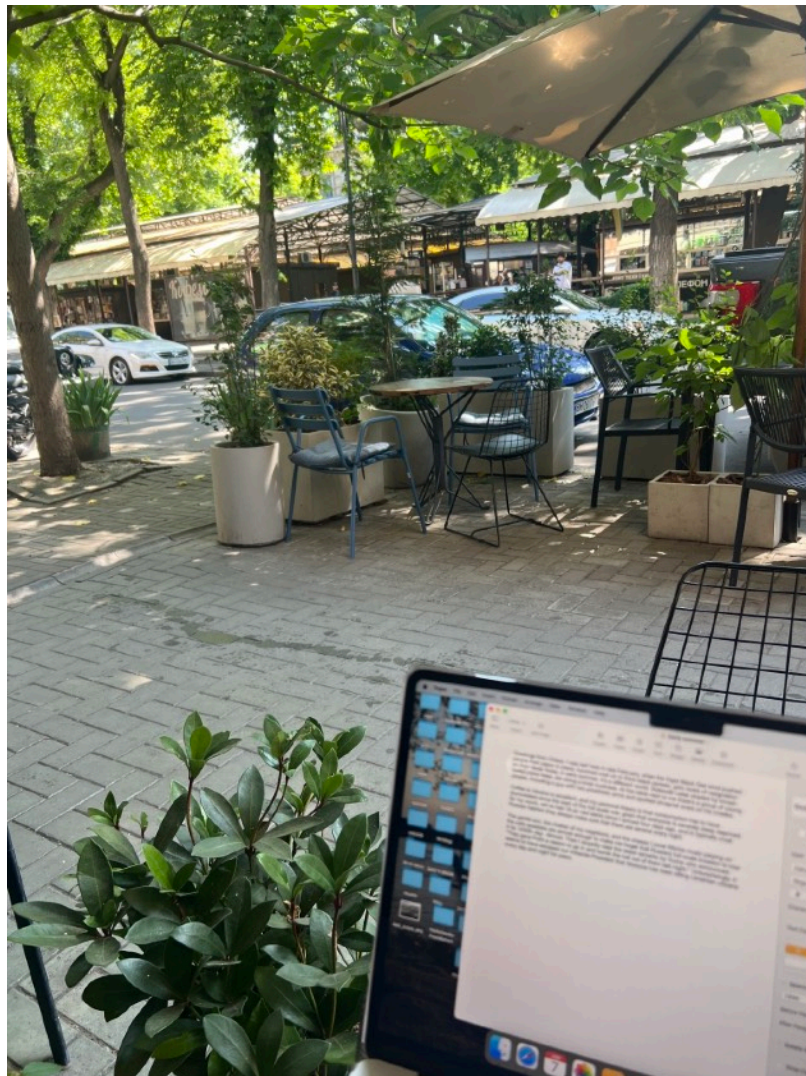


Greetings from Odesa. I was last here in February, when the bitter Black Sea wind bullied people as they scurried from place to place, hunched over in thick coats, wearing tight-lipped looks of resignation. Now, in early summer it's a different and better world. Sandals and shorts have replaced down jackets. Sidewalk cafes shaded by broad-leafed plane trees are doing a brisk business. At the table next to me there's a lively group of young people, including an outgoing guy with two prosthetic arms and shrapnel scars spotting his cheeks.

Coffee in Ukraine is excellent, and my personal theory is that caffeine consumption has skyrocketed since the start of the war, given that we're all so severely sleep deprived. By my count, we've had 18 air raid alerts since I arrived four days ago, and in typically cruel Russian fashion they always make sure there are several every night.



The gentle sun, the chatter of my neighbors, and the cheesy Lionel Ritchie song playing on the cafe's speakers are almost enough to make me forget that Russia's full-scale invasion is now its 1200th day. Almost. Then I stupidly read the latest remarks by Trump who announced: "They gave Putin a reason to go in and bomb the hell out of them last night." Unsurprisingly, it seems to have escaped our witless President that Moscow has been killing Ukrainian citizens every day and night for years. Putin needs no excuses to murder.

Odesa region has been relatively lucky this week. As usual, civilian infrastructure was hit — homes, warehouses, a school, hospital, youth center, church, and so on. There were injuries and apparently a death or two, but the toll was much heavier in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Chernihiv. And Russia seems to still have a healthy supply of drones and missiles, and no compunction about lobbing them into crowded European cities. But Putin's resources are not inexhaustible and his forces continue to be vulnerable, as Ukraine's recent spectacular attacks on the Russian strategic bomber fleet and the massive Kerch bridge have proven.

Far away from those splashy headlines, men and women continue to hold the line in places like Sumy and Kherson. Yesterday, I spent \$3,500 of your money to buy and dispatch to the front tourniquets, a Starlink terminal, drone operator goggles etc.

I need some breakfast, but will of course report more during my six weeks here. Thanks!