Ukrainian diplomacy would be better off without hypocrisy

by Lev Tsitrin

I have a friend who claims to understand — if not approve of — the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In his telling, having accumulated over the centuries an enormous empire that stretches from Europe all the way to the Pacific, Russians have become natural imperialists, and blaming them for invading Ukraine is like blaming a crocodile for attacking a zebra drinking at a riverbank. He sees the question of "why?" as not applicable; moral argument is dismissed out of hand. This is simply the nature of the beast, he claims. (Needless to say, Mr. Putin's oft-repeated argument that by aiding Ukraine, the West shows its deep-seated desire to stymie Russia's development — as if a country's "development" was tantamount to absorbing its neighbors — fits neatly into that narrative).

It goes without saying that this friend of mine delights in sending me reports that critique Western support for Ukraine, or show reasons why it should be stopped — reports (like the recent one on a promptly-withdrawn letter from the left-leaning Congressional Democrats suggesting that the US should engage Russia in seeking a diplomatic settlement, even if it would undermine Ukraine) which I dismiss with a shrug of the shoulders as utterly trivial.

But the news that [in a recent General Assembly vote](#) to compel Israel to surrender its presumed nuclear arsenal Ukraine voted for the resolution and against Israel could not be as easily dismissed. Of course, General Assembly resolutions are non-binding and have zero consequences; they are as harmless as a mosquito bite — but are as annoying. So the question remains — why did Ukraine do it?

If Ukrainian diplomats thought that a "no" vote was too defiant (only five countries voted against, including US and Israel), Ukraine could have abstained, joining the likes of Germany, France, the UK, Italy and great many other European countries — not a bad company to be in! It could have simply not shown up, as roughly ten countries did. Instead, Ukrainians voted "yes."

They could have done it out of dissatisfaction with Israel's refusal to provide arms to Ukraine, choosing to dismiss Israel's well-known and well-reasoned rationale for doing so — though Ukrainians should be more than simply understanding: both the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and Israel's inability to sell it arms stem from the exact same source — Obama's deliberate policy of accommodation towards Russia and Iran. Somehow, Obama felt genuine empathy towards them, and understood (and accepted) their positions — so if Russia wanted a hunk of Georgia, or took over Crimea, or insinuated itself into Syria; or if Iran wanted to develop nuclear weapons, Obama invariably found those aspirations excusable, and worked to accommodate them — by moving his "red lines" in

Syria; by stating that there was more at stake for Russia in Crimea than for the US, by agreeing to give Iran's nuclear program legitimacy in exchange for a mere fifteen-year-long hiatus in its production of the actual weapon, so that his administration and that of his successor (whom he thought would be Hillary Clinton) would not have to deal with it — and then, who cares? *Après nous, le déluge!* Having created the vacuum of American strength and determination, Obama all but invited invasion of Ukraine. And by letting Russia and Iran get into Syria, Obama tied Israel's hands: now, Israel has to coordinate with Russia its raids on Iranian shipments of arms to Hezbullah.

Undoubtedly, Ukrainian diplomats know this full well; so what was the point in their anti-Israel vote? To show that, geopolitics or not, they are unhappy with Israel's inability to sell them anti-aircraft systems they want? They know it won't help — and to antagonize a potential ally over what's not under its control makes no sense. Perhaps Zelensky wanted to show that his being Jewish does not influence his political calculus and that he can be independent and "objective" when it comes to Israel, so he decided to bend backwards to show this "objectivity"? Perhaps, but to what end? There is no conflict whatsoever between Zelensky's Jewishness, and Ukraine's interests in Israel.

Not only does Ukraine's vote make no sense politically; what's much worse, it is thoroughly and monumentally hypocritical. I do not know whether Israel has a nuclear arsenal — rumors swirl, but nothing is officially confirmed. But I do know that Ukraine indeed had one — a massive nuclear arsenal it inherited after the fall of the Soviet Union — and that Ukrainians got rid of it, doing exactly what Ukraine apparently thinks Israel should do. How well did it work out for Ukraine? The road to hell is paved with good intentions; Ukraine's good intentions of thirty years ago led to an invasion by her nuclear-armed neighbor. Of all countries

voting in the UN, Ukraine knows best about consequences of nuclear disarmament: it went through it — and in exchange, got a bloody war. Can't Ukraine learn from its mistake? Or does it wish the same to Israel? Not only does Ukraine's vote constitute bad politics (antagonizing a potential ally was never a good idea) but, much worse, it was through-and-through hypocritical.

Contrary to my friend's hopes, Ukraine's UN vote did not make me abandon my support for Ukraine — but I admit that it lessened its emotional intensity. Hence, my advice to Ukraine's diplomats: Ukraine is dealing with a very powerful enemy and needs all the friends it can possibly get. Creating antagonisms where there needs be none is not a smart move. Going forward, Ukrainian diplomats would be well advised to not create problems where there aren't any — and above all, they should avoid hypocrisy. There is plenty of real tension in the world. Neither Israel nor Ukraine needs an unnecessary one.