

Invasion: The Inside Story of Russia's Bloody War and Ukraine's Fight for Survival

Luke Harding, Published by Guardian Faber, Pp 291.

Ayeza Areej¹

The book titled "Invasion: The Inside Story of Russia's Bloody War and Ukraine's Fight for Survival," authored by famous British journalist Luke Harding is divided into 12 chapters. Harding's professional trajectory has been marked by his extensive writing, publishing his ninth book "Invasion" in the previous 11 years. His books cover an extensive range of subjects, including comprehensive analyses of Julian Assange and WikiLeaks case. "Invasion," in addition to his previous books, portrays the author's commitment to unveiling contemporary events and documenting them as they unfold. Harding was *The Guardian's* Moscow bureau chief and renowned journalist but later got expelled from Russia because of his reporting against the regime. Apprehending the imminent Russian invasion, he journeyed to different parts of Ukraine before the war broke out. He coincidentally was there in Kyiv when the war started. His book provides the firsthand narrative and stands out as one of the earliest accounts.

Harding travelled to Lviv, Kharkiv, Mariupol, Kyiv, Mykolaiv, and other places in Ukraine, during his journeys before and through the war. What sets apart this work is the plethora of contemporaneous viewpoints covering the whole of Ukraine, providing readers with a dynamic and unfiltered view of the conflict. Harding offers a

¹ Reviewer is a Research Intern at Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Pakistan.

comprehensive analysis, deciphering the complexities of Russo-Ukrainian war, the Crimean annexation, and the ongoing conflicts in Eastern Ukraine. He masterfully resurrects the incidents, which formerly grabbed global attention only to subsequently fade into obscurity. From the chilling devastation of Chernobyl, where Russian tanks audaciously transgressed the nuclear zone to the coastlines of Snake Islands, where a bold statement from Ukrainian guard instigated a meme frenzy. Harding demonstrated several attacks from Mariupol, a besieged city experiencing multiple challenges to shocking ordeals of Bucha massacre, a place engraved in unimaginable war time atrocities and crimes. The author highlights Chonhar, Mykolaiv, and Kherson in particular to showcase the heart-wrenching realities of war.

Harding presents the Ukrainian and Western-oriented viewpoint in the book with a little focus on Russia. One of the twelve distinctive chapters of the book, “The Captive Mind,” is only dedicated to Russia. However, the conflict involves two major parties Russia and Ukraine, but the author's dominant focus is on the Ukrainian side. It explicitly limits the scope and comprehensiveness of his study. Moreover, his narrative revolves around the people he knows, and who willingly partake in discussions with him, inadvertently leaving a gap by overlooking the narrative of a substantial spectrum. Yet another interesting aspect of his writing is a pictorial portrayal of Ukraine as a resilient and strong country, with President Volodymyr Zelensky being shown as an essential and admirable character manifesting this tenacity.

The author highlights “openness and transparency” as important components of Zelensky's leadership, distinguishing it from the deep-seated secretive culture of Russia. Arguably, the most notable achievement of the book is to portray different regions of Ukraine during wartime, illustrating the brutal Russian attacks on multiple places. It powerfully depicts the physical destruction from shelling to bombing to terrorising civilians and violent combats resulting into

Ayeza Areej

people displacements. The author humanises the war through personal stories and insights of the emotions of Ukrainians, fostering profound sympathy. The book provides readers a window into the lives of ordinary Ukrainians, fighting a war they never asked for.

Harding explains Ukraine's fervent ambitions to attain NATO membership, an ambition that provoked vehement opposition, notably from President Vladimir Putin. The resistance, meticulously narrated by Harding, provides a favourable pretext for Putin's military intervention in Ukraine. He explains Putin's irrevocable conviction that Ukraine, as a country should not exist as an autonomous entity but instead remain, persistently under the Moscow's influence. However, the Russian invasion, in a dramatic shift of fortune, acted as a catalyst in NATO's expansion.

Countries traditionally acknowledged for their neutrality, like Sweden and Finland, set off on a swift path to join NATO after witnessing the effects of invasion. Furthermore, the immense international recognition provided to this issue grants further credence to Ukraine's argument that this war goes beyond its borders. It is instead an ideological conflict with the power to not only shape the future of Europe but also influence the global order. However, underneath the geopolitical event lies an expansive canvass. The proclaimed Russia's aspirations extend far beyond territorial gains and include the denazification of Ukraine, a strategic move aimed at reviving Russia's waning influence and lost glory in the world order.

Harding's descriptive writing style enriches the reading journey by instilling a sense of inquisitiveness and interest among the audience. He employs a cinematic and imagery approach in structuring the storyline. Harding's scrupulous focus on details is discernible in his writing, where he assiduously examines every facet of the Ukrainian tale. His phenomenal descriptive proficiency masterfully conjures an image of the events in the audience's cognition, enabling the readers

to connect themselves with the events and emotions described in the situations.

The book acts as an inspiration source, highlighting the narrative of Ukrainian perseverance against the Russian attacks. However, the author eschews from making theoretical predictions about the war's outcome and the post war prescriptions. Similarly, the book does not delve into the economic ramifications of such a war, including the impact of sanctions against Russia and the downfall of the Ukrainian economy. A more comprehensive investigation would have provided a holistic approach towards the conflict. Moreover, Harding's assessment that "Russia has basically lost the war," and looking vertically upward along the feudal lines while Ukraine is emerging as a "proven state" with super organisms, resonates with many readers. However, the ongoing combat remains uncertain with various global implications and Russia succeeding at many fronts.

Overall, the book is undeniably a remarkable addition to contemporary literature and suggested for those who have keen interest in geopolitics, modern history, and dynamics of various battles in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Additionally, students of journalism will find it interesting, to gain thorough understanding of the intricacies of reporting and scrutinising global conflicts. All in all, the book is a thought-provoking testament to the invincible resilience of Ukrainians against Russia's bloody war, and a grim reality check that the echoes of this war will reverberate in history for future generations. ■