

APR 10, 2022

Climate Clock Keeps Ticking

This is The Weekly Letter for April 10, 2022. [About this newsletter](#)

I'm trying a slightly different format this week. The News section will be broken into three topics—international, U.S., and environment—with a more in-depth focus on one story for each topic.

News

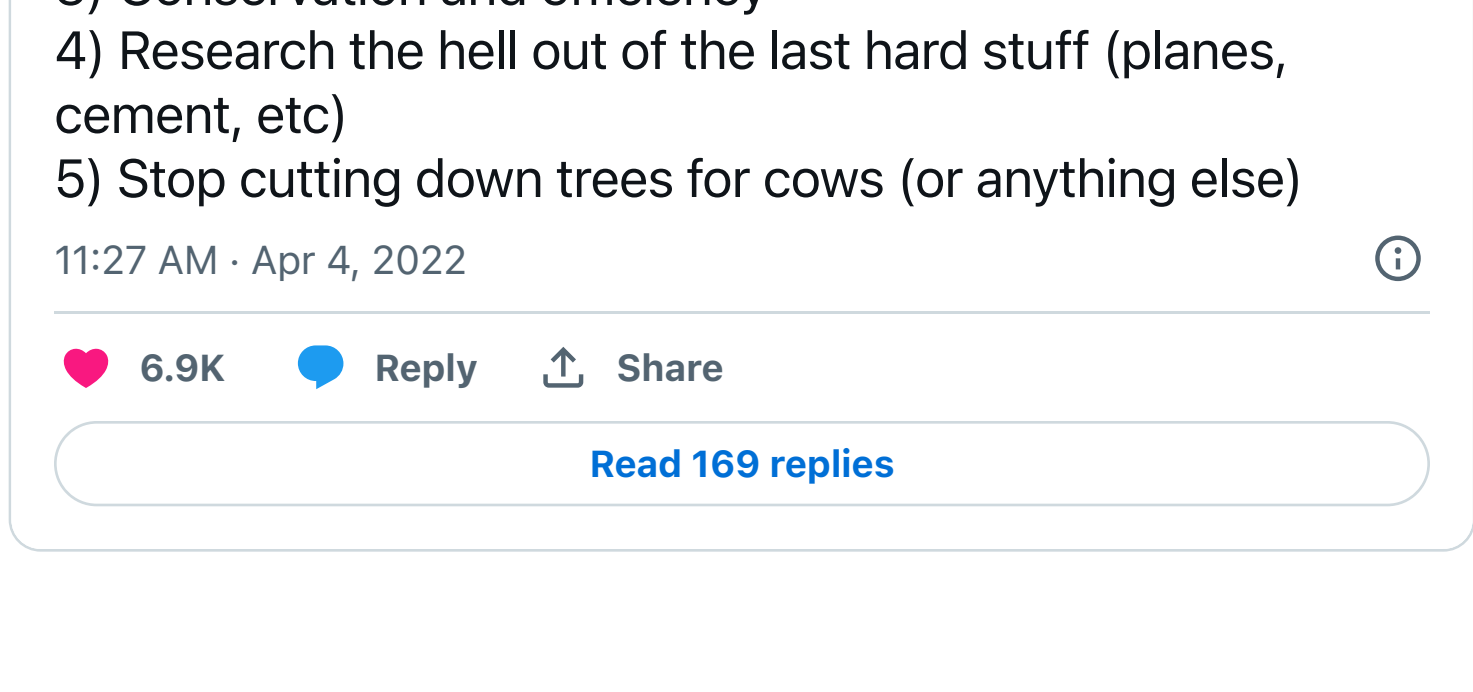
Environment

A [Grist article](#) outlines the findings in the newest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, which was released on Monday:

"Greenhouse gas emissions must peak within the next three years, and in the next eight, the world must push fossil fuels aside, rapidly scaling up the use of clean energy like wind and solar." However, "even with the most ambitious policies, there is now only a 38 percent chance that the world will stave off a 1.5-degree C rise in temperature. This is a significant decrease from 2018, when the panel predicted a 55 percent chance of staying below that threshold."

"The authors' top recommendation: Immediately move away from fossil fuels and replace them with renewable technologies." According to the Grist article, the report emphasized that "Political barriers — rather than scientific, monetary, or technological ones — are currently holding the world back from urgent climate targets." (Grist, 4/4)

Climate activist Bill McKibben discussed the report on Twitter:

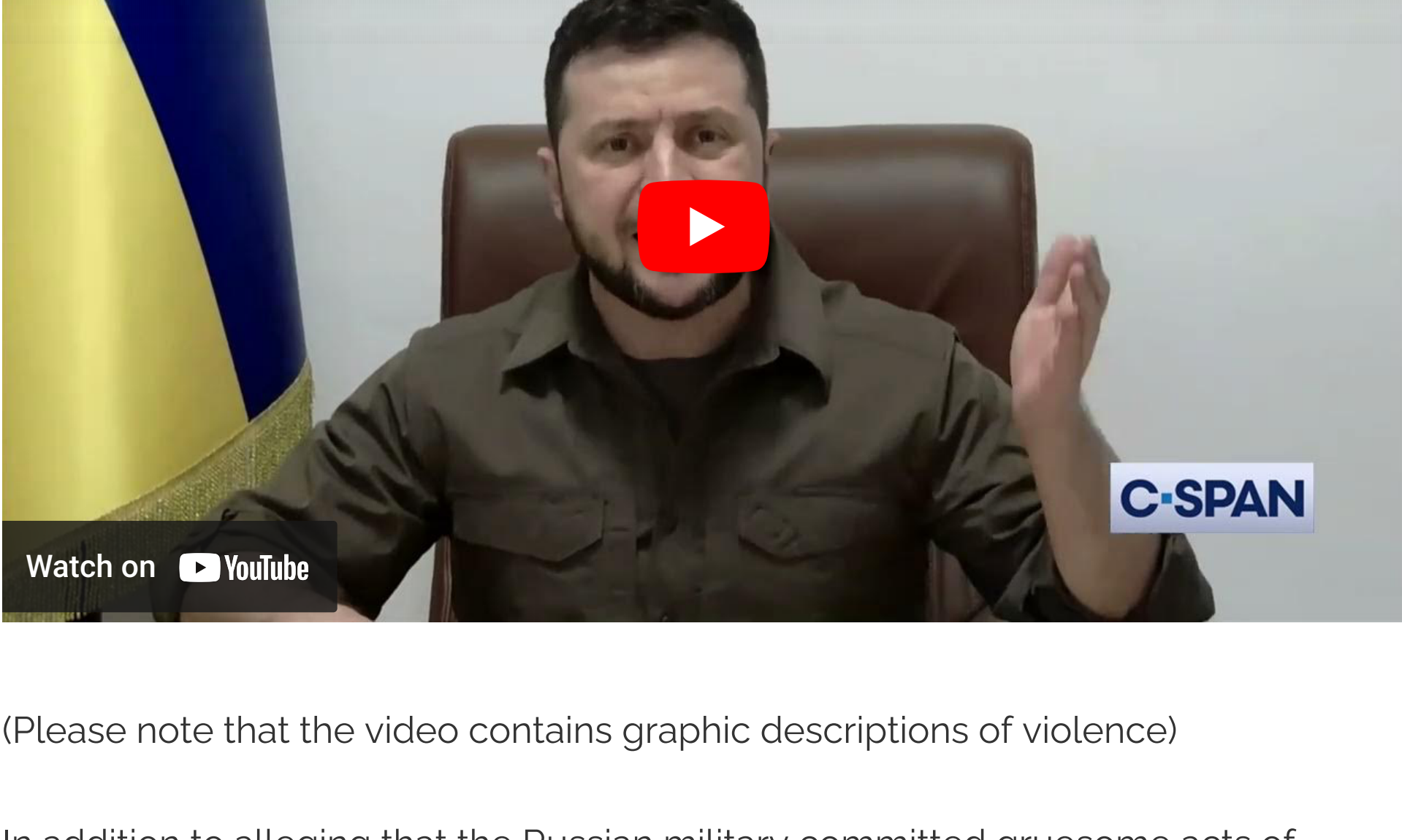


And United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres bluntly criticized climate inaction:



International

On Tuesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy gave a blistering speech to the United Nations Security Council, calling for reforms of the council in order to achieve peace and accountability in Ukraine and around the world.



(Please note that the video contains graphic descriptions of violence)

In addition to alleging that the Russian military committed gruesome acts of violence in the city of Bucha, Zelenskyy proposed steps to reform the Security Council and a tribunal to achieve accountability for "war crimes" committed in Ukraine. These are some of his proposals:

"The UN system must be reformed immediately so that the right of veto is not a right to kill. So that there is a fair representation of all regions of the world in the Security Council."

"Immediately bring the Russian military and those who gave them orders to justice for war crimes in Ukraine.

Everyone who gave criminal orders and fulfilled them by killing people will face a tribunal similar to the Nuremberg trials."

"we must do everything in our power to pass on to the next generations an effective UN with the ability to respond preventively to security challenges and thus guarantee peace.

Prevent aggression and force aggressors to peace. Have the determination and ability to punish if the principles of peace are violated.

There can be no more exceptions, privileges. Everyone must be equal. All participants in international relations. Regardless of economic strength, geographical area and individual ambitions."

"we need decisions from the Security Council. For peace in Ukraine. If you do not know how to adopt this decision, you can do two things.

Remove Russia as an aggressor and a source of war from blocking decisions about its own aggression, its own war. And then do everything that can establish peace.

Or show how you can reformat and really work for peace."

(All quotes are taken from the [text of the speech](#) posted on the website of the President of Ukraine.)

U.S.

The Senate has [confirmed](#) Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court. She will become the first Black woman to serve as a Justice. All 50 members of the Democratic caucus voted to confirm Jackson, along with three Republican Senators—Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski, and Mitt Romney.

However, some Republicans staunchly opposed Jackson. "Underscoring the partisan tensions, Jackson's confirmation came only after the Senate Judiciary Committee deadlocked on her nomination along party lines and Republicans forced three procedural votes on the Senate floor this week. Still, Democrats said Thursday that her confirmation should be a cause for national reflection and jubilation.

"This milestone should have happened generations ago — generations ago — but we are always trotting on a path towards a more perfect union," Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) said. "America today is taking a giant step towards making our union more perfect." (Washington Post, 4/7)

Opinion

Jan Egeland: "The Ukraine conflict will not only be devastating for countless Ukrainians, but also for [millions of vulnerable people elsewhere](#)." (Al Jazeera, 4/5)

Jamelle Bouie: How workers at an Amazon warehouse in New York [successfully unionized](#). (NY Times, 4/5)

Kara Alaimo: Elon Musk is joining Twitter's board of directors. But Musk has a ['worrisome track record'](#) of using social media irresponsibly." (NBC News, 4/6)

My View

Responding to War in Ukraine is Simple—and Complicated

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a clear-cut act of aggression. It doesn't take an expert in international affairs (which I'm not, by the way) to be outraged at Russia's attack and the war crimes committed against Ukrainians. It's not hard to figure out that the Ukrainian people deserve the world's solidarity.

Ukraine is in the middle of a political conflict. At stake is whether Russia can reconstitute an empire or whether Ukraine will remain independent. However, war is not a normal political situation and the cost of the conflict is being paid in human lives and suffering.

On April 9, the UN Human Rights Office [reported](#) that 1,766 civilians have been killed in Ukraine since the start of the war, although they note their belief that "the actual figures are considerably higher, as the receipt of information from some locations where intense hostilities have been going on has been delayed and many reports are still pending corroboration." On March 23, [NATO estimated](#) that the Russian military death toll was between 7,000 and 15,000 soldiers. Back in early March, a [U.S. official said](#) 2,000 to 4,000 Ukrainian soldiers had been killed. Since the war began, [11.4 million people](#) have fled their homes, either leaving Ukraine or moving elsewhere inside the country.

A secondary effect of the war is also grim: In an [opinion article](#), Sara Menker and Rajiv Shah write, "As Ukraine's farms have turned into battlefields, uncertainty around the country's agricultural exports, as well as Russia's, has created a global food emergency by driving up the prices of wheat, corn, soybeans, fertilizers and sunflower oil." Menker and Shah continue, "Before the war, roughly 811 million people around the world did not have enough to eat. That number could increase tremendously this hunger season, the time between spring planting and fall harvest when food often runs out."

Finally, while economic sanctions are a way to punish Russia for its invasion, the sanctions will hurt ordinary Russians, not just Putin and his inner circle.

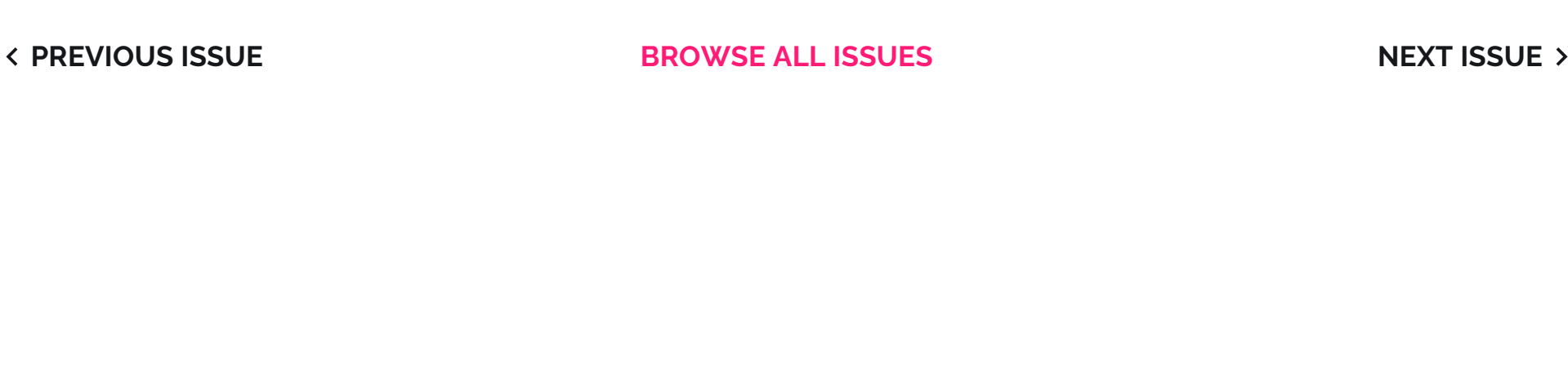
Ukrainian resistance to Russia's aggression is a just cause. However, because the cost of this war is so high—and because it is being paid in part by people who did not consent to fight—reaching a ceasefire and a peace agreement is crucial.

However, the price of peace may also be high. A peace deal would very likely necessitate concessions to Russia that Ukraine should, in an ideal world, not have to make. Formally relinquishing Crimea or territory in the Donbas region would be particularly bitter for Ukraine. (It seems to me that the U.S., NATO, and E.U. may be able to take some pressure off Ukraine to make big concessions by negotiating with Russia on some security matters not related to Ukraine and making their own concessions where feasible.)

It is clear that Ukrainians are standing for democracy and self-determination against imperial aggression. It's also clear that it is imperative to try to achieve peace and minimize suffering and the loss of life. But considering all these values at once and trying to balance them when they conflict? That's complicated.

So what's the answer? The best I can offer is that for its part, the U.S. should make a serious effort to help reach a diplomatic solution that gets as close as possible to a just peace.

Have some thoughts about a current event? Want to reply to an opinion article featured in the newsletter? To create a conversation about the news, all are encouraged to share their views. Send your letter along with your name and where you're writing from to theweeklyletternewsletter@gmail.com or reply to this email. Please be aware that the newsletter is published on the website theweeklyletter.ghost.io and sent by email to subscribers. Letters that are hateful or contain misinformation will not be published.



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