

Poland Waits to Pounce

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The president is in Poland. After keeping the Polish government in suspense for a month after Joe Biden announced his willingness to visit Warsaw, his administration finally confirmed the president would travel to Poland to mark the first anniversary of Russia's tragic war on Ukraine. Biden also made a surprise visit to Ukraine to meet President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday.

As Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre explained, President Joe Biden will meet with his Polish counterpart Andrzej Duda to discuss bilateral ties and their mutual commitment to support the Ukrainian cause “for as long as it takes.” Biden also plans to meet with the leaders of the Bucharest Nine—a group of NATO members situated on the eastern flank—to show his “unwavering support” for the alliance.

Former government officials and foreign diplomats in Warsaw indicated to these writers that the most significant part of Joe Biden’s visit to Poland will be the speech scheduled for today, February 21, at Arkady Kubickiego (gardens of the Royal Castle). In the same place almost one year ago, the U.S. president unexpectedly proclaimed that Putin “cannot remain in power.”

Indeed, the timing and the place of the planned remarks have raised expectations among Polish political elites. As Mark Brzezinski—the American ambassador to Poland and the son of Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's national security advisor—noted in one of his recent interviews for TVN24 news channel, this is the first time that the U.S. president has visited the country “twice in one year.” This should be perceived, he added, as a sign that “Biden cares about Poland, its citizens and their security.”

Poland has a sharpening geopolitical appetite. “The visit of U.S. President Joe Biden is a great opportunity for Poland, Ukraine, but also for the entire NATO, as well as a chance for President Andrzej Duda to try to convince Joe Biden to unblock the issue of transferring planes to Ukraine,” former Polish president Bronisław Komorowski recently commented.

Although it has not been officially confirmed if Zelensky will come to Poland during Biden's visit, *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna* newspaper reported that its sources in the Ukrainian government believed that the president is likely to show up in Warsaw and expand on his "peace summit" idea, referring to the 10-point peace plan announced at last November's G20 summit at Bali. Noteworthy is the fact that the plan provides for a negotiation process only after Russia returns the annexed territories, including Crimea.

Strategically speaking, Poland plays a crucial role in Ukraine's resistance, as almost 90 percent of all military aid from the West goes through its territory. The chairman of the board at the Polish Armaments Group (PGZ), Sebastian Chwałek, told the newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* that the country serves as a hub where armaments from Ukraine are shipped to be repaired. Additionally, Mesko, part of the PGZ, has increased the production of the Piorun man-portable air-defense system from its usual 150–300 units per annum to 600 in 2022. This year it plans to produce 1000 units and to continue increasing output should the war in Ukraine continue.

The Polish public assumes that a protracted war is likely: 52.1 percent of respondents of a survey conducted by IBRiS for *Rzeczpospolita* last month believed that combat would continue, suggesting that the company has every reason to expect its business plan to succeed. Only 28.1 percent of those surveyed believe that the war across the border will end this year.

The public's mood certainly reflects the Polish government's attitude to the conflict: hawkish, and inclined against the swiftest possible end to the war in Ukraine.

Undersecretary of State Pawel Jablonski makes clear that Poland's goal is to make sure that "Russia is defeated, loses face and is held accountable." President Andrzej Duda sees no option besides a Ukrainian victory, with the Russians brought to their knees and ideally signing a peace deal Pereislav—an awkward allusion to the Pereislav Agreement at which Ukrainian military commander Bohdan Kmelnysky was forced to sign a treaty with Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich's plenipotentiary in 1654, which resulted in the Russo–Polish War of 1654–1667.

Furthermore, in his interview for the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* published on February 9, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki argued that "victory over Russia constitutes both Polish and European *raison d'état*." When asked why Poland opposes negotiations with the Kremlin, Morawiecki contended that Russia is a "terrorist state" and there could be no peace until Putin is replaced.

Of course, there is little outsiders can do to oust him. And the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center's most recent survey found that Russians' confidence in their president stood at 79.1 percent, though such findings must be viewed with some caution.

It is worth noting that three days earlier, in an interview with *El Mundo* newspaper, the Polish prime minister admitted the current situation may escalate to a third world war if Russia is "forced" to leave occupied territories in Ukraine; yet he claimed, "We take into account all scenarios." This fits nicely into Morawiecki's remarks made the same day in Warsaw, where he

urged that “the West must turn this war into a Waterloo for Russian imperialism and colonialism.”

“Poland is ready to take co-responsibility for shaping the new world order. Poland is ready to become one of the key links in post-imperial Europe. It is not enough to defeat Russia. It is also necessary to build a world in which Russian imperialism and colonialism, Russian domination, will not find a place for themselves,” the prime minister concluded.

As reported last week by Onet.pl, the formation of the first Polish "elite unit" subordinate to the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine has just begun. Its tasks are said to include reconnaissance and sabotage activities. The unit is in addition to, rather than a component of, the International Legion of Territorial Defence of Ukraine, in which many volunteers from Poland have been fighting so far. Even more extreme: Geostrategist Jacek Bartosiak, considered to be American George Friedman’s confidante in Poland, argued in December that Poland should send its troops to confront Russia on the battlefield.

When *Le Figaro*’s Laure Mandeville recently asked Andrzej Duda about his opinion about the recent U.S. survey in which more than 40 percent of Republicans expressed their willingness to make territorial concessions to stop the war in Ukraine, the Polish president lashed out; he said that if they “want to give Russia territory as a concession, let them give theirs!” The Polish leader added that he does not believe that “there are any American patriots who think otherwise.”

With more military equipment and U.S. boots on the Polish ground on Duda’s wish list for Joe Biden’s visit in Warsaw, Biden should remember assessments that neither the U.S. nor other Western countries are ready for an all-out confrontation with Russia, both at the regional and global level—let alone the possibility of nuclear escalation.

Unfortunately, with this seeming shift in “Europe’s centre of gravity towards Poland”—which appears increasingly ready to directly confront Moscow—this may become the US reality very soon.

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