


Chapter 7

Poland, a Benign but Not a Naïve Power in Its Response to Russia's War in Ukraine (2022–Present): Assertive Pursuit of Enlightened Self- Interest – Forging New Alliances and Strengthening Existing Ones

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ABSTRACT

The chapter investigates an interesting twist in the bilateral relations between Ukraine and Poland under the Morawiecki Government. It discusses the main reasons that led Morawiecki to drastically change from a very generous response to Russia's invasion to an openly hostile stance after Zelensky's UN Speech. The chapter explores the rationale that led Morawiecki to impose an embargo on Ukrainian grain and other agricultural commodities during the summer of 2023. It deliberates on the post-2023 improvement of these relations after the formation of the Tusk government. It exemplifies that even if certain disagreements over the scale of the offered assistance arise in the countries that eagerly helped Ukraine since February 2022, those disagreements can be appropriately dealt with. The ferocity of Putin's war against Ukraine failed to discourage Ukraine's most loyal friends from stepping up their support. Paradoxically for Putin, despite all his efforts to turn such a scenario into an undesirable one, Ukraine today is much closer to becoming a full EU and NATO member than ever.

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Poland in Its Response to Russia's War in Ukraine

“Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners, and necessity has made us allies. Those whom God has so joined together, let no man put asunder.” — John F. Kennedy

May 17, 1961, in an address before the Canadian parliament, on the Canada-US relationship.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter aims to enhance the ongoing discourse regarding Poland's response to Russia's war in Ukraine by clarifying a specific case that necessitates a more rigorous evaluation, untainted by typical media sensationalism, exaggeration, and unfounded conclusions.

While the chronology of NATO's and the EU's responses to this conflict is well covered by both the media and various valuable academic accounts, Poland's response to the latest outbreak of Russia's neo-imperialist war in Ukraine is still relatively undercovered and insufficiently integrated into the literature describing the global response to this conflict. Without delving into Poland's role in Ukraine's defense strategy, we miss the broader picture, as the internal dynamics of Poland's response to various stages of this conflict have had a considerable impact on the way the war has evolved into a regional conflict of global importance.

Three main stages of this response have been identified: the first started on February 24, 2022, and lasted for at least 18 months until Zelensky's UN Speech in September 2023, which triggered a considerable change in Poland's attitudes towards Ukraine. Subsequently, this short period of open hostility between both governments ended on December 13, 2023, when the Tusk replaced Morawiecki at the head of Poland's government and adopted a more pragmatic response towards Ukraine (which will be covered in a separate chapter in a forthcoming book published by IGI Global (Pietrzak, 2024b)).

In February 2022, Poland demonstrated unwavering Giedroycian commitment to the Ukrainian authorities and people, which extended to providing arms for their defense, safe havens for millions of Ukrainian refugees, and logistical, material, and financial support for the embattled regime. The swift and determined response from Poland in those early days of the conflict was considered relatively risky at the time, yet it set off a significant momentum that spurred an even more generous global response to support Ukraine during that challenging period. This generous assistance from Poland played a crucial role in boosting and maintaining Ukrainian morale, which assisted Ukraine in securing its survival as an independent state. Poland's proactive humanitarian response during this conflict set a standard that provided other parties with a stronger rationale to offer even more generous logistical, military, political, and diplomatic assistance to Ukraine (Pietrzak, 2024a).

While there is no way to discuss all the determinants that shaped the current situation in the Ukrainian war, we can recognize that there was a considerable change in Morawiecki's attitudes towards Ukraine in the last six months of his government. His positions drifted from one of Poland's total and unwavering support in 2022 to one of considerably less enthusiasm after the UN Speech in which Zelensky insinuated that Poland was secretly supporting Russia because of its embargo on Ukrainian agricultural commodities and its categorical refusal to incur the costs of Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative (Kokcharov et al., 2023).

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