

Poland: Strategically Active or Passive?

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With Poland's release from communist captivity and its subsequent accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, its strategic situation was transformed and seemed to have improved dramatically. Poland's security is in reality not what it appears to be. Rather, Poland's security situation, in my estimation, has deteriorated and is likely to deteriorate further. As this situation becomes painfully obvious, Poland will have to decide whether it will remain strategically passive or become strategically active.

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It is ironic that just as Poland joined NATO, the Alliance, having simply outlived the Warsaw Pact, weakened in its strength and in its will. Starkly put, despite the legal obligations of treaty commitments, Poland cannot be assured of NATO's—really the United States'—steadfast commitment to its security in all circumstances, particularly in response to the new ambiguous tools of threats, for example in economic warfare and cyberwar. Yet this US guarantee was precisely the indispensable singular protection that Poland sought as a guarantee of its independence when it joined NATO. Despite the parlous state of NATO's defense capabilities and determination, and notwithstanding the rhetorical pronouncements of the current NATO Secretary General and the reassurances of the US State and Defense Departments, it seems to be politically incorrect to admit this fact publicly. Nevertheless, Poland needs to accept this depressing but realistic appreciation as the undeclared factor motivating its security policy. Poland needs to pursue its own security actively, independently in some ways if necessary. It must be understood that this would be a high risk policy.

There are three disadvantageous strategic developments which Poland must mitigate or compensate for, although by itself it does not have the power to eliminate them. First, the US is determined to establish a permanent strategic relationship with Russia. Whether or not the US and the Europeans

understand, such a relationship, if realized, would subordinate Europe to a dependent status with Russia. (Parenthetically, the US's suicidal pursuit of China's friendship would render even this relationship secondary and perhaps inconsequential.) Second, NATO is lapsing into a progressive, wasting decrepitude and most probably cannot be rejuvenated. The European Union, another institutional foundation of Europe's security (and therefore Poland's security) is also slowly collapsing economically and politically, again ironically while Poland holds its presidency. If the Eurozone collapses and then the European Union loses its economic viability, only Germany in the medium term will prosper. However, Germany's long term prosperity is questionable because of its demographic trends, which mirror those of all Europe. The European Union's economic stasis will, of course, weaken NATO's political and military strength. These two developments, in the US and Europe, mean that the foundations of Poland's post-Cold War security are slowly sinking. Third, Russia's leadership is deliberately and with malice aforethought reconstructing the Russian Empire, albeit with means different from its two predecessors and in a form to accommodate current conditions and sensibilities, and on a less costly basis. In October 2011 Putin announced that Russia would begin an effort to construct an Eurasian Union including the former Soviet "Stans," Belarus and, most importantly, Ukraine. Most dangerously for Poland specifically, Russia still adheres unwaveringly to its contention of its privileged position in Eastern Europe.

The Poles should press for a redefinition of Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty.

In the United States for the past two decades Democratic and Republican Administrations have subordinated American interests in Eastern Europe and American support for Eastern European interests to the pursuit of a strategic partnership with a supposedly democratizing Russia. The so-called Reset Policy is the latest expression of this years-long, self-delusionary pursuit. Arms control agreements amounting to US unilateral disarmament and the modification of US missile defense emplacements in Eastern Europe because of Russian objections serve to weaken US and NATO defense capabilities and resolve. These agreements also do not address contemporary forms of threats such as economic pressures for political ends and cyberwar. So long as Russia does not adopt and operate on Western principles and values, a US strategic

partnership with Russia is a chimera. Agreements on more limited subjects do not contradict the fundamental difference between Russia and the US and cannot lead to a strategic partnership. Notwithstanding these facts, the United States will continue to pursue Russia, when necessary in preference to and to the detriment of Eastern Europe's interests.

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At its core, Russian policy on key diplomatic and defense issues is consistently and reflexively anti-Western, and on these key issues Russian policy is expressed in non-negotiable differences. This will certainly not change for the better with the strengthening of Putin's power over Russia. Russia will not democratize, certainly not in our time. Russia perforce may have been a European power by virtue of its overweening and aggressive strength and its penchant for self-aggrandizing intervention into Europe, but Russia has never been a European country culturally and historically, as several prominent and respected Russian historians, including the great George Vernadsky, have contended. Even in the twenty-first century the Russian State explicitly and emphatically rejects the principles and values of the West and glories in this rejection. It is worthwhile to recall a historical truth: Russia can be of Europe or in Europe or over Europe only when it is in Poland or over Poland. And Russia is most content when it has Poland.

Since the end of the Second World War, one of the geopolitical foundations of US power has been NATO. In fact, it was NATO that made the US the paramount European power for half a century. The Russians have repeatedly declared their intent to expel the US from the Continent and replace the US with themselves and NATO with a pan-European security system, thereby becoming de facto the paramount European power. In the meantime, almost a quarter century after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russians still claim a special sphere of influence over all of the former Warsaw Pact states. According to official Russian diplomatic declarations, these still are Russia's ambitions.

NATO, which is the basis for Polish security, is steadily weakening. Only the United States is meeting the defense budget targets set by NATO, 3 percent of GNP (Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defence. Press Release. North Atlantic Treaty

Organization, Public Diplomacy Division. Communiqué PR/CP(2011)027, 10 March 2011. Table 3, p. 6.). Furthermore, on the Continent even Germany and Britain are in the process of drastically cutting forces and equipment, and therefore core capabilities. Both have already expressed their unwillingness to deploy their forces out of area. The other NATO members are in worse and worsening shape. The potential volunteers for any future coalition of the willing and able are all becoming conscientious objectors. The recent Libyan Intervention demonstrated that the European Allies cannot intervene, much less impose their will even in third-world Libya without the indispensable and substantial participation of the US. Libya showed both the failure of US leadership and the failure of Europe without US leadership.

During the past few years Poland has been building an historically unprecedented cordial relationship with Germany, due chiefly to German investments in Poland. Yet, during these same years, Germany has demonstrated that it is prepared to compromise politically with Russia over economic matters, such as natural gas deliveries. Neither Germany nor France, supposedly the two strong powers on the Continent, are particularly strong in confronting Russia. Italy, Greece, and Turkey, NATO partners of Poland, also have shown their willingness to accommodate Russia.

The effects of European weakness in will and wallet will be exacerbated as a domestically oriented and economically weakened American Administration turns its national security policy attention from the Continent to China. The US, because of its debt, deficit, and declining economy, is likely to cut US forces in Europe to the bone. It is these forces that are the visible sign of the US commitment to Poland's security. What US forces will remain will be only those elements necessary to support the transit of the declining number of US operating forces to the Middle East. Thus, stationing a US Air Force fighter squadron in Poland even on periodic temporary deployments, as has been proposed, is unlikely. Standing, capable, and ready military forces are essential as weight backing a country's or an alliance's diplomacy. Cumulatively, the defense cuts in the US and on the Continent will weaken the force of Western diplomacy and influence. To strengthen the arm and spine of the Alliance, perhaps the time has come for a conservative Pole to be selected Secretary General of NATO.

Although there is no foreseeable danger in the future of Russia resorting to military force against Poland,

there are in the current international system other more subtle and ambiguous instruments of aggression against countries. These can be employed to undermine the sovereignty and plunder the patrimony of states. Various financial and commercial tools can beggar or blackmail a country. One has only to recollect the repeated price gouging and denials of service of natural gas throughout Europe in the past few years by Gazprom, which is an instrument of the Russian Government. Additionally, there are the media campaigns, deceptions, and political warfare conducted for long-range strategic objectives to inculcate false knowledge, condition attitudes, and influence policy based on an incorrect understanding of reality. Compounding this danger are the clandestine intelligence and covert programs undermining states. A newer and growing threat to policy, intelligence, defense and industrial, commercial, and financial infrastructures is cyberwar. We only have to recollect the organized Russian cyber attacks of a few years ago that brought the Estonian banking system to a halt for two or more weeks and caused large economic losses.

With the obliteration of the distinction between war and peace in the twentieth century, the new means of aggression, and Russia's hostile posture towards the West, the time is long past due for NATO to redefine and reaffirm Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty. This article commits all the signatories of the Treaty to come to the aid of any member who is attacked. In this era it is unlikely that a state will attack a neighbor openly with armed forces across their common border. Rather, ambiguous and unattributed aggression is conducted, using the sophisticated measures of economic, social, psychological, informational, and political warfare. In order to meet the needs of NATO's member states to cope with these new threats, Article V ought to be redefined. Poland, which occupies the exposed flank of Europe and whose immediate neighbors have suffered such attacks, ought to take the lead in this enterprise.

Ukraine is the geopolitical key to a rebuilt Russian Empire. During the past score of years, the US wasted the proverbial golden opportunity in Ukraine. The US and NATO Europe should have had a stronger hand in Ukraine, more forceful diplomacy, and an extensive and strong covert action program to secure Ukraine for the West. Ukraine, after all, was once part of the West under the old tripartite Commonwealth (*Rzeczpospolita*). Before the current pro-Russian government came to power in Kyiv, Ukraine had

declared its intention to join both the EU and NATO. The US and Europe could have done much more and more effectively to shore up the competing and feckless politicians in Kyiv, instead of bemoaning the chaos and watching them fritter away the independence of their country. The interminable, petty bickering over small change in the *Rada* (the Ukrainian legislature) ought to be a lesson for Poland's domestic politics. But Western prevarication, prejudices, and perspectives, old conceptions and old thinking and, frankly, lack of understanding and fortitude coupled with distractions elsewhere would not combat the pernicious effects of seventy years of systematic Soviet inculcation of evil. The US and Europe, and indeed Poland, ceded what should have been a primary geostrategic rampart of the West. This cession was a loss of incalculable strategic consequence.

The *Kresy*, Poland's historical eastern borderlands, are still important to Poland's security. It is astonishing and disappointing that Poland itself did not do more to keep Ukraine on the Western side, because it is Poland alone that has an acute and accurate appraisal of the criticality of Ukraine and the strategic position of all Eastern Europe *vis-à-vis* Russia. Poland's insufficient activity in Ukraine is particularly astonishing because of the open, active, and useful activities Poland has conducted on behalf of the democratic opposition in Belarus. If Ukraine had moved Westward, Belarus would have likely followed. These developments would have cut Russia off directly from Europe and solidified Poland's geostrategic position. These developments also would have left Russia geographically and historically where it belongs.

There is another issue of great potential danger about which the US, NATO, and Poland have kept their shameful silence. This issue is Kaliningrad or, more properly, Königsberg or Królewiec, an imperialistic anachronism. The issue is even more shameful because the territory is named after the bolshevik Kalinin, one of the signers of the death sentence on the Polish prisoners in Katyn and the other Soviet Russian death camps. The territory so named is an affront to Poland and another example of Russia's un-Western ways. At the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union unilaterally incorporated this territory, comprised of the northern half of the former East Prussia, some 5,830 square miles, simply by right of conquest. Half of prewar Poland, all of Sub-Carpathian Rus, and large parts of Romania were not sufficient to satisfy Soviet Russia's acquisitiveness for foreign lands—a blatant

indulgence of Russian imperialism. After the Russians seized East Prussia, they expelled the inhabitants, replaced them with colonists, and shut the land to the outside world as a closed military zone. The territory now houses an army garrison, several air bases, and the headquarters of the Russian Baltic Fleet. Most recently, the Russians have added a brigade of marine infantry to their Kaliningrad garrison. The Russians have also deployed their most modern long range air defense missile system in the territory. What is significant about this deployment is the system's combat radius which covers the Baltic states and Poland. Because of the need for land transport to Kaliningrad from Russia through Poland and the Baltic States, use of the transit routes raises accompanying issues which the Russians exploit frequently to pressure the transited states. The Russians also frequently violate the Baltic states' air space in flying to and from their colony. More importantly, the Russians in recent years have several times threatened to station tactical nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad in retaliation for NATO developments that they did not like, including in 2008 short-range surface-to-surface missiles in the exclave and SS-27 strategic missiles in Russia itself aimed at Poland in retaliation for the *proposed* stationing of US-NATO air defense missiles in Poland. It is very likely that the Russians have stationed large numbers of nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad, notwithstanding any public declarations or denials of theirs. Kaliningrad is a direct and ever-present threat, like a loaded gun, pointed at the heart of Europe, especially Poland. The Russian occupation of Kaliningrad is not a case of *beati sunt possidentes*. Russia has no right or claim historically, demographically, culturally, or legally to this ancient land. One should recall here Matejko's famous painting of *Hołd Pruski*, The Homage of Prussia. There is no good reason for the Russians to continue to occupy this land and every good reason for Europe to oust the Russians from it. Poland should break the West's silence on this danger.

There is more that Poland could do to improve its security. Poland's membership in the Višegrad Group ought to continue, although it has resulted only in limited usefulness. The quartet's power is simply too limited in scope, interests, and influence, and its cohesion is too unstable. Poland ought to mobilize and lead "new Europe," all the states of Eastern Europe from the Baltic to the Black Sea to strengthen NATO and to act as a united bloc on foreign policy, defense, and economics equal to "old Europe." Poland as the

pivot of Eastern Europe is in a position to be the leader of "new Europe"—if it wants to be.

Poland's internal political cohesion could strengthen the realization of its geopolitical strategic interests. Polish patriots ought to protect Polish political and intellectual life against the persistent, pernicious influence of alien agents in academia, the media, politics, and the several components of the national security establishment who propagate disinformation, discord, and disunion in the interest of states inimical to Poland. The Polish Nation in the postwar period was strongest when a Polish Pope electrified Polish patriotism and Polish piety. Polish patriots should take heed that the more Poland becomes like Europe in the sense and sensibility of the European Union, the more Poland will depart from its unique spirit. The communists sought to kill Poland's soul; European moral relativism too could kill Poland's soul. Moral relativism affects more than personal character and personal behavior in daily life. Moral relativism can deform and displace the correct and realistic understanding and judgments of leaders and the public that are necessary to deal with the challenges and problems in foreign and security policy. Essentially, moral relativism, certainly in security affairs, can compromise and jeopardize Poland's independence. Poland needs to look to the best in itself, its character, its history, its traditions, its values, its uniqueness. These qualities need not only to be preserved but to be encouraged and strengthened. To sustain its soul and its security, Poland has to remain what it was: the *Antemurale Christianitatis*.

The Polish American Community's (*Polonia's*) unrelenting pressure on the State Department and the United States Congress to withdraw the outrageous ethnic discrimination against Poland in the issuance of visas is an essential effort. Having the President issue Proclamations and the Congress pass Resolutions commemorating Kazimierz Pułaski, Tadeusz Kościuszko, and the Third of May Constitution (*Konstytucja Trzeciego Maja*) are important and laudable ways to sustain the Polish heritage in America. However, there is much too that the *Polonia* and its several major organizations can do to support Poland's security. Strong lobbying on behalf of Poland's strategic issues would be more consequential. All of the *Polonia's* organizations should combine to pressure Congress and the Executive, the Democratic and Republican Platforms especially in the current US Presidential Electoral Campaign, and the Polish *Sejm*

and government in support of the hard issues of Poland's foreign and defense policies: for example, secure US and Polish support for more radio and television broadcasts into Ukraine and Belarus; promote expanded close cooperation of Poland with the US Intelligence Community; lobby for the stationing of some US armed forces in Poland, particularly an Air Force fighter squadron, homeporting a US Naval warship in Gdańsk, and the conduct of combined exercises in Poland of US special forces with Polish special forces; press for a redefinition of Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty; campaign for a conservative Pole to be chosen as Secretary General of NATO; lobby in the US, at NATO, and in Ukraine for Ukraine's membership in NATO; support regime replacement in Belarus; obtain the Central Intelligence Agency's support for a Polish covert action program in Ukraine; and mobilize a diplomatic campaign to expel Russia from Kaliningrad. Polonia consists of many voters; why should they not be mobilized in support of the hard issues of Polish security?

Poland, preferably with the support of the United States, ought to take the initiative to confront the difficult strategic challenges of its security and not merely accept the efforts of others, however friendly and well-intentioned, to set the fundamental conditions of its security. I contend that Poland has no other choice. ▲

The above article is based on the Address to the Polish American Congress delivered at the Annual Thanksgiving Dinner in Washington, DC, in November 2011.

Bloodlands

Europe Between Hitler and Stalin

By **Timothy Snyder**. New York: Basic Books, 2010. 524 pages, Maps of the Bloodlands from 1918 to 2010, ISBN 978-0-465-00239-9. Hardcover, \$29.95.

James E. Reid

A whole world that had been lovingly and carefully assembled now lay in ruins.

"The Blind Mirror," Joseph Roth on Galicia

The betrayals, history, and terror of the war-torn lands of Europe that lay between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union have concerned Timothy Snyder for some time. In the May 2003 issue of *Past & Present*, he published a focused examination of "The Causes of Ukrainian-Polish Ethnic Cleansing 1943." There he described the shifting allegiances and paths to genocide in a theater of the Second World War that

is not as well known as it should be, and whose places, such as Galicia, Volhynia, and Lwów/Lviv lay in the heart of the heart of these killing fields. His article made clear the need for a more complete history of the people who were executed, starved, and murdered across the area where the greatest number of noncombatants died before and during the war. *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* is that history.

Bloodlands is grounded in deep scholarship, and its broad scope, impact, and the resultant shifts in and coordination of historical perspective and knowledge all recall the significance of the three volumes of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, whose gulags the Snyder book references. *Bloodlands* is not a history of the military casualties of war, but of the lesser-known state policies of deliberate murder and starvation of civilians, and the summary execution of prisoners of war.

Snyder's Introduction to *Bloodlands* lays the groundwork for how this devastation occurred. He begins with the tremendous changes in state power relations that occurred following World War One before moving forward to the vile responses of Hitler and Stalin during and after the Great Depression: Hitler's national socialism and Stalin's genocidal socialism. He also presents Hitler and Stalin's common interest in the rich resources in the breadbasket of Ukraine, in the heart of the Bloodlands. Recognizing the complexity of the shifting borders in the Bloodlands for his readers, he provides six maps of this area in the preface and introduction. Numerous detailed maps, unfortunately not indexed, appear throughout the rest of the book. They present countries and cities whose former names have disappeared.

Bloodlands opens with "The Soviet Famines." As Stalin's collectivization of Ukraine brings famine and death by starvation, this deeply deluded ruler blames the catastrophes on the peasants themselves instead of apprehending that his *diktats* are directly responsible for the deaths. By 1932 in Ukraine a peasant's "possession of food was presumptive evidence of a crime," usually punishable by death. As mass starvation increased cannibalism occurred. "Roving bands of cannibals" hunt for unprotected children. Some families even cannibalized their own children and weaker members of their families. Snyder draws on a number of sources in Polish for this difficult chapter and throughout his book, one of which is *Głód i represje wobec ludności polskiej na Ukrainie (Starvation and Repression of the Polish Population in Ukraine)* by the prolific Polish writer (and Roman Catholic priest) Roman Dzwonkowski. Summarizing what is now