

Lavrov's Diplomacy of Illogic



Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

by Lev Tsitrin

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [caused a brouhaha](#) when explaining to an Italian journalist the absence of a contradiction between Russia's claims that its invasion of Ukraine was caused by the need to "denazify" it, and the fact that Ukraine's President Zelinski is Jewish. "In my opinion, Hitler also had Jewish origins, so it doesn't mean absolutely anything. For some time we have heard from the Jewish people that the biggest antisemites were Jewish."

The response was fast, furious, and visceral. "The Jews did not murder themselves in the Holocaust," said [Israel's Foreign Minister] Lapid, the son of a Holocaust survivor. "The lowest level of racism against Jews is to blame Jews themselves for antisemitism." Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who has been more measured in his criticism of Russia's invasion, also condemned Lavrov's comments. "His words are untrue and their intentions are wrong," he said. "Using the

Holocaust of the Jewish people as a political tool must cease immediately.” Israel’s Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem called the remarks “absurd, delusional, dangerous and deserving of condemnation....Lavrov is propagating the inversion of the Holocaust – turning the victims into the criminals on the basis of promoting a completely unfounded claim that Hitler was of Jewish descent.”

All of which may – politically speaking – be true, but, as so much in politics, plays on emotions rather than appeals to reason, and hence, misses the point entirely. And the point is that Lavrov replied to a question of “can a country that elected an openly Jewish person as president be a nation of Nazis?”, with an answer to a totally different question, “can a Jew be antisemitic?” The trickery here is simple – the journalist’s question had an answer of “no,” so Lavrov replied to an entirely different question that had an answer of “yes” – and that “yes” was the only thing that was heard.

Even if Lavrov’s reply be considered as an argument from analogy (which, in logic, is perfectly legit), it still can’t hold any water – because there is no analogy between the situations of Hitler and Zelinski – even if Hitler was secretly Jewish. The word “secretly” is the key here. In 1933, Germans did not vote for a Jew – even a thrillingly antisemitic Jew. They chose a perfect Arian, an incarnation of the German race. So Hitler’s actual origin does not matter one bit; his perceived origin is all that matters.

Nothing of a kind happened in the Ukrainian elections of 2019. Zelinski did not hide his Jewish origins, and Ukrainians knowingly elected a Jewish person in the hope that Zelinski would rid the country of its endemic corruption, and would negotiate a reasonable settlement with Putin. So the journalist’s question posed to Lavrov was not about Zelinski, but about the Ukrainians who elected Zelinski: how can they be Nazis? Lavrov re-framed it into a question that is not even about Zelinski (who is no Jewish antisemite), but about Jews

in general, and the ability of some of them (Karl Marx being a good example) to turn antisemitic. To judge by the emotional reactions, Lavrov managed to muddy the waters enough to extricate himself.

Which illustrates the obvious point – politics is not about facts and logic. Emotions are much more powerful stimulants than facts. To know facts, one needs to put an effort into educating oneself, which only a minority does. To have emotions, one only needs to have the heart on the right side – which is true of the absolute majority. Hence, lies and liars do well in this world, and politicians operate by stirring passions, facts be damned. And, as Mr. Lavrov knows all too well, it works like a charm.