

**SPIRITUAL VALUES AND STATECRAFT IN TODAY'S WORLD:  
Some thoughts on Ukraine, Taiwan and China**

Hon. David Kilgour  
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Reading this morning in the *Citizen* about Canada's first female senator, Corinne Wilson, a member of this congregation, I'm especially pleased to be with you tonight. She even had the courage to speak out against the Munich- "peace in our time"- agreement between Neville Chamberlain and Adolph Hitler against the position of another Presbyterian from the same congregation, then Prime Minister W.L.M King. All Canadians can be proud of Senator Wilson.

Spiritual issues increasingly today appear to play underlying roles in international and intrastate conflicts, although conventional diplomacy usually ignores or misunderstands them. I'll attempt to illustrate this phenomenon by indicating some religious dimensions, among others, in recent events in Ukraine, Taiwan and China.

**Ukraine**

The religious faith of many Canadians of origin in Ukraine, mostly Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish, is well known. Indeed, the 2013 commemoration of Black Ribbon Day--commemorating the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which purported to authorize Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia to seize the countries and peoples located between them--by Canada's Central and Eastern European Communities Council was held last August 23 at St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church in Ottawa.

The event was marked in five Canadian cities last year, partly I understand because among all 28 NATO member nations Canada evidently continues to hold the highest percentage of citizens who fled Communism/Nazism in Europe and elsewhere, comprising today with descendants as many as eight million Canadians.

In Ukraine and Russia, ousted President Viktor Yanukovich and Vladimir Putin continue to misrepresent the democratic uprising in Ukraine. No one has cut through the propaganda in Russian state media more effectively than Timothy Snyder, history professor at Yale and author of *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. Snyder: “Ukraine (under Yanukovich) was governed by probably the most financially corrupt regime... which by the end of its rule was not only physically oppressing, but finally killing its citizens ... (for) exercising their rights to speech and assembly.”

Snyder observes, “During the first few days of the protests, the students called (the central square) the Euromaidan. Russian propaganda called it, predictably enough, the Gayeuromaidan. When riot police were sent to beat the students, who came to defend them? ...Ukrainian veterans of the Soviet Red Army, men who had been sent to invade Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion of that country in 1979. These men came to defend ‘their children,’ as they called the students.”

“In all of these ways”, Snyder continues, “the ‘decadent’ West, as Russia’s foreign minister put it, was present ...The Russian press presented the protest as part of a larger gay conspiracy. The Ukrainian regime instructed its riot police that the opposition was led by a larger Jewish conspiracy. Meanwhile, both regimes informed the outside world that the protesters were Nazis. Almost nobody in the West seemed to notice this contradiction.” Persons of any faith community- or none- everywhere can only wince at these tactics of Putin and Yanukovich.

### **Kasparov Recommendation**

Let me interject here three points made by the former world/Russian chess champion and democracy advocate Garry Kasparov:

- Vladimir Putin has twice during six years sent Russian troops across internationally recognised borders to snap off pieces of neighbouring countries, first in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and now in Ukraine (Crimea), thereby joining an exclusive club with Saddam Hussein and Sloboban Milosevic.
- In Ukraine, Putin used the same rhetoric as Hitler during the Austrian Anschluss in 1938 about protecting a threatened population. Much of the Kremlin’s statements about Crimea could

have been translated from the German, with “Fatherland” replaced by “Motherland”. Like Hitler, Putin first occupies and then negotiates, while holding a snap referendum in Crimea at the point of guns.

- It is a waste of time to seek a deep strategy in Putin’s actions. “There are only personal interests, the interests of those close to him who keep him in power, and how best to consolidate that power”. If the West punishes Russia with sanctions and a trade war, “it would be cruel to 140 million Russians, so instead sanction the 140 oligarchs who would dump Mr Putin...if he cannot protect their assets abroad. Target their visas, their mansions and IPOs in London, their yachts and Swiss bank accounts. Use banks, not tanks”.

When Yanukovich fled to Russia, the Peterson Institute in Washington estimates that he and his family alone stole between US\$8 billion and US\$10 billion yearly since 2010. Ukraine’s parliament then elected Arseniy Yatsenyuk prime minister by a vote of 371–1. He told MPs, “About US\$70 billion has been withdrawn from Ukraine’s financial system to offshore accounts over the last three years. Most sensibly, he urged Russia, which he referred to as Ukraine’s “partner,” not to “wage war on us ... for we are friends.”

### **Incursions**

Then came the unprovoked Russian military intervention on part of Ukrainian territory: Crimea. The world saw Mr. Putin’s unmarked soldiers seize the region. Only yesterday the tension was heightened with the mayor of Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine being shot in the back and being now in critical care in hospital. Today, I see that protesters in Lugansk in eastern Ukraine are calling for Russian troops to invade. How well I recall being an international election observer in the Lugansk region in the 2004 election. The most memorable moment was when a man in his 80s at a polling station grabbed me by the shoulders and said through an interpreter that both his parents starved to death during Stalin’s Ukrainian Famine of ‘32/33. Bloodlands estimates that three million died in the Stalin-induced famine in Ukraine.

Putin wants to advance his alternative civilization model. He, his advisers, and the obedient Russian media assert the Ukrainian events were caused by a decadent European civilization, which advocates the rights of cultural, religious and sexual minorities. Putin claims to be defending values of the Russian Orthodox church. His ability to associate his bizarre notions here with national strength in a military victory might well enable him to project his intolerance even further beyond Russian territory. This is deeply troubling to most in all faith communities.

Among the violations of international norms in deploying unlabeled Russian soldiers across Crimea, Putin violated the Charter of the United Nations and the Helsinki Final Act. He also shredded the 1994 agreement of Russia, Ukraine, the U.K. and the U.S., under which Ukraine, then the third-largest nuclear power on earth, gave up all its nuclear weapons, leaving the somber lesson that if a country gives up its nuclear weapons it invites invasion from authoritarian neighbors.

Putin claims the right to invade a neighbor to defend the undefined rights of a minority language community, or as he put it in a press conference on March 4, “people who are closely tied (sic) to us historically, culturally, economically.” Many Russian speakers across Ukraine have already signed a petition saying that they do not need any external parties to protect their rights. There are also the mysterious pop-up self-defense forces, with new, matching and unmarked uniforms and weapons, claiming to defend Russian-speaking Ukrainians.

Another presumed benefit for Putin is diverting Russians from economic problems. Their economy fell from a 4.5 percent growth rate in 2010 to 1.3 percent in 2013. The ruble has fallen lately by almost a fifth. The longer outlook is troubling. Nervous investors, adversely affected by widespread corruption, are now asking whether this is the beginning of renewed Soviet-era imperialism.

Keeping Europe short-sightedly dependent on Russian imports in a period of growing international oil/gas abundance and Ukraine relying on deeply discounted prices proved a good strategy. Now that the Ukraine/Crimea crisis is reported to have caused capital outflows from Russia in the first

quarter of 2014 alone as large as \$70 billion, Russians generally might now realize that European harmony is essential if the wider Russian economy is to improve the lives of the great majority of its citizens.

According to Eric Reguly of the *Globe and Mail Report on Business over this past weekend*, European gas consumption is declining, in part because of efficiency gains, greater use of cheap coal and growing electricity production from solar, wind and hydro. This trend seems bound to accelerate because of Putin's conduct in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. Alternative gas suppliers should support Europe by rapidly exporting growing gas surpluses to it to reduce Russia's Gazprom sales in Europe. In 2008, Gazprom's market value was \$250 billion, today it is less than \$90 billion. Putin and his petro oligarchs might find winning Crimea and losing Gazprom value a bad deal since he appears to listen mostly to 140 or so oligarchs.

In short, in Ukraine we are not dealing with a fascist coup at all. In Snyder's words, "What has taken place is a popular revolution, with all of the messiness, confusion, and opposition that entails. The young leaders of the Maidan, some of them radical leftists, have risked their lives to oppose a regime that represented, at an extreme, the inequalities that we criticize at home. They have an experience of revolution that we do not. Part of that experience, unfortunately, is that Westerners are provincial, gullible, and reactionary. Thus far the new Ukrainian authorities have reacted with remarkable calm.

### **"Finlandization"**

Martti Ahtisaari, former president of Finland and a Nobel laureate, said, "Respect for the territorial integrity of a sovereign country is essential. Acknowledging this is a precondition for building a peaceful future for all citizens of Ukraine." Achieving this in the present difficult circumstances might well require Ukraine to follow the example of Finland itself after World War II and become fully independent from both Europe and Russia, while trading and being on equally good terms with both.

"Finlandization" is unpalatable to some, but it is instructive to remind ourselves of what Finland is like today—strong, united, prosperous, and

free. This option offers Ukrainians the best opportunity for a democratic future while maintaining their territorial integrity. It will, however, be an enormous challenge to achieve consensus among sharply differing opinions among Ukrainians, which has little democratic infrastructure and lots of corruption.

Whether Mr. Putin wants 143 million fellow Russians to live better lives or to be further isolated economically and politically by the international community is clearly now in his hands. The real-life game of "chicken" continues. At the recent Geneva conference, it appeared briefly that Putin might exchange peace with the rest of Ukraine for a Moscow veto over key decisions made by its new government and the successor president to be elected now on May 25. He has fulfilled none of his commitments in Geneva. There is little doubt that recent events in eastern Ukraine, including the shooting of the mayor of Khrakiv, are very very troubling.

## **Taiwan**



### **Taiwan Sunflower Student Movement**

Little covered by North American media, the Taiwan Student Sunflower Movement and their actions inside and outside the Legislative Yuan (national parliament) in Taipei from mid-March to mid-April this year is an example of young people standing up for democratic principles. I went to show Canadian support for the protesters. It soon became a coalition of students, academics, civic organizations and others, until on March 18 there was a huge citizen rally—some say as many as half a million. The catalyst for their stand against the Ma government was its pushing of a

trade agreement with China in services through parliament with literally only a 30-second clause by clause review of the required legislation.

Those impatient with the continuing standoff between the students and the government perhaps forgot that young people are likely to be affected longest and hardest by any trade agreement in services or anything else with the party-state in China. Protesters are also worried about the indirect impact of the proposed agreement on jobs in other economic sectors across Taiwan. They were also concerned about the impact on their democracy by these unilateral actions by the governing KMT party. The students do not forget that this same party ruled by martial law from 1949-1987. They do not want to risk losing their multi-party democracy and the civil society gains achieved since that time.

Various faith communities, including our own denomination, have played key good governance roles in Taiwan both in the past and more recently in Taiwan. Former President Lee Teng-hui, who did much to establish full democracy in Taiwan, evidently attended the school founded by Rev. George Leslie MacKay near Taipei, which is still one of the best middle schools in Taiwan.

## CHINA

Let me begin here with a surprising quote:

*“In the past twenty years, we (Chinese) have realized that the heart of your culture is your religion: Christianity. That is why the West has been so powerful. The Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life was what made possible the emergence of capitalism and then the successful transition to democratic politics. We don’t have any doubt about this”.*

*-An anonymous Fellow of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, quoted in Civilization: The West and the Rest, by Niall Ferguson (2011).*

Only last week, there was a news story that China is despite all becoming the largest Christian country on earth. A U.K. Telegraph news story began:

*“China on course to become 'world's most Christian nation' within 15 years. The number of Christians in Communist China is growing so steadily that it by 2030 it could have more churchgoers than America.”*

This might, of course, prove far too optimistic. Two years ago, for example, Jan Harvey and I wrote an article on the persecution of faith communities in *Convivium* magazine, published by Canadian Catholics. You can access it on the Internet at <http://www.david-kilgour.com/2011/convivium2011.pdf>. Another piece was written late last year by Geoffrey Johnston in Kingston's *Whig Standard* newspaper and can be accessed at <http://www.thewhig.com/2013/12/05/faith-communities-persecuted-in-china>.

Among Johnson's points:

- Freedom of religion, faith, conscience and belief, guaranteed under the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has not discouraged China's Communist overlords from establishing a system that oppresses and brutalizes people of faith.
- "I think China is one of the most significant religious freedom abusers in the world," says Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, vice-chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. "China is focused on persecuting a number of groups...For example; Christians who do not belong to state-sponsored churches are singled out for harsh repression".
- When Communists seized control of China in 1949, the new regime established state bodies to oversee religion. The regime also founded state-controlled national Catholic and Protestant churches, which ordain and control clergy. All Chinese Christians are required to register with either of the official state-sanctioned churches.

### **Gao Zhisheng**

Before leaving this very brief glance at China, permit me to mention a personal hero, Gao Zhisheng, who is in many respects the Chinese version of Nelson Mandela or Mahatma Gandhi. He has spent the past several years in the gulag in rural China under severe torture and other inhuman treatment. His family was forced to flee China after his arrest and are refugees in the U.S. today, missing him greatly.





Gao, a lawyer, is known as the 'conscience of China' for defending without fee disfavoured groups, including tenants, the disabled, tenant farmers and Falun Dafa. Please pray for him and all others in prisons / labour camps across China for standing up for universal values, including the spiritual ones specified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We might all ponder the words I quoted earlier and advocate more effectively contemporary spiritual and related universal values, especially in the present deeply distressed international situation across the world.

Thank you.