What I Think About the Situation in Ukraine

written by Viet Thanh Nguyen | April 3, 2022

The Nguyen family, in the early 1980s in San Jose, Calif., where his parents owned the New Saigon Mini Market. Photograph courtesy Viet Thanh Nguyen

Viet Than Nguyen posted the following statement on his Facebook page on March 18, 2022. We thank him for permission to publish it.

Some people have asked me what I think about the situation in Ukraine. A prominent magazine also asked me. Here's what I wrote. I wonder if they'll publish it:

I was born in Viet Nam and made in America.

I fled from Viet Nam as a refugee in 1975 and came to the United States. While I'm grateful for American aid, I wouldn't have needed American aid if the United States hadn't invaded Viet Nam in the first place.

As a refugee, I am aware that wars kill more civilians than soldiers, and that wars always produce refugees. I have seen that wars do not end simply because we say they do, and that war's effects will ripple through bodies, minds, and souls for decades afterwards.

As a refugee, a writer, and a human being, I stand with the people of Ukraine, who are suffering now and will suffer in the future even after the violence is over. I stand against Putin and authoritarians and autocrats and Russia, and I stand against powerful, imperial nations invading or imposing their will on smaller and weaker countries. I believe that all Ukrainian refugees should be accepted everywhere with open borders, open hearts, open arms, and open minds.

Therefore, I also stand against every instance of nations unilaterally invading other countries, which means I oppose my own government and the United States in its many instances of imposing its will

on other nations, from Iraq and Afghanistan in very recent memory to many other instances, such as the Philippines, Cuba, Haiti, Viet Nam, to name just a few, in addition to the many indigenous nations that the United States currently occupies.

Since I oppose authoritarians and autocrats, I also oppose whenever the United States and its allies support authoritarians and autocrats, in places present and past like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Guatemala, and South Korea, to name a few examples. Since I oppose occupations of all kinds, I am not only opposed to Russia's attempt to occupy Ukraine, I am opposed to the Israeli occupation of Palestine and to the United States' unwavering support for Israel.

And since I support Ukrainian refugees, I support refugees no matter where they come from, what religion they believe in, what color their skin is, what language they speak, and regardless of whether or not my country will benefit politically, economically, or morally for taking them in.

As a Vietnamese refugee from a communist victory, I am well aware that I was let into the United States because it was advantageous for the United States to show the evils of communism. Likewise, Ukrainian refugees are welcome now because it is in the interest of the West and the United States to demonstrate the evils of Putin.

What about all the other refugees who need our compassion, our empathy, our love, and our action? Will we stand for them?