

Prayer sought for missions, missionaries in Russia/Ukraine region

DULUTH, Ga. (BP and local reports) – The buildup of 100,000 Russian troops on their border with Ukraine has elicited a call for prayer from a former International Mission Board missionary who served in the region and is now a missions strategist at the Georgia Baptist Mission Board in Duluth.

“The thing to remember in all of this is that the Baptist churches in Russia and Ukraine are very closely related, with family members on both sides of the border,” Buck Burch told The Christian Index, news journal of Georgia Baptists.

Southern Baptist missionaries serve in both Russia and Ukraine. “That which we see unfolding in front of us has affected relationships on both sides within the evangelical family. We should pray for our brothers and sisters that they would not be divided even as the political lines are drawn,” Burch said.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Ukraine Jan. 19 and plans to hold talks with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, on Jan. 21 in Geneva, Switzerland, The Associated Press reported.

Russia is demanding a commitment to preclude Ukraine from its present consideration for membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was organized in 1949 among western nations to counter post-World War II aggression by the Soviet Union. Observers believe Russia, successor to the Soviet Union, is upset at the prospect of having a western military ally on their border.

U.S. President Joe Biden said at a press conference Jan. 19

that Russia would be held accountable for an invasion but added, "It's one thing if it's a minor incursion and then we end up having a fight about what to do and not do, etc."

Biden received criticism after the press conference for use of the phrase, "minor incursion," with many saying his comments gave Russian President Vladimir Putin too much leeway. The White House issued a clarifying statement later Wednesday.

"President Biden also knows from long experience that the Russians have an extensive playbook of aggression short of military action, including cyberattacks and paramilitary tactics," said press secretary Jen Psaki, "and he affirmed today that those acts of Russian aggression will be met with a decisive, reciprocal, and united response."