

Why We Need the Same Godly Determination and Clarity Ronald Reagan Gave Us to Defeat Putin

Three months into Vladimir Putin's war of naked and unprovoked aggression against the people of Ukraine, the leaders of Italy, France and Germany have called for negotiations to end the war. Some voices among the chattering classes in America counsel the same.

They argue that we must not force Putin into a corner or embarrass him, that we must give him a way to "save face." Such a course is wrong-headed and dangerous. It will not bring peace. It will only enable a bad player who will invade again.

Let's begin with the underlying premise of the call for peace talks, specifically, that negotiations can have a positive outcome. In dealing with Vladimir Putin, the West must never forget who he is and what he is. Nina Khrushchev, the great-granddaughter of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, famously said of Putin, the ex-KGB agent, "Once an agent, always an agent." KGB agents live in a world without a moral code. The only sin for an agent is to lie to the party.

Vladimir Putin never made an agreement that he felt bound to keep. After Putin's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014, in which he illegally annexed Crimea and set up rump republics in Eastern Ukraine, the Europeans engineered the Minsk Accords, in which Putin committed himself to withdrawing Russian troops from Ukraine and allowing elections in the occupied territories. Putin kept neither of these promises. Nearly a decade later the Russian parliament voted, just before the tanks rolled into Ukraine in February, to annex Donetsk and

Luhansk to the Russian Federation. By annexing these Ukrainian territories, Putin has effectively removed their status from any negotiations. He won't be leaving unless he is expelled.

Putin has shown that his word is no better than Adolf Hitler's.

Those who argue that Putin must not be embarrassed or pushed into a corner demonstrate a lack of understanding of international relations and power politics. International politics is not a cotillion or a senior prom. When aggression goes unchallenged, it sets the stage for future acts of aggression.

The advocates of a negotiated peace also forget one trenchant point: Ukraine does not belong to them. They do not have the right to barter the freedom of others. It is for the Ukrainian people to determine their fate. Their yearning for the freedom to choose is the mainspring of their spirited and determined defense.

So why negotiate?

Whenever there are negotiations, one must ask, "Who benefits?" In this case, certainly not Ukraine which stands to lose any claim to territories stolen by the Russians and the considerable assets of the occupied regions. Ukraine will not obtain secure borders or be protected from future Russian invasions. In fact, one may argue that, even though Putin did not achieve his objective of regime change in Kyiv, a negotiated peace that leaves him in control of the occupied territories is still a win and positions him to invade Ukraine again.

It is certainly not a win for the people of the conquered territories whose cities have been bombed to powder, whose mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, sisters and brothers have been summarily executed or for the women and children who have been brutalized by Russian soldiers. But, of course, ordinary

citizens will have no seat at the negotiating table and will not be consulted about their futures. They will be what they have been at every negotiating table convened by the Europeans in the last hundred years—pawns in an international game of chess.

Who stands to gain?

Putin for sure. But also, the Europeans who have grown accustomed to cheap oil and natural gas from Russia. The German and London banks, whose coffers got fat on the ill-gotten gains of Russian oligarchs, will also gain, as will the multinational corporations who do business with Putin. All of these will gain and handsomely.

Some believers will argue that as followers of Jesus we ought to turn the other cheek, that our Lord taught an ethic of non-resistance. Jesus certainly taught his followers to “love their enemies ... and pray for those who despitefully use you” in the charter of the kingdom that we know as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:44).

But the Scriptures also recognize the role of government to preserve order, to punish the guilty and to secure justice. God Himself established the nation of Israel as an earthly model of divine government. He specifically directed leaders, beginning with Moses and throughout the Old Testament, to go to war against bad players. He often miraculously intervened on behalf of His people.

Those wars were both offensive and defensive.

The fact that Israel failed in that mission does not diminish the need for government or undermine the legitimacy of governments. Both the apostles Paul and Peter enjoined believers to obey government and Paul explicitly stated, “God does not give the sword in vain” (Rom. 13:4). From church history, the teachers and early church leaders acknowledged that, in a fallen world, sometimes wars must be fought. Which

means that there are times when non-resistance is not an option. Gandhi's strategy of non-violence proved effective against the British to whom moral arguments could be made. It proved fatal for millions of Europe's Jews in the face of Nazi terror.

This brings us back to the current crisis in Ukraine. I would argue that we can't quit now. We must support the people of Ukraine as they resist tyranny.

Four years before his election as president, Ronald Reagan stated his approach to the Russians and the Cold War and dealing with the Russians when he said, "We win and they lose." Within months after President Reagan left office, the Berlin Wall fell.

Ronald Reagan's clarity and determination played no small part in that victory. That same clarity of vision and determination is needed today.

Gary Kellner *is the founder and former executive director of International Center for Christian Leadership, the first graduate school of leadership studies in the former Soviet Union. He served as the president of Save Ukraine Now, an interdenominational organization supporting the Ukrainian people through advocacy and by providing humanitarian aid during the Russian incursion in 2014.*

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.