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Australia needs to step up its aid and diplomacy in Ukraine

Австралія повинна посилити свою допомогу та дипломатію в Україні

Вторгнення росії в Україну 24 лютого 2022 р. розпалило конфлікт масової бійні та руйнування. Через рік ми підбиваємо втрачені життя та те, як цей конфлікт змінив світ і життя австралійців. Незважаючи на те, що Австралія надала бажану військову допомогу Україні, вона, на думку видання, може і повинна зробити більше, щоб зіграти більшу роль у припиненні затяжного конфлікту. Невпинні ракетні атаки та армія володимира путіна вбили щонайменше 42 тис. людей, ще 15 тис. досі вважаються зниклими безвісти, а 14 мільйонів переселенців. Це достатня причина для потоку військової допомоги, щоб допомогти українцям підтримувати свою оборону. Але Австралія, разом з іншими країнами світу, має більше, ніж гуманітарний інтерес у цій війні. Це підвищило світові ціни на продукти харчування та паливо, обмежило постачання енергії, на яку європейці покладаються для опалення своїх будинків. Це перекроїло геополітику та викликало величезну міграційну кризу. Австралійці відчували безпосередній вплив зростання цін на пальне та інші види тиску на вартість життя внаслідок порушення ланцюгів постачання та торгівлі.

<https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/australia-needs-to-step-up-its-aid-and-diplomacy-in-ukraine-20230217-p5cld4.html>

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24 last year ignited a conflict of carnage and destruction on a massive scale. One year on, we take stock of the lives lost and how this conflict has changed the world and life for Australians.

While Australia has provided welcome military aid to Ukraine, there is still more it can, and should, do to play a bigger part in helping bring the protracted conflict to an end.

Vladimir Putin's relentless missile attacks and army have killed at least 42,000 people – with 15,000 more still missing and 14 million displaced. This is reason enough for the flood of military aid to help Ukrainians maintain their defences.

But Australia, along with other countries around the world, has more than a humanitarian interest in this war. It has increased global food and fuel prices, restricted the energy supplies Europeans rely on to heat their homes. It has redrawn geopolitics and sparked a huge migration crisis.

Australians have felt the direct impact of increased fuel prices and other cost-of-living pressures resulting from disrupted supply chains and trade flow.

As our columnist Mick Ryan – a retired major general who served in the ADF for more than 35 years – has noted, the Australian government's commitment of about \$388 million in aid for Ukraine is significantly less than the annual cost of Australia's commitment to Afghanistan between 2007 and 2016. As the world's 13th largest economy and a nation that has regularly sent its people to the far side of the globe to defend other democracies, Ryan finds this small contribution puzzling. "There are ample reasons for why Australia should be at the forefront of providing more military, economic and humanitarian aid to the Ukrainians," he says.

Our conspicuous diplomatic absence from Ukraine for more than a year also raises questions about the level of commitment Australia is demonstrating to support the wartorn nation and its allies on the ground in Kyiv. It means Australia does not have a presence at the table with the Ukrainian government alongside our international partners in helping develop a strategy to end the war.

As the Herald reveals, Australia has failed to reopen its diplomatic mission in Kyiv despite the reopening of more than 60 others in the capital since Moscow withdrew its troops. Canada's mission, which was co-located with Australia's, returned in the middle of last year. A reason for Australia's lingering absence – that the embassy is simply following its own "do not travel" advice – sounds like a lame excuse when it continues to have a presence in other hot spots including Iran, Iraq, Myanmar and Russia, which carry similar travel warnings. Australia also continued to maintain a presence in high-risk conflict zones – Baghdad and Kabul – until 2021.

One senior diplomat, not authorised to speak publicly, said it appears to be a failure in leadership and a “total joke” that Australia has not reopened its mission in Kyiv.

Bruce Edwards, a career official with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, was forced to leave Kyiv along with ambassadors from the United States, Britain and Canada, in January last year as tens of thousands of Russian troops assembled at the Ukrainian border before a military invasion. He has been based in neighbouring Poland since last February and has returned to Ukraine only once since the invasion.

Unlike the Australian Defence Force and security agencies, the Department of Foreign Affairs is unable to waive its responsibilities under Work Health and Safety Act when sending staff to conflict zones.

Australia urgently needs to resolve this issue and reopen its embassy to demonstrate our solidarity with Ukraine and the global community to help facilitate a resolution – and to demonstrate that Russia’s war will not be tolerated.

The war has reminded us that so-called modernity does not always bring peace and that we can never put the threat of war behind us, even in regions we had thought were settled. Ukrainians should be supported for their courage and resilience in the face of Russia’s overwhelming cruel force. Australia should not continue to send a message to Ukraine and the global community partners that it is holding back in taking a firm stand beside them.