

# MEDIA

HIGHLIGHTS 2022 Q1

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# BY THE **NUMBERS**

**+6,600**  
MEDIA MENTIONS



**+37,500,000,000**

**GLOBAL IMPRESSIONS**

COVERAGE OF HRF PRINTED IN

## **45 LANGUAGES**

Afrikaans • Albanian • Arabic • Bengali • Bosnian • Bulgarian • Catalan • Chinese • Croatian • Czech • Danish • Dutch • English • Estonian • Finnish • French • German • Greek • Hindi • Hungarian • Icelandic • Indonesian • Italian • Japanese • Kannada • Korean • Latvian • Macedonian • Malayalam • Marathi • Norwegian • Persian • Polish • Portuguese • Romanian • Russian • Slovak • Slovenian • Spanish • Swedish • Tamil • Thai • Turkish • Ukrainian • Vietnamese

# TV & BROADCAST

HRF's work is consistently featured in top media outlets around the world. Besides print and online formats, HRF regularly makes appearances on television, radio, and podcasts. Here's a snapshot:

## ABC News



Chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov speaks out: "Sanctions don't stop tanks"  
March 2, 2022 | Leigh Sales

## CNBC Crypto World



How crypto could change the way organizations provide humanitarian aid  
March 1, 2022 | Tanaya Macheel & Darren Geeter

## NPR Morning Edition

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is being called the world's first crypto war  
March 3, 2022 | Bobby Allyn

## CBC Radio

Human Rights groups calling out FIFA for applying a double standard with how it applies sport sanctions  
March 9, 2022 | Stephen Quinn

## MSNBC

Garry Kasparov: "Putin is playing poker. He's bluffing."  
January 29, 2022 | Ali Velshi

# Justin Bieber performs at Saudi race despite calls for boycott

December 6, 2021

By [Sarakshi Rai](#)

Justin Bieber performed some of his biggest hits at the Saudi Grand Prix in Jeddah on Sunday, [The Associated Press](#) reports, despite calls for him to boycott the show.

Bieber was accompanied on his visit to Saudi Arabia by his wife, supermodel Hailey Bieber, who took to Instagram to praise the pop star on his performance and said “go baby” along with a video of him performing on stage.

Bieber, who has not responded to criticism over his decision to perform in Saudi Arabia, was not the only celebrity to perform at the post Formula One race concert. Jason Derulo took the stage before Bieber along with female back-up dancers who donned baggy sweatpants.

The Hill has reached out to Bieber’s label, Def Jam, for comment.

Last month, human rights groups and the fiancée of the Washington Post journalist who was murdered by a Saudi hit squad urged Bieber to cancel his appearance at the F1 concert in Saudi Arabia.

“Cancel your Dec. 5 performance in Saudi Arabia. This is a unique opportunity to send a powerful message to the world that your name and talent will not be used to restore the reputation of a regime that kills its critics,” Hatice Cengiz, the fiancée of Jamal Khashoggi, wrote in an op-ed [published](#) in the newspaper in November.

“It would be disastrous for Justin Bieber, an artist with a vast global following, and who is idolized by

millions, to be used as a pawn by [Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's] murderous regime," Human Rights Foundation President Céline Assaf-Boustani said.

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In October 2018, Khashoggi, a critic of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, went to the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to arrange a marriage license and was killed by a Saudi hit squad.

The Biden administration said earlier this year that a "capture or kill" operation against Khashoggi

had been approved by the crown prince.

However, the Saudi Foreign Ministry said in February it rejected completely "the negative, false and unacceptable" assessment of a U.S. intelligence report that found Mohammed bin Salman had approved the killing of Khashoggi, [Reuters](#) said.

The AP notes that Sunday's concert would have been "an unthinkable scene in Saudi Arabia" just a few years ago. The changes to the country's ultra-conservative laws come amid sweeping changes by the crown prince, who aims to modernize society, attract foreign investment and create jobs for youth.

# US condemns 'unjust' media arrests in Hong Kong

December 30, 2021

By [Laura Kelly](#)



The Biden administration is calling on the People's Republic of China and Hong Kong authorities to release journalists and media executives arrested in recent days, claiming that their charges of sedition are unjust.

Secretary of State [Antony Blinken](#) said the arrest on Dec. 29 of seven senior staff of the Stand

News website in Hong Kong and raid of their offices "have forced yet another of the few remaining bastions of free and independent media in Hong Kong to cease operations."

"Journalism is not sedition," the secretary said in a statement released Wednesday night.

"We call on PRC and Hong Kong authorities to cease targeting Hong Kong's free and independent media and to immediately release those journalists and media executives who have been unjustly detained and charged."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian dismissed criticisms by the U.S. as "a false pretense ... to serve its true agenda of destabilizing Hong Kong." China views international criticisms as interfering in its domestic affairs.

Yet the criticism from the U.S. echoes outrage from other democratic governments and human rights groups who view the shutdown of the Hong Kong news outlet, and a raid of their offices carried out with a reported 200 officers, as part of an increasing campaign of intimidation and silencing of free speech.

Hong Kong authorities on Thursday charged two former senior Stand News editors with conspiring to publish seditious materials and denied them bail. However, four former board members would be allowed release pending charges, [Reuters reported](#).

Those released included Denise Ho, a popular singer and prominent pro-democracy activist based in Hong Kong who holds Canadian citizenship.

Human Rights Foundation (HRF) had earlier criticized Ho's arrest and called the shut-down of Stand News, and arrest of its employees "a grave miscarriage of justice."

"How many more innocent individuals in Hong Kong must be arrested before the international community responds?" HRF Chairman Garry Kasparov said in a statement. "We stand in solidarity with Ho and all the brave individuals wrongly imprisoned for simply exercising their basic rights."

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen [said the arrests are](#) "yet another example of Beijing authorities' crackdown on free speech in Hong Kong" and called for unified calls of condemnation among the international community.

Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne [wrote on Twitter](#) that the raid on Stand News and arrests of journalists "continue the suppression of free speech and media in Hong Kong. [Australia] reiterates our

call for media freedom and for the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong to be upheld.”

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The media arrests are being viewed as another example of Hong Kong’s eroding autonomy since Beijing imposed its National Security Law in 2020 on the territory, punishing vague acts of subversion and secession.

Pro-democracy activists have criticized the law as Beijing’s strategy to tamp down dissent

in Hong Kong, prompting months of protests that at times have turned violent.

The U.S. has imposed a number of sanctions on individuals and entities that it says are carrying out or responsible for the suppression of Hong Kong’s autonomy, including Hong Kong’s chief executive, Carrie Lam.

# Chinese Artist Wields Digital Olympic Imagery to Protest Own Country

February 1, 2022

By **Emma Mayer**



^ Artist Badiucao released a five-part collection of NFTs that use Olympic imagery to protest the Chinese government's oppression and human rights record. Above, Badiucao poses next to the series inspired by the coming 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, on November 12, 2021, at the Santa Giulia museum in Brescia, Italy.

An artist from China launched a five-part collection of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) on Tuesday that use the 2022 Winter [Olympics](#) as imagery to protest China's oppression, lack of transparency

regarding COVID-19 and the dismantling of democracy in Hong Kong, according to [the dedicated site for the collection](#).

Created by artist Badiuca, the collection is titled *Beijing 2022* and contains five drawings of Olympic-style images. In it, a snowboarder rides a surveillance camera instead of a snowboard, a curler slides the COVID-19 virus instead of a curling stone, and the biathlon shows someone blindfolded and held at gunpoint to represent the Uyghur genocide.

"I have been battling censorship from China's authoritarian regime for more than 10 years," the artist wrote on the collection's site. "When conventional galleries and venues are too intimidated to exhibit my art due to threats from Beijing, the Internet has been the last resort for artists like me."

An NFT is a digital art form similar to cryptocurrency that can be stored in a digital wallet or ledger. NFTs, Badiuca said, are a safe way to give financial support to dissident artists like himself, but also "serve as an important immutable public record outside of authoritarian tampering and control."

Each of the artworks will be minted as 2022 editions. As part of the minting process, collectors will have the opportunity to write their own

message of opposition to China's government onto the blockchain.

In December, Badiuca showed the *Beijing 2022* works in more than 20 locations around Miami before taking it to the Museo di Santa Giulia in Brescia, Italy. The Chinese embassy requested in October that the museum cancel the exhibit, but the city's mayor, Emilio del Bono, [refused](#).

The project is a "collective act of censorship resistance" and 10 percent of the proceeds from the purchasing of the NFT collection will go towards the Human Rights Foundation's (HRF) "Art in Protest Residency," a collaboration between HRF and the Gray Area Foundation for the Arts.

Dubbed "the Chinese Banksy," Badiuca has used art and cartoon work to speak prolifically on political topics of interest for several years.

NFTs have been deemed a "reorientation of power and control," London-based artist Robert Alice told *Forbes*. The non-fungible tokens give control "back into the hands of the artist

basically since the Renaissance and the printing press.”

In a statement sent to *Newsweek*, Human Rights Foundation Executive Director of Art in Protest Holly Baxter said: “The Human Rights Foundation’s Art in Protest residency aims to provide a safe space for dissident artists to grow and explore new ways to creatively propel the importance of civil and political rights into the global spotlight.”

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The statement continued: “Promoting and protecting human rights is at the very core of every initiative at the Human Rights Foundation.”

More recently, NFTs have taken on different forms than just art, such as concert tickets and music. In March 2021, the band Kings of Leon released their newest album in NFT form as part of a three-part series called “NFT Yourself.” The newer form of the album offered a special album package, show perks such as front-row seats as well as exclusive audiovisual art.

Digital and physical artists are continuing to push the envelope as they consider how far NFTs might take their art to their audiences.

# Why Are People Boycotting the 2022 Winter Olympics?

The U.S. and nine other countries are carrying out a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics. It's a symbolic gesture, but what obligation do regular people have to boycott by not tuning in?

February 9, 2022

By [Jenny Singer](#)



At the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, [figure skaters](#) sharpen their blades and machine-made snow covers the giant slalom. On the other side of the country, the Chinese government is carrying out what the U.S. State Department has labeled a genocide against Uyghurs, a minority ethnic group.

Since 2017, over one million Uyghurs—a mostly Muslim group living in Xinjiang, a region in north-western China—have been forced into internment camps. They are detained on the basis of “everything from wearing a headscarf or sporting a long beard to having more than two children or traveling overseas for vacation,” [The Washington Post reports](#). Survivors of the camps have reported acts of torture, rape, and forced sterilization. Though China [claimed](#) to have closed the camps, in 2020 a [BuzzFeed News investigation](#) revealed that the government had built “high-security camps—some capable of housing tens of thousands of people” in which to forcibly house Uyghurs. “Uyghurs are basically having their cultural identity destroyed over time,” Peter Irwin, senior program officer at the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP), tells *Glamour*.

If you’re following the Olympics, you know that Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva [already made history](#) with her quad jump, and that Leslie Jones’s commentary [isn’t being respected](#) as the art form it is. Regular viewers don’t have the same visuals of forced labor, family separations, and life under surveillance in Xinjiang. But most people are connected to the region, since it is responsible for the vast majority of [cotton production](#) in China.

“Even though we may never have met someone who is Uyghur, we may never have been to China, each of us owns a T-shirt that likely has cotton that comes from Xinjiang and was likely made by slave labor,” Naomi Kikoler, director of the Center for the Prevention of Genocide at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, [said this week](#). “I don’t think we often talk about the level of proximity that we sometimes have to acts of potential genocide.”

In response to the treatment of Uyghurs, the U.S. and nine other countries are carrying out a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics. It’s a symbolic gesture—American [athletes can compete](#), but diplomats won’t attend the

games. What obligation do regular people have to boycott by not tuning in? The Olympics are supposed to be a celebration of athleticism, diplomacy, and the perseverance of dreams. But this year, it may feel as if viewers are forced into an absurd position in which watching speed skating means accidentally normalizing a genocidal regime.

"There's a genocide taking place in the Uyghur region. There are crimes against humanity taking place in the country where the Olympics are taking place," says Irwin. "I don't think any individual should be supporting this by watching the Games. I think if you're watching, you're legitimizing what the Chinese government is doing." This isn't the first time moral questions over watching the Olympics have been raised in recent months. Ahead of the 2021 Olympic Games—held in Tokyo during a COVID surge—Sasha Mudd, a professor of philosophy, referred to this situation as "tolerance complicity." That is, not participating directly in a bad act, but also not calling it out. "We tolerate, normalize, or even celebrate wrongdoing through taking pleasure in its results," she [wrote in \*The New York Times\*](#).

But before you come at people for cheering on [Nathan Chen](#) and Sara Hector, Irwin says there are other things to consider: "I think we have to step back and think—the only reason we're calling on individuals and looking at athletes as potential sources of free expression to call out China for what it's doing is because the International Olympic Committee has [done nothing](#)," Irwin argues. "There has been no pressure put on the Chinese government at all when it comes to what they're doing to Uyghurs." He's critical of corporate sponsors too. Despite the U.S.'s labeling the treatment of Uyghurs a genocide, major corporations like Coca-Cola, Airbnb, and Procter & Gamble are Olympic sponsors this year.

### **What can we do?**

Level one: "It sounds a bit cliché, but [read about the situation](#), inform yourself," says Irwin. Other easy steps: Talk about it with your friends and family, bring it up on social media, seek out relationships with Uyghur communities in your state.

The next level of action: Contact your elected officials. The Uyghur Human Rights Project recommends asking your member of Congress to

support or sponsor the [Uyghur Human Rights Protection Act](#) and the [Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act](#).

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**One easy step is to add a Google Chrome extension called the Uyghur Forced Labor Checker, which will warn you if the company you're buying from might use Uyghur labor in its manufacturing.**

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The next level: "If there's something you can do to prevent the atrocities, it's that China does respond to the economic argument, says Irwin. "If there's an economic reason to stop doing what they're doing, then that could be somewhere to press." Students at the Catholic University of America have [pushed their school](#) to move toward divesting from any investment related to Xinjiang. Now students at other schools are calling for their own inquiries. "We've seen some momentum on this," says Irwin.

If you're a consumer, consider this: Captives are often released from the camps but then forced to labor at factories for little or no money, [The New York Times reported](#) in 2018. In December 2021, President Biden [signed](#) the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act to keep products manufactured in the Xinjiang region from entering the U.S. But [the Times reported](#) that before the act was passed, Nike and Coca-Cola both lobbied to weaken it. The UHRP encourages consumers to hold brands accountable on social media and through petitions. In 2021, French prosecutors, according to [The New York Times](#), [began investigating](#) whether Inditex, the owner of Zara, as well as Uniqlo, and Sketchers, use forced Uyghur labor. One easy step is to add a Google Chrome extension called the [Uyghur Forced Labor Checker](#), which will warn you if the company you're buying from might use Uyghur labor in its manufacturing.

*Jenny Singer is a staff writer for Glamour. You can [follow her](#) on Twitter.*

# 'Insightful and courageous': Gabon activist Hervé Mombo Kinga dies of Covid

Celebrated blogger had suffered ill health after spending 17 months in prison for speaking out against president Ali Bongo

February 18, 2022

By [Saeed Kamali Dehghan](#)



^ *Hervé Mombo Kinga began making videos in 2015 criticising the regime and poor living conditions in Gabon. Photograph: Human Rights Foundation*

Hervé Mombo Kinga, the pro-democracy activist and celebrated blogger who spent 17 months in jail for insulting the Gabonese president, Ali Bongo Ondimba, was not impressed when he saw the pictures of the leader limping up the stairs of France's presidential palace.

Kinga, who died last week at 47 after contracting Covid, was infuriated by the episode – widely shared in the west African country of Gabon, despite the embarrassment it caused the president, whose family has held power for more than five decades.

Using a walking stick and supported by an aide, Bongo lost his balance at the top of the Élysée stairs. He was caught by the French president, Emmanuel Macron.

In a six-minute video on social media, Kinga fumed at Macron for what he saw as the French leader's endorsement of Bongo, whose disputed re-election in 2016 by a slim margin was marked by violence.

"Emmanuel Macron, we are effectively at war," said Kinga, angry about the mending of

relations between his homeland and its former colonial ruler.

Kinga was a vociferous critic of the Bongo regime, posting videos under the pseudonym "Matricule 001" or resistance soldier 001.

Kinga's health had deteriorated after the harsh conditions of his detention, according to his lawyer, Anges Kevin Nzigou. He was hospitalised in January and contracted Covid, which "became more severe, particularly because of his state of health", Nzigou says. Kinga had just become a father for the second time.

"Mr Kinga was an unwavering defender of human rights in Gabon and led his fight without hatred or resentment, despite the obstacles he faced. It is this [that] made him an emblematic figure in the fight for freedoms in Gabon," Nzigou says.

Kinga had been left penniless after the authorities destroyed his business, a cybercafe in the capital Libreville, and could not afford healthcare. A crowdfunding campaign was launched to help, but the intervention came too late.

Céline Assaf Boustani, president of the Human Rights Foundation (HRF), says: "Armed with just a camera, Hervé dedicated his life to exposing the harsh reality of life under the Bongo regime in Gabon."

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**Céline Assaf Boustani, president of the Human Rights Foundation (HRF), says: "Armed with just a camera, Hervé dedicated his life to exposing the harsh reality of life under the Bongo regime in Gabon."**

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"Hervé was insightful and courageous, and his death is a tremendous loss to the Gabonese people struggling against poverty and government repression."

Gabonese opposition leader Jean Ping was among those who paid tribute online. He hailed "the courageous fight he led for Gabon". Others called Kinga a "freedom fighter" whose death was a "big loss" for young people.

"Sick, weakened, continually persecuted, he refused to leave Gabon. A righteous man died today," [said one tweet](#).

"Your death saddens us. But the seed you sowed in us has become a hope that nourishes and inspires us every day," [read another](#).

Kinga started making [videos](#) in 2015, "criticising repression, injustices, poor public services and deleterious living conditions for ordinary Gabonese citizens under dictator Ali Bongo's regime", says the HRF.

He supported Jean Ping in 2016. Dozens of people [lost their lives](#) in the post-election violence. Omar Bongo, the current president's father, governed from 1967 until his death in 2009, when his son took over after a [contested election](#).

Kinga was among more than a dozen activists arrested in demonstrations in August 2017, a year after the election. He was held for 17 months, partially in solitary confinement, and charged with "insulting the head of state" and "participating in propaganda that disturbs the public order".

"He was kept with very limited light and air coming from a small opening in the ceiling, making it impossible to ascertain whether it was day or night. Through this opening, rather than through the door, Kinga received his minimal food ration. Although detainees are usually allowed three meals per day, Kinga was only given food once per day," according to a 2019 HRF petition submitted to the UN, appealing Kinga's imprisonment.

"This food ration was thrown over the wall to him, as if he were an animal. He was unable to shower and lacked access to any toilet facilities; instead, he was forced to relieve himself in a plastic bag in his cell. Kinga was not provided [with] a mattress and was relegated to sleeping on the floor, although he could not properly lie down in the painfully small cell."

Released in February 2019, Kinga was particularly critical of the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

[In his last video posted](#), Kinga said: "If you think about it, we are armed: we have words, resistance, boycotting, and disobedience. I will be the first to encourage this type of fight."

# Garry Kasparov: How the free world gave Putin the green light

February 25, 2022

By **Garry Kasparov**, HRF Chairman



▲ *Russia has launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, attacking by land the north, south and eastern parts of the country. Russia also has targeted Ukraine with air strikes to the interior of the country. (Emilio Morenatti / AP)*

Early Thursday morning, Germany invaded Ukraine. So did the Netherlands, Italy, France, Great Britain and every other country that

has supported Russian dictator Vladimir Putin's war machine for the past decade.

The missiles that slammed into Kharkiv, the helicopters attacking an airport near the capital Kyiv, every bullet in every Russian paratrooper's gun – all were built or bought largely with money from the free world. That same free world now stands in shock that these weapons are being used to do what they were designed to do.

Europe bought Russian gas and oil and welcomed Putin's oligarch cronies' looted billions in IPOs, real estate purchases, and political donations legal and illegal. Even after Putin invaded Ukraine in 2014 and annexed Crimea, Europe tried to keep business as usual separate from Russia's assault on European security and the global world order.

On Thursday, Putin repaid them in full for their years of appeasement. After weeks of posturing and dramatic calls for summits and negotiations made headlines around the world, he sent his massed forces into Ukraine on the schedule he set months ago. The preening shuttle diplomacy by France's Emanuel Macron and Germany's Olaf Scholz was revealed to have been a waste of time for everyone but Putin, who used it to ready his forces for the attack.

That time could have been used to arm Ukraine with the weapons it badly needs to fend off Russia's overwhelming military superiority. It could have been used to level sanctions to demonstrate that this time, for once, the West was serious about deterrence.

Instead, Ukraine was treated like a beggar and sanctions were kept in reserve, as a threat Putin had little reason to expect was serious. After all, goes his thinking, if you have the power to stop me and choose not to use it, aren't you giving me the green light?

It's not as if Putin tried to hide what he was doing. Spies and satellites weren't necessary to tease out that Russia was investing record sums in its military capacity and security forces; it was right there in the national budget for years. Russia may be falling apart and falling behind, but there was always plenty of cash for security forces and propaganda, the budget of a dictator.

Putin was so confident of his potential rivals' obliviousness and cowardice that he brought nearly every mobile element of the Russian military to Ukraine's border over the course of two months. There were

barely any of the usual pretexts about “exercises,” even when Russia took the unusual step of moving a large force into Belarus, where they were poised just a couple of hours from Kyiv.

Of course, this is far from the first time that the world has ignored Putin’s warnings, let alone mine. Five years into his rule in Russia, Putin infamously stated that “the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.” Few took it seriously or understood it to mean that Putin would try to reverse that catastrophe should he have the chance. A clear warning was ignored, much the way Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” was considered little more than hateful ranting when it was published in 1925.

Now a war of conquest has erupted in Europe, the greatest ever threat to the post-World War II order of borders and laws. Tanks are rolling and jets are dogfighting above major cities. Putin has followed through on his promise to try to crush Ukraine, which he first invaded in 2014. [My New York Daily News op-ed](#) on Putin at the time was bluntly titled “Stop This Man.” Needless to say, Putin has not been stopped.

Eight years later, Putin and his war machine are much stronger. Instead of being politically isolated and economically cut off, his regime has profited from record gas and oil exports. Most profits are siphoned off into the private accounts that make Putin and his cronies the richest people in the world. Much of the rest has gone into a literal war chest, expanding and improving Russia’s military and internal security forces and filling a reserve fund to help them weather sanctions.

Time has made Putin’s grip on power in Russia stronger as well, with every significant critic dead, jailed or exiled. The last major protests, in 2020 on behalf of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, were met by an army of well-equipped riot police. Their shiny new helmets and batons were also paid for by the same European nations whose leaders meekly protested the brutality.

Putin is not invulnerable, nor is his army. Ukraine is fighting hard, and if the initial onslaught is repulsed, and aid arrives in time, Putin could find himself in a difficult position. He will have to either retreat or choose total war against an urban

population, which could shock even sleepy NATO into action.

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## **Defending Ukraine from Putin is the defense of the free world. Defending Ukrainian lives is the defense of Western values.**

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Russians came out to protest this war in the largest numbers since 2020, with more than 1,700 arrests across the country on the first day. Most Russians get their news from state-controlled television, unfortunately, where they are told this is a war of self-defense against the "Nazis" in Ukraine and their masters in America. But the longer the war goes on, the more obvious it will be that Putin's needless war on Ukraine is also part of Putin's war on Russians.

Russia has the world's largest nuclear arsenal and Putin invokes it regularly, but there is much that can be done to constrain him and save lives now. After years of my warnings and proposals being ignored, and now hearing "You

were right, Garry!" all day, I'll repeat what I said in 2014: Stop telling me I was right and start listening now. My recommendations:

- Support Ukraine militarily, immediately. Everything but boots on the ground, meaning every advanced weapon, intelligence and cyber-capability. It has to be now. If Ukraine falls, Putin will bleed it dry to compensate for sanctions and dig in, as he has in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. Victory in Ukraine is also the only way to avoid doing this all again, when Putin needs new targets to distract from the disastrous state of Russia.
- Bankrupt Putin's war machine by freezing and seizing Russian assets and access to markets. Kick Russia out of SWIFT and other financial networks, and every international institution.
- Expose and seize the assets of Putin's cronies and their companies and families in the free world. Take away their visas and send them back to live in the dictatorship they helped build.
- Recall all ambassadors from Russia. There is no point in diplomacy or communications with

a rogue dictatorship making war. Send the message that isolation will be total until all aggression ceases and Ukraine is made whole.

- Turn off, shut down and send home every element of Putin's global propaganda machine. Russia Today and other platforms beam lies and hate into millions of homes in the free world, while Putin maintains total control of the media in Russia.

- Call out Putin's lackeys in the free world. The lobbyists, the law firms, the [former politicians like German ex-chancellor Gerhard Schröder](#), who chairs two of Putin's strategically important energy companies. This includes the fifth columnists of all political stripes who side with a dictator for ideology or Russian cash. Why do executives and advertisers tolerate the likes of Tucker Carlson braying Putin propaganda in prime time? Donald Trump and his acolytes in Congress still can't find a discouraging word for Putin and repeat Russian propaganda blaming NATO and President Biden even as Russian bombs fall on Ukraine. I've bashed every U.S. president since Ronald Reagan over Russia policy, but praising a bloodthirsty dictator to

score partisan points is disgusting and un-American.

- Replace Russian energy exports by increasing production and opening new sources, from fracking to nuclear to renewables. Giving authoritarians so much leverage for extortion is unacceptable. There's no point in saving the planet if you don't save the people on it.

Joe Biden's Cold War background has prepared him better than most of his European peers. His grave tone and announcement of serious sanctions were a welcome start. Most EU leaders, even the ones in the East who grasp the danger Putin represents, are a generation removed from confrontation and conflict. But now they must help Ukraine fight against the monster they helped create.

This is war, a hot war, no longer deterrence, and time is of the essence to get weapons to Ukraine so it can fight the war for freedom that the rest of the world has preferred to pretend isn't real.

We must acknowledge that there will be sacrifices involved. The price of stopping Putin has gone up since 2008, when he invaded Georgia,

and since 2014, when he first invaded Ukraine, but it will only get higher if he isn't stopped now. Failing to fight will only postpone the inevitable to another time and place.

Defending Ukraine from Putin is the defense of the free world. Defending Ukrainian lives is the defense of Western values. America used to care about such things, I recall from my life in the Soviet Union that Putin misses so much. It's time to do what is needed and to do what is right. It's time to fight.

*Garry Kasparov is chairman of the Renew Democracy Initiative and the 1985 world chess champion.*

# War in the time of crypto

In the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which side is crypto helping? Both.

March 1, 2022

By [Rebecca Heilweil](#) and [Emily Stewart](#)



▲ A cryptocurrency exchange point in Kyiv, Ukraine, on January 24.

In times of crisis, there is no good; there's only a best course of action, given the circumstances. Is crypto good in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine? Is it bad? Neutral? It's a hard question to answer.

Cryptocurrency is now a [more mainstream part](#) of the global financial system, which means that – for better or for worse – it's inevitably a part of international conflict, too. This is on full display

as [Russian forces invade Ukraine](#). Millions of dollars in crypto have flowed in to support Ukraine's army and hacktivist groups. Even the Ukrainian government is [now soliciting](#) donations in crypto and has already raised [more than \\$15 million](#). Some Ukrainians are also turning to crypto as an alternative to Ukrainian financial institutions, which are limiting people's access to bank accounts and foreign currency. In a scenario where governments are in chaos, it's difficult to rely on traditional banks, and there's fear of surveillance. So a relatively anonymous system where no government is involved is appealing.

"The fact that it can't be frozen, the fact that it can't be censored, and the fact that it can be used without ID is very, very important," Alex Gladstein, chief strategy officer at the Human Rights Foundation, told Recode. "And they are why bitcoin is such an important humanitarian tool."

Just how useful an avenue crypto is for people in crisis or organizations in need of donations is up for debate. You need a relatively sophisticated understanding of technology to use crypto, and if

you weren't already set up for it, the onset of a war might not be the moment to try to do it. Plenty of [donations](#) to Ukrainian groups are flowing in just fine using more traditional currencies.

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"This is not a time for disrupting things. Folks have their lives disrupted already," said Giulio Coppi, global digital specialist at the Norwegian Refugee Council.

All of the things that make crypto appealing to those under siege

apply to those doing the sieging as well. Crypto is often used by bad actors, and [could be exploited by Russia to avoid sanctions](#), which is currently the main weapon being employed by the US and its allies against Russia. Its prevalence in cyberwarfare also means people holding crypto could be a target for cyberattacks, and although one of the main appeals of crypto is that it's supposed to be anonymous, [it isn't foolproof](#).

More broadly, cryptocurrencies are quite volatile. While proponents of the crypto space often argue that bitcoin and the like are some sort of "digital gold," they've [lost value](#) amid global uncertainty, undercutting the argument that they're a kind of safe haven. If you imagine a scenario where you take \$1,000 out of Ukraine in a cryptocurrency and by the time you're able to convert it back to cash it's lost half its value, that's not ideal. But what if crypto is the easiest way to get money in a crisis? Is it better than nothing at all?

### **Ukrainians are using crypto – but there are limitations**

Right now, at least some Ukrainians escaping the country seem to be taking their [crypto with them](#),

which they hope to convert back into fiat currency once they arrive to safety. Others seem to be looking toward crypto as a way to store their wealth as Ukraine's economy collapses; the country's central bank has already [suspended electronic cash transfers](#) and is blocking Ukrainian citizens from [withdrawing foreign currency](#). Trading on the Ukrainian crypto platform Kuna reached [its highest level](#) since May 2021 this past Friday.

"In Ukraine right now, you can download a bitcoin wallet open source – totally unconnected from your ID – and you can generate an address via a QR code or an alphanumeric string," Gladstein explained. "You can paste that to me, I can send you \$1,000, and it goes through in a few minutes."

Using crypto in the middle of a crisis isn't necessarily easy. For one thing, you need an internet connection and a working device. You also need to know how to use crypto, which has a [steep learning curve](#) and is something people aren't going to be able to pick up quickly in moments of crisis. There are thousands of cryptocurrencies, and they don't all work the same way. Crypto also has to be available

to buy: Right now, even wealthier Ukrainians are reportedly [having trouble buying](#) Tether, a digital currency that's pegged to the US dollar. And if you're only converting other assets you own into crypto now, the rest of the financial system needs to be working, too.

"It might work for some people, but they need first to unfreeze their assets, transfer them into digital currency, and then manage to get out [of the country], which is actually the main problem right now," Coppi said. "And then when they're out, hope it hasn't devalued too much."

That means that for now, crypto might be most helpful to the people who already have it. That could account for [millions of people](#) in Ukraine, which has spent the [last few years](#) aggressively promoting its [own domestic cryptocurrency industry](#). In February, the country's parliament passed a law "[legalizing](#)" crypto, and Ukraine now ranks fourth in the world in terms of [crypto adoption](#), according to the blockchain research company Chainalysis.

As the conflict continues, supporters of Ukraine are sending

even more crypto into the country. On social media sites and platforms like Telegram, people – including leaders of the country's [burgeoning](#) crypto sector – are sharing their crypto wallet addresses and soliciting donations. One NGO supporting the Ukrainian military has [reportedly raised](#) several million in cryptocurrency, and groups are using crypto [to buy](#) a motley collection of military equipment, medical supplies, and even a facial recognition app. Some of these fundraising efforts have been active for months, but [picked up steam](#) last week.



▲ A Ukrainian soldier at an ATM in Mayorske on December 11, 2021.

To be sure, if you're looking to send crypto to help in Ukraine, it's important to check if the people on the receiving end want it and are equipped to handle it. Notably, neither the [Ukrainian Ministry of](#)

[Defense](#) nor [the National Bank of Ukraine](#) appear to be accepting cryptocurrency donations right now, though the government of Ukraine is, according to its [verified Twitter account](#). Given crypto's volatility, it's also worth remembering that the amount of the donation in crypto [isn't set in stone](#) and could drop fast.

"If they don't ask you for it, don't send it," Coppi said.

### **Russia can also take advantage of crypto**

The heroic version of crypto in crisis – one that paints it as an alternative for people in dire situations – obfuscates the darker side of the space. It's a very pertinent side, in particular, with regard to Russia.

Even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the United States government was worried that cryptocurrencies could [dull the impact](#) of economic sanctions. Iran has used bitcoin mining to bypass trade embargoes, according to [research from the blockchain analytics firm Elliptic](#).

Multiple countries [have begun to hit Russia with heavy sanctions](#).

In some corners, that's caused concern that Russia could use crypto to circumvent sanctions and move money undetected. As [the New York Times outlines](#), the Russian government has been developing a digital ruble, and Russia has been building tools to help hide the origins of digital transactions. Basically, if sanctions are meant to keep countries and businesses from dealing with Russia, crypto would be a way to get around them. Michael Parker, a former federal prosecutor, told the Times it would be "naive" to think Russia hadn't gamed out a scenario where sanctions were imposed and it would have to find alternatives.



^ People walk past a currency exchange office in central Moscow on February 24.

To avoid this scenario, Mykhailo Fedorov, Ukraine's vice prime minister and minister of digital transformation, has called for crypto and blockchain platforms to block the [addresses of Russian users](#). The Biden administration is also [weighing](#) how it might sanction Russian cryptocurrency assets, and has already urged crypto exchanges to [ensure that specific, sanctioned individuals](#) and organizations from Russia aren't using their platforms.

While cutting off Russia's access to crypto could have real repercussions for the country – crypto has become increasingly popular in Russia, which is also the world's [third-largest bitcoin miner](#) – it may not be possible. Not all exchanges [confirm the identity of their customers](#), and it's generally difficult to track the origin of cryptocurrency transactions. Whether a cryptocurrency exchange legally has to [comply with sanctions](#) may depend on where they're registered and where they operate. Many exchanges have [rebuffed calls](#) for them to freeze Russian accounts.

Crypto can also be used to fundraise for bad actors. Just as pro-Ukrainian groups have been

able to get funding via crypto, so have [pro-Russian separatist groups in Ukraine](#), including in 2014, [when Russia invaded and annexed the Crimean Peninsula](#), said Jess Symington, the head of research at Elliptic. "The pro-Russian groups were particularly active around the 2014 conflict," she said.

Russia has [heavy ties to crypto-linked cybercrimes](#) and illegal activity such as money laundering and ransomware. According to one analysis from Chainalysis, three-quarters of the money made through ransomware attacks last year [went to hackers linked to Russia](#). In January, the Ukrainian government was targeted by a series of cyberattacks that disguised themselves as [ransomware that demanded bitcoin](#), before destroying data on government computers.

"Capital flight by economically distressed Ukrainians, or even Russians, is a very different thing than the Russian state attempting to launder money or evade sanctions," said Alex Zerden, a former Treasury Department official under the Obama and Trump administrations.

Coppi, from the Norwegian Refugee Council, warned that people putting their money in crypto may become unsuspecting victims in cyberwarfare, and not only in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. "Most conflicts are going to be more and more about cyberwarfare," he said. "You risk becoming a target."

That being said, it's not as though other currencies can't be used for unsavory activities. "US dollars are used for a lot of really great economic activities," Zerden said. "It's also used to buy drugs and weapons and, you know, engage in human trafficking, right?"

### **Bitcoin maybe isn't digital gold**

One of the big arguments that crypto proponents have long made is that cryptocurrencies have the potential to act as "digital gold." That means that, unlike fiat currencies, bitcoin can't be diluted because there's only going to ever be a set number of bitcoin, and that investing in cryptocurrencies is a way to diversify your portfolio in the face of volatility. Theoretically, that's supposed to mean that bitcoin is a way to hedge against inflation, or that if the stock market

crashes, bitcoin won't. This theory hasn't entirely proven to be true. Crypto has shown itself to be super volatile, and it often moves with stocks. The current conflict has highlighted crypto's volatility.

Bitcoin [fell when Russia invaded Ukraine](#), as did the S&P 500 – it didn't act differently from major US stocks. And as the S&P 500 rebounded later in the week, so did bitcoin.

"That's removing the perception that people had that cryptocurrencies could be used as a hedging asset against these kinds of macroeconomic conditions," said Hugh Harsono, a digital currency researcher.

Still, cryptocurrency advocates say bitcoin can be better than the alternatives – like cash, bank accounts, or other physical assets, like gold or real estate – because it's beyond the control of any one institution and easily transportable. And while crypto may be volatile, it can be less volatile than some countries' fiat currencies or markets. Earlier this year, the Turkish lira became [more volatile than bitcoin](#), which prompted some

people in Turkey to cash in their fiat [currency for bitcoin and Tether](#).

"You're worried that bitcoin went down 10 percent today or whatever," Gladstein, from the Human Rights Foundation, said. "What are your other options for Ukrainians? What are they going to do? Put it in the Ukrainian stock market? Are they going to put it in a house? Are they going to bring the house with them?"

### **Crypto is a part of war now, like it or not**

This isn't the first time people have turned to crypto amid an international [conflict](#), but it does feel like the first time crypto is front and center, so much so that some have even called Russia's invasion of Ukraine "[the world's first crypto war](#)."

This is largely thanks to crypto proponents who have [rallied in support of Ukraine](#) and tried to find a role for crypto. The cryptocurrency exchange FTX, for instance, has given the equivalent of \$25 to every Ukrainian user on its platform to use as they please, according to its [CEO](#)

[Sam Bankman-Fried](#). One of the co-founders of the Russian protest band Pussy Riot, Nadya Tolokonnikova, has organized a fundraising effort to sell [10,000 NFTs of the Ukrainian flag](#). [Vitalik Buterin](#), the Russian-born founder of ethereum, has encouraged people to donate to humanitarian efforts in the country with crypto.

Of course, some of crypto boosters' efforts to inject the digital assets into a war effort have been a little cringeworthy. It doesn't really help for a [bored ape NFT person](#) to express solidarity with Ukraine. Given the [scamminess of parts of the space](#), it's also hard to know which projects are actually going to help people in Ukraine and which ones are just money grabs by opportunists.

For now, we don't know how crypto will shape international conflict, or whether it will ultimately help or hurt. People fleeing war zones might find a unique use for crypto, but they'll need to figure out how to use it first. There are already plenty of other ways to raise and move money that don't involve digital currencies. And while crypto may make it easier to

sidestep sanctions, countries were evading sanctions long before bitcoin arrived.

What we do know is that bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies are now a real factor in global economies and in conflicts. Whether it's good or bad in wartime, crypto is doing what its proponents say it does – giving people a way to work outside of traditional financial institutions – and there's no sign that will change anytime soon.

# It's Time We Give Corporations a Human Rights Scorecard

March 1, 2022

By [Jianli Yang](#) and [Alvaro Piaggio](#), HRF Policy Advisor



▲ Protestors hold signs as they gather during a rally for Uyghur Freedom.

Several democracies took an important symbolic step by staging a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics that came to a close on February 20. Dozens of athletes around the world bravely refused to act as pawns of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the games.

Although far from sufficient, these are encouraging signs that there is a growing movement in the democratic world willing to stand up to [China's egregious human rights violations](#) and its efforts to undermine liberal democratic values around the world. Unfortunately, there is a major and influential

player that has proven much harder to convince to join these efforts: the corporate world.

The world today has largely embraced free markets. If there is one way in which history “ended,” it was certainly in the way in which totalitarian, centrally planned economies have all but ceased to exist except for less than a handful of stubborn autocracies like North Korea and Cuba.

Most dictatorships, however, learned long ago that their survival depended on them avoiding economic ruin, and thus have taken advantage of free markets and welcomed foreign investment.

### **CCP Rights Violations**

China’s regime is the poster child of this sort of capitalist dictatorship, having expanded its economic power and influence in the world since the CCP started adopting free-market reforms in the 1970s.

At the same time, in the last 10 years alone, the CCP has engaged in some of the most egregious [human rights violations in Xinjiang](#), crushed any remnant of autonomy and democracy in Hong Kong, built

a monstrous surveillance state, and centralized even more power in the hands of party leader Xi Jinping. And they are not stopping there.

The CCP is trying to shape international institutions in its image, as it buys off or bullies other countries into toeing their line to conform to their interests.

As the [CCP is committing genocide against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang](#), large corporations from free countries are looking the other way as they continue to do business in the region. Major clothing companies have refused to even acknowledge that the cotton in their garments was picked by forced Uyghur labor.

### **Foreign Capital Fuels the Regime**

Entertainment giant Disney filmed a movie in the region and thanked the very local government that is carrying out this horrific crime for their hospitality. BlackRock, the largest investment firm in the world, received approval from the regime to operate mutual funds in China – the first foreign corporation to be allowed to do so – and it is pushing for American investors

to dramatically increase their exposure to the Chinese market.

This shamelessness was at its most infamous display last month, as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), backed by millions of dollars in sponsor money from around the world, allowed the [Chinese regime to host the Winter Olympics in Beijing](#).



▲ People calling for a boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics due to China's persecution of Muslim Uyghurs in front of the Chinese Consulate in Los Angeles in November 2021.

None of the CCP abuses or even the recent [disappearance of Chinese tennis player](#) and Olympian **Peng Shuai** seem to have deterred the IOC from taking the sponsorship money and allowing the greatest sports washing event in history to take place.

There is a lot more the democratic world must do about China's human rights abuses. But none of this will matter much if foreign capital continues to empower the regime.

### Corporations Must Be Held Accountable

In order for this to stop, we must start by creating a reliable and systematic way in which we can grade corporations in their commitment to respecting basic human rights and democratic values.

Not partnering with a government carrying out genocide, or not helping a dictatorship build a massive surveillance system are among the lowest bars we should expect companies operating from the comforts of countries where rule of law and free speech are respected to clear.

Today, the only efforts made to rate corporations in how they perform beyond their bottom lines take the form of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) ratings. ESGs, however, rely on flawed methodology and dilute such important issues into one scorecard to the point that they make some of them meaningless, especially human rights.

In other words, not only are there issues with how data is reported and the independence of the rating agencies, but companies can get away with glowing reviews by improving their environmental impact, even while they do business with some of the worst human rights abusers in the world.

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**If we are serious about promoting democracy and showing solidarity with oppressed peoples around the world, we need to go after the oppressors' bottom line.**

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How is it possible that Tesla can receive such high ESG ratings while [it opens a showroom in Xinjiang](#)? How can Dell claim to be "making strides" in its social impact in the world, while it is helping the CCP build its massive surveillance state? How can BlackRock offer ESG rated funds that have massive exposure to the Chinese state?

**Evaluate Company Ratings**

This is not to say that companies' efforts to curb global warming, the reason many of these companies get favorable ESG ratings, are not welcome. They are. But this should not be used as cover for companies as they collaborate with human rights abusers. The S in ESG needs to be dropped if human rights are not going to be at the top of the agenda.

Providing consumers and investors an independent, systematic rating of companies and their commitment to human rights will empower people to effect meaningful change around the world.

Autocrats from Saudi Arabia to China have abandoned most ideological burdens to embrace an evil and Machiavellian pragmatism: they have put markets, and free people's capital, to work into solidifying their autocratic rule and crushing civil society in their countries.

If we are serious about promoting democracy and showing solidarity with oppressed peoples around the world, we need to go after the oppressors' bottom line.

One of the most important steps to do this is to identify the companies that enable dictators and ensure that respect for human rights becomes the first and most important hurdle to clear when deciding on an investment.

# The Russia-Ukraine war is a critical moment for crypto

From funding the Ukrainian military to aiding its citizens, crypto is raising questions about the possibilities of borderless currency.



March 6, 2022

By [Stephanie Forshee](#)

On February 26, Ukraine's [official](#) Twitter account announced that the country was accepting donations in the form of bitcoin,

ethereum, and the stablecoin tether. Days later, it added polkadot and [dogecoin to the mix](#).

More than 100,000 crypto asset donations worth more than \$59 million were sent to Ukraine between February 24 and the morning of March 7, according to blockchain analytics firm [Elliptic](#). It marks an unprecedented moment as cryptocurrency, largely decentralized from government-run banks or government imposed restrictions, bypasses financial institutions and moves directly to the Ukrainian government, as well as its civilians. And crypto, which is viewed by some to be one of the most efficient ways to get funds directly to Ukrainians, could become a bigger part of the conversation moving forward as Russian troops continue to advance to Kyiv.

Ukraine has disbursed \$15 million of its total cryptocurrency donations to purchase military gear, including weapons, bulletproof vests, and medical supplies, [Bloomberg reports](#). While the Ukrainian government's crypto fund is reserved for its military, other funds have been launched to help civilians evacuate and to get food and gas to them. One such [fund](#) is the "private fund" of Kuna founder Michael Chobanian. Kuna helped

Ukraine officials set up crypto wallets for donations.

NFTs have also played a small role. UkraineDAO, backed by a member of the Russian artist collective Pussy Riot, launched an NFT of the Ukrainian flag that [raised](#) about \$6.7 million, and Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykhailo Fedorov [tweeted](#) on Thursday that Ukraine would accept NFTs to help financially support its armed forces.

In Russia, the economy has tanked as the United States and its European allies have set limits of their own—from blocking much of Russia's access to the SWIFT bank messaging network to rolling out boycotts of Russian [vodka](#). Meanwhile, the value of the ruble has plummeted, and citizens have [rushed](#) to ATMs to retrieve any cash they can get their hands on. That's where the unregulated nature of crypto could prove to be a problem.

US legislators, including Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and European lawmakers have expressed concerns that Russia could skirt sanctions using the largely unregulated forms of payment. "Cryptocurrencies risk undermining sanctions against

Russia, allowing Putin and his cronies to evade economic pain," Warren [tweeted](#) on Monday. "US financial regulators need to take this threat seriously and increase their scrutiny of digital assets."

Warren, along with three other Democratic US senators—Sherrod Brown (OH), Mark Warner (VA), and Jack Reed (RI)—sent a [letter](#) to US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on March 2, [asking](#) her to explain how the Treasury intends to enforce sanctions compliance by the cryptocurrency industry, "given the need to ensure the efficacy and integrity of our sanctions program against Russia and other adversaries." (They have asked her to respond by March 23.)

A number of crypto exchanges have pledged to comply with US sanctions but will not cut off individual Russian users, even after Fedorov asked them to freeze all Russian accounts in order to put even more domestic pressure on the country. Binance CEO Changpeng Zhao [told](#) BBC Radio his company is not backing down on its stance that it will not cut off Russians' access to crypto. While Zhao said Binance is monitoring activity among political leaders using the crypto exchange

to fund war efforts, it wants to make itself available to Russian civilians caught up in the war.

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**Alex Gladstein, chief strategy officer of the Human Rights Foundation, a nonprofit group based in New York, told Morning Brew that the crypto-focused fundraising efforts by Ukraine are not only "geopolitically fascinating" but also "completely revolutionary."**

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"We are not political, we are against war," Zhao said, "but we are here to help the people." His sentiments [were echoed](#) by spokespeople for Coinbase and other major crypto exchanges.

And judging by early metrics, Russians are exchanging their rubles for crypto, raising questions about whether or not the borderless currency could unwillingly fuel

Russia's aggression. Motherboard [reported](#) that tether, which is based on the value of the US dollar, was particularly popular with Russians. The tether/ruble trading volume broke records on March 1 with \$34.94 million.

This is a seismic shift in the way war-torn countries can access funds from around the globe. Alex Gladstein, chief strategy officer of the Human Rights Foundation, a nonprofit group based in New York, told Morning Brew that the crypto-focused fundraising efforts by Ukraine are not only "geopolitically fascinating" but also "completely revolutionary."

Ukraine's people are struggling to access traditional money, creating "a logistical nightmare with regard to banking," Gladstein said. He thinks the "parallel system" that bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies offer "is hugely helpful."

He said, "People are starting to realize why [some turn to] bitcoin."

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