


In the end, perhaps the greatest puzzle is that no one actually knows what Canada has said “no” to. Regardless, the decision does not speak well of Canada’s commitment to national defense. And the United States, as well as other Canadian allies, is likely to respond accordingly. Much of Ottawa’s choice derived from a belief that its post-September 11th defense and security relationship with Washington is a durable one, immune to specific domestic decisions. Canadian politicians, however, could well discover that they were wrong. 

Total Recall

by Kamil Tchorek

WARSAW, POLAND—Change is afoot in Poland. The country’s upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, scheduled for September and October respectively, are widely expected to produce a fundamental transformation in political outlook, and Warsaw’s foreign policy is sure to follow suit.

Poland is ripe for just this sort of overhaul. The reputation of the country’s ruling left has been destroyed by a series of cataclysmic sleaze scandals. Allegations include a conspiracy theory—one taken seriously by the electorate—that ex-communists in government conspired to enable Russian infiltration of Poland’s energy sector through a closed network of tycoons and former security agents in both countries. Meanwhile, the country’s rising political right, riding high on public outrage at these charges, is staunchly anti-Kremlin.

In Poland, after all, fear of Russia runs deep. To understand the reasons for this sentiment, it is instructive to take a look at a fifteenth century map of Europe. Back then, a Polish-Lithuanian dynasty, the Jagiellos, ruled across an area covering much of the modern “post-Soviet space,” including what has become known as “New Europe”: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine, Hungary, Croatia, modern Moldova and the Czech and Slovak territories. In the centuries that followed, however, that geopolitical space became dominated by Germans and Russians, leading many Poles to embrace the notion that the region should again unite for self-preservation.



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Lech Kaczynski, the current frontrunner in Poland's presidential race, is attuned to this sentiment. Over the past several years, in his capacity as the mayor of Warsaw, Kaczynski has given the Polish people a sense of how and where he would lead their country. In July 2004, he opened a museum to revitalize the memory of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, a mass slaughter by the Nazis made possible because the Red Army refused to come to the aid of the Polish resistance. Then, when Chechen leader Aslan Maskhadov was killed by Russian security forces in March 2005, Kaczynski denounced it as a Russian blunder and immediately named a Warsaw roundabout after Maskhadov's predecessor, Djokhar Dudayev, who was assassinated by Russia in 1996.

Such acts of defiance against Russia would have been unthinkable a decade ago, when nobody in Poland really knew what the political future of Central and Eastern Europe would be. Now, however, Poland has gained NATO and EU membership. Its new foreign policy stance has challenged Europe's traditional center of gravity, France, much to the delight of officials in London. And it has become an active and constructive participant in the transformation of the regimes in Iraq and Ukraine.

Polish self-assertiveness, in short, is a growth industry. So it is no surprise that an ambitious politician like Kaczynski wants to invest in it wholeheartedly. As a member of the "Law and Justice" party (PiS), he is quick to point out the injustices that were done to Poland by Russia in the past, and to connect them to injustices Russia is currently committing throughout the region.

Kaczynski's popularity, and his hold on power, could be bolstered by another factor: his twin brother Jaroslaw Kaczynski (who is identically short, identically conservative, and identically tough on Russia) has a good chance of being elected prime minister. Together, this duo would present a powerful political bloc—one that would unflinchingly shore up the new governments in Georgia and Ukraine, and toe a far tougher line on Belarus.

Indeed, Belarus might just emerge as the major political fault line between Warsaw and Moscow. Many Polish policymakers have no expectations of an outpouring of "people power" in Belarus akin to Ukraine's "Orange Revolution." Belarus is more ethnically and linguistically homogenous, and its economy is given such preferential treatment by Russia that certain industries (such as armaments and chemicals) are booming. In many of the country's provinces, agricultural jobs are secure and bellies remain full.

Polish attempts to support Belarusian subversives will certainly be limited by these factors. But the regime in Minsk has a serious liability: the country's volatile and unpredictable president, Aleksandr Lukashenko, whose relationship with Moscow of late has been anything but uncomplicated.

That is where the Kaczynskis come in. They are dedicated provocateurs, and will doubtless see Lukashenko as a perfect target for political agitation. The ensuing war of words, and Lukashenko's responses to Poland's efforts to promote democracy in his country, might turn out to be too much for Russian President Vladimir Putin to bear, provoking regime change in Minsk—not from below, but from above. 