

‘Inaction supports Putin’s escalation’: World must keep standing up to Russia, historian says



By [David Crowe](#)

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Australians are being urged to maintain support for Ukraine to prevent Russia and its allies weakening Western democracies, in a prediction that the threat will remain as long as the Russian people believe in the “illusion” of imperial power.

Historian Olesya Khromeychuk opened a speaking tour of Australia with a warning that any attempts to appease Russian President Vladimir Putin would only give him further incentives to wage war against the people of Ukraine.



Historian Olesya Khromeychuk is on a speaking tour of Australia.

The Australian government has contributed more than \$655 million to Ukraine, including military help worth \$475 million, but Khromeychuk, the director of the Ukrainian Institute in London, warned against “fatigue” with the war and argued that Australians had a stake in a victory against Russia.

“It’s a fight for the democratic order. If we let a bully such as Russia gain from being an aggressor and destroying democratic order in Europe, then we’re going to find ourselves living in a very frightening world wherever we are, including Australia,” she said.

“It seems like it’s far away, but it’s not. Russia is a country that has allies elsewhere, that still has an alliance of sorts with China and has alliances with North Korea with Iran.

“It’s an international threat and it’s the sort of threat that affects all of us and affects the democratic order and our values, the values of protection of human rights. We cannot afford to not ensure Ukraine’s victory.”

In the latest move, Australia will [supply material to France to produce 155mm artillery shells](#) to Ukraine.

Khromeychuk rejected the view that escalating the war – for instance, with the [United States and Germany promising tanks](#) – would provoke Russia to inflict greater damage as a nuclear power.

“We’ve seen that any appeasement of Russia actually encourages escalation, so it doesn’t work,” she said.

Like other Ukrainians, she dates the beginning of the war to 2014, when Russia occupied Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine, and says a reckoning will be needed in the West over the way leaders did not do enough to stop Putin at that point.

“So you don’t escalate? He actually takes that as the reason to escalate. The inaction supports his escalation,” she said.

“If we allow him to have any gains from this absolutely horrendous genocidal war that he’s been waging for a whole year, the appeasement translates into escalation, not the other way around.”

Khromeychuk, who has taught at University College London and written commentary for *The New York Times*, is the author of *The Death of a Soldier Told by His Sister*, about her brother and his death in 2017 while fighting with the Ukrainian Army in the country’s east.

That account resonated with people who had lost siblings in other circumstances, she said, but it also helped readers understand the background to the war before the invasion on February 24 last year.

The comments came after [Putin used a speech](#) to commemorate the battle of Stalingrad in 1941 to say he was leading a struggle against “the ideology of Nazism in its modern form” – a false claim used in Russian propaganda to justify the war.

Putin has cited centuries of Russian control of Ukrainian territory to justify his invasion while Khromeychuk and other historians have pointed to the country’s past as a sovereign state and a “melting pot” of cultures in eastern Europe.

“Putin isn’t the only problem. Putin in one way or another isn’t going to necessarily mean that other leaders will not continue the imperialist project,” she said.

“Russia has to fail in Ukraine to the degree where the Russian society will understand that the imperialist project isn’t working for them anymore and they need to abandon it.

“In some ways it’s the only thing that they have – this illusion of greatness – that the population has to hold on to because they’re so poor, they’ve been fed this propaganda for so many years. But they need to understand that it’s not working for them.

“Unfortunately, I don’t really see a lot of evidence that that that’s going to happen anytime soon.”

Like others, Khromeychuk sees Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who has been jailed by Putin, as a supporter of that imperial vision because he has never rejected the Russian annexation of Crimea.

Khromeychuk spoke at the University of Sydney on Thursday night and speaks at the [Australian National University in Canberra](#) on Tuesday.