbas region during the time from 2014 to 2022, containing many interviews of residents, is “8 Years Before” Donbass Documentary [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JM0VYkL\\_UI4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JM0VYkL_UI4).