

CQ, The "Spirit" of Ham Radio, and the War in Ukraine

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It appears that CQ Publisher K2MGA and I have single-handedly (dual-handedly?) destroyed amateur radio by taking what we believe is a morally essential stand in response to Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and its tactics of specifically bombing civilian targets (actions which the U.S. government has categorized as war crimes). At least, that's the impression one gets from reading some of the e-mails we've been receiving ever since deciding that, at least for the WPX SSB Contest in late March, stations in Russia and Belarus would not be eligible for awards or trophies, and that contacts with these stations would have no contest point value. We have more specifics, along with a sampling of correspondence, both pro and con, on page XX. But I'd like to use this space to provide some perspective, as well as a more thorough explanation of the factors that led up to our decision.

In a nutshell, we started out by closely monitoring the discussions on the private CQ Contest Committee email reflector, representing the full spectrum of opinions. These guys, individually and collectively, are brilliant, highly-educated and very eloquent. Dick and I always value their perspectives.

Here's the basis of our decision: While we strongly respect amateur radio's tradition of staying above political frays, we feel that this situation is not about politics and debating which person or proposal is the best choice for dealing with a particular situation. Rather, this is about an unprovoked invasion of one sovereign country by another, compounded by Russia's deliberate targeting of civilians, as seen in repeated missile strikes on residential areas, hospitals and shelters. This is not politics; it is, as the U.S. State Department says, war crimes.

It is also highly reminiscent of the days leading up to the start of World War II, at which time the western powers pursued a policy of "appeasement" of the Nazis in hopes that they'd be satisfied with taking over just a few little countries. I've been reading up on those times and Russian President Vladimir Putin is taking pages directly out of Adolf Hitler's playbook, taking over Crimea (without much of a response by the West), encouraging ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine to pursue independence, and using false-flag incidents to justify the invasion. These are all identical to tactics used by Hitler. In the 1930s, the West didn't respond until he invaded Poland. Will we wait for that today as well? This is not politics, this is life-and-death for Ukrainians and a possible prelude to World War III. We need to do all that we can to prevent that and we collectively need to stand up to Putin and say "No! This is not acceptable. There are consequences for your actions."

We understand that most Russian and Belorussian amateurs have no direct impact on their governments' policies or actions, and that many of them privately oppose the war. Many others support it, though (particularly if they believe Putin's propaganda), and we are aware of at least one Russian ham who has put together a literal hit-list of Ukrainian hams - identified by name and call sign - who are to be executed if captured. Talk about violating the spirit of amateur radio! (And this information comes from very reliable sources.)

We came to the conclusion that silence is complicity, and that we could not in good conscience sit back and pretend that none of this is happening and that all is right in the world, especially in our little ham radio world. It is not, and we must join hundreds of other private entities and sports federations in refusing to conduct business as usual with Russia and Belarus for as long as the atrocities in Ukraine continue.



The real ham spirit: Val, UT7NY (right), has taken in his friend Victor, UR8IDX, and Victor's wife, whose home in Mariupol was destroyed by Russian shelling. (Photo courtesy UT7NY)

Some of our correspondents suggest that our policy will discourage open communications between amateurs in different countries and will play into Putin's efforts to close off external communication channels to Russian citizens. With all due respect to our contests, an exchange of call signs and "59 123" is hardly a meaningful conversation about world affairs. In addition, we are not telling Russian amateurs that they may not participate in our contest, nor are we telling other amateurs that they may not contact stations in Russia. We are saying that if you do, those contacts will not be considered in your contest scores. That's all.

This is not going to destroy the "purity" and integrity of amateur radio, as some are suggesting (although creating amateur radio-based hit lists might); and our policy won't cause the Russian people to rise up and overthrow Putin. But if our actions add to the discomforts caused by government economic sanctions and the refusal of many private entities to conduct business in Russia, resulting in greater pressure on Putin to end the war, then so be it. We are sorry if non-involved amateurs feel inconvenienced by our policy, but nobody is dropping bombs on their houses and missiles on their hospitals. We stand by our decision.

We're Back in Print!

After six long months of digital-only purgatory, we are very excited – and greatly relieved – to have our print edition back again. It's a very long story, but a federal "economic disaster" loan that we needed to kickstart everything after Covid-related setbacks was repeatedly delayed until nearly the end of March. With that funding now in hand, we can restart the presses, get printed products back out to our non-digital readers and go back to the usual struggles to break even faced by most small businesses most of the time.

All subscribers will get the number of issues they've paid for – all print subscriptions have been extended by the number of missed issues, and digital copies of those missed issues are available for free download at < <https://spaces.hightail.com/space/NdX2BBYxbQ> >. We're glad to finally be back in print and plan to stay there for a very long time to come. Your patience, support and understanding throughout these past several months mean more to us than you can imagine. Thank you!