This page was exported from - Shelburne Free Press
Export date: Thu Oct 29 23:55:45 2026 / +0000 GMT

ICC Arrest Warrant on Putin

by GWYNNE DYER

Although the arrest warrant issued on Russian President Vladimir Putin by the International Criminal Court last week was welcome, there was a certain puzzlement about the actual crime he is being charged with.

This is a man who launched an unprovoked invasion of a neighbouring country, Ukraine. He declares that the country should not even exist, and denies that there is a valid Ukrainian identity. Those Ukrainians who believe they are not Russians are ?Nazis' who must be ?re-educated' or destroyed. That alone qualifies Putin for a charge of genocide.

An estimated 120,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed or wounded in the fighting in the past year, together with many thousands of Ukrainian civilians. That exposes Putin to the charge of waging aggressive war.

Some of the soldiers under his command have committed well-documented massacres of Ukrainian civilians and committed various other atrocities against them. As the supreme commander ultimately responsible for their actions, Putin is also liable to indictment on a wide variety of war crimes charges.

So why did the International Criminal Court charge him only with the crime of deporting Ukrainian children into Russia, placing them in the care of Russian families as if they were orphaned refugees, and blocking them from contact with their real families?

There is no doubt that this is happening. The United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine says there is evidence of the illegal transfer of hundreds of Ukrainian children to Russia, and the Ukrainian government says that the real number is at least 16,221.

This phenomenon is a particularly shameful aspect of President Putin's obsessive campaign to erase Ukrainian identity. However, with so many larger crimes to choose from, why did the ICC limit itself to what is essentially a charge of mass kidnapping?

The answer was visible last Wednesday at an event in the George W. Bush Presidential Center in Dallas, Texas, where the former US president ?misspoke' yet again. He meant to condemn Putin's invasion of Ukraine, but he actually denounced ?the decision of one man to launch a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq... I mean of Ukraine.?

Realizing his blunder, Bush muttered ?Iraq too? and then excused himself on the grounds of age: ?I'm 75?. It got a laugh and it was certainly a slip of the tongue, but it might have been a Freudian slip.

Could it be that Bush secretly realizes that he committed not only a great blunder but also a great crime when he invaded Iraq? That would be nice, although it's too late to apologize for the lies, the hundreds of thousands of lives lost, and the ruin of Iraq. However, the real point lies elsewhere.

The two invasions are linked. Bush's wholly unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq broke the key law on which we built the post-1945 ?rule of law' in international affairs. Putin's did it again.

The victors of the Second World War knew they might not survive a third, so they made attacking another country illegal. (It never was before.) The new rule, embedded in the United Nations Charter, is that borders, fair or not, must never be changed by force. From now on, only voluntary, negotiated changes are legal..

In an era of nuclear weapons, that is not just a good idea; it is essential for our long-term survival. And to a surprising extent, the new rule has been obeyed.

The world is still littered with civil wars, ?wars of liberation', and other traditional side-shows, but full-on military invasions by great

powers without the blessing of the UN Security Council have been very scarce in the past seventy years. In fact, only two come to mind: the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine last year.

The difficulty in condemning Putin now is that George Bush and his British sidekick, former prime minister Tony Blair, are still walking around free and unpunished.

The fact that they invaded the wrong country is irrelevant. (Iraq and Saddam Hussein had nothing whatever to do with the 9/11 attacks.) Their crime was simply to invade another country. That doesn't just cause a lot of death and destruction; it undermines the basic law that keeps great wars at bay.

It would be blatant hypocrisy for the ICC to indict Vladimir Putin for the usual range of war crimes when Bush and his pals committed them in Iraq and got away with it, so what's left?

Well, Russian forces have been kidnapping Ukrainian children and raising them as Russians, which is a form of ethnic cleansing forbidden by international law. So far as anybody knows, Bush didn't kidnap Iraqi children. So that's the charge we can use for Putin.

Not that we actually expect to bring him to trial.