

A Brief Response to G. Murphy Donovan's "Pollyanna Takes Kiev"



by Christopher Garbowski

In the June issue of *New English Review*, G. Murphy Donovan's

stimulating "[Pollyanna Takes Kiev](#)" raised a number of issues worth discussing further—not to mention the discussion that took place in its wake and in which I participated. The author gave a harrowing picture of what Putin was up to from a geopolitical perspective and how he seemed to be gaining the upper hand in his invasion of Ukraine. As someone who lives in Poland, these are fundamental issues. But I'll begin from one of the responses to one my comments to the essay from June 17th by a respondent under the name of Northern Observer, who took issue with my defensive stance as a Pole on behalf of the Ukrainians and American support of their the heinously assailed nation.

Among other things the author seemed to imply that Poles like myself have a distorted view of the situation:

What I find utterly weird about the Polish (and Czech) thinking classes response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine is that they sincerely believe that Moscow has imperial ambitions upon them. (. . .) As if the Deluge of the Commonwealth was only yesterday and Poles are still fighting, fighting, fighting. [E]nimity is forever and tribal enemies are always a threat until they cease to exist.

This is to suggest that Poles were always picking a fight. The Deluge referred to is the violent and destructive invasion of Poland and the Commonwealth by Swedes in the seventeenth century with their modern army shortly after the Thirty Year War on the excuse of some petty dynastic dispute. What should be recalled is that it was a defensive war on the part of one of the most democratic polities—Poland together with Lithuania—in Europe of the time. It is unimaginable to think of the Swedes as such an aggressive people at present, I remember seeing some of the ruins they left behind when I first came to the country, so does Northern Observer think the Poles were responsible? Much of future history was the same, with somewhat parallel consequences for us here. As French

author Michel Louyot puts it, “How could the Czechs forget that they were handed over to Hitler in 1938 without any objections from France and England? How could the Poles forget they were abandoned a year later and handed over to two monsters who had just made their pact?”[\[1\]](#) We simply have no choice in our neighbours and that determines much of our history. This is not to claim Poles are saints, but the broader picture is much as I have put it.

The author concludes: “If anything, Poland’s geopolitical interests, much like Germany’s, run through a comprehensive peace and cooperation settlement with Russia.” This is a naïve view of coming to terms with Putin, not to mention basically an acceptance of his horrible war crimes. Andrew Michta, an expert at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, argues that peace should not always be the first priority in a conflict. For Putin has demonstrated a peace would likely be a tactic on his part to prepare for a future attack. Thus, “As Ukrainians have shown us when attacked, the goal should not be to reach a compromise as soon as possible, but to defeat the aggressor and liberate the nation’s territory.”[\[2\]](#)

Moreover, it is not just an American expert, among others, who feels that this is the best course. The Russian chess master turned dissident Garry Kasparov says the same. He reminds us the course of appeasement was already tried in response to the first Russian invasion in 2014. Where it was implicitly accepted by European leaders, I might add: the German Putin enablers continued to do business with the invaders, building up the latter’s funding for weapons that allowed for the severity of the current invasion. Kasparov recommends arming the Ukrainians. And I think he likely has a better understanding of Putin and his powerful clique than many from outside of Russia. Putin comparing himself recently to Tsar Peter the Great needs little explanation. Not to mention recently there was also an ominous motion by one of the

members of the Russian parliament to declare the independence of one of the Baltic states illegal. A British military expert points out that if the Russians are given a reprieve, a subsequent invasion could be far more devastating, since they would have learned from their military errors. As Mr. Donovan put it in his text, Putin is intelligent. And, unfortunately, the Russians may yet succeed in this invasion.

Most likely there simply is no good solution. What helped the Germans and Japanese become democratic after World War Two is an American occupation, which is not possible in this case even with a Ukrainian victory. And as I hardly need to add has failed in a number of other such international efforts in the not-so-distant past, unfortunately.

The author of the main essay, in his response to my comments, indicates he is against American involvement in surrogate wars, adding he had fought in Vietnam. From the patriotic Polish perspective, the American involvement in that war made sense and some were disappointed when Americans withdrew. I came across an essay by an American professor whose parents brought him to the United States as a child after the Soviets invaded Hungary in 1956. Because of his Hungarian patriotism and knowledge of what communism stood for, he himself volunteered to serve in Vietnam and did not regret it. In the end the major losers in the war were the Vietnamese people who were subjected to a communist regime after the American retreat. Dictators like the one who ruled Vietnam earlier come and go, while communist regimes are for the long term. Of course, this was a time when the domino theory of communist advancement was held, which fortunately turned out to be false. Nevertheless, it worried many who were under communist dominion.

As an aside I might add is that among the contemporary Asian immigrants to Poland there are a significant number of Vietnamese. They are in part connected with the Polish national community's past in an unusual way that not many are

aware of but related to our discussion. After the Vietnamese war with the United States the nation was indebted to the member countries of the Soviet Bloc that had been forced to support it financially. And so, a number of Vietnamese worked on contracts in communist Poland, among other countries, in which part of their salaries would help pay off their country's debt—like all such workers of that time in communist countries their families were quasi hostages in their homeland to make certain they would return after their contracted work was finished. Poland made a positive impression on a good number of these Vietnamese and some of them are among the immigrants that have settled in the country, now that the communist regime has softened to some degree and there is a possibility to emigrate. The community is now the second largest of their nation's immigrant groups in Europe.

To conclude, I understand Mr. Donovan's concern if I read it correctly. Why should the United States constantly need to solve the world's problems? That is a good question. Ukraine and Russia should primarily be an EU problem. But instead, the Eurocrats continue to bully Polish patriots under the guise of a normative empire—with not a few woke norms, one might add—and can hardly be trusted to carry out one of the primary duties of the state they aspire to create: protect its members, let alone effectively help Ukrainians. I envy the British for their Brexit, but under the geopolitical circumstances that is not an option for Poland. As the author put it, moral solutions are not sufficient under certain circumstances.

This is admittedly a brief response to complicated issues. Perhaps I will write a longer piece in the future. But I am first and foremost waiting to see how the tragic situation evolves.

[\[1\]](#) Michel Louyot, "The East and the West of Europe still do

not understand one another," *WszystkoCoNajwazniejsze*, December 10, 2021, retrieved from: <https://wszystkoconajwazniejsze.pl/michel-louyot-the-east-and-the-west-of-europe-still-do-not-understand-one-another/>

[2] [Andrew A. Michta](#) "Russia's Invasion Of Ukraine Is Transforming Europe," *19FortyFive*, May 8, 2022, retrieved from: <https://www.19fortyfive.com/2022/05/russias-invasion-of-ukraine-is-transforming-europe/>.

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