

HERMIT HERALD

ISSUE 139

MARCH 31, 2022

QUOTE FOR THE DAY

“The time has come, the Walrus said

to talk of many things:

Of shoes, and ships, and sealing wax,

Of cabbages and kings

And why the sea is boiling hot

And whether pigs have wings.”

“Through the looking Glass” Lewis Carroll.

NONSENSE THAT MAKES SENSE

First an apology for the long delay since the last issue. Your scribe has neither run out of

ink nor ideas. Frankly, the Ukrainian situation has rightfully taken all the oxygen out of the room. I used to take an hour and a half just to read the NY Times; today, only twenty minutes, as each story about the war in Ukraine; the sorrow, the deaths, the abject misery is chronicled. Each story is unique, but each story is the same. I just can't bring myself to read them all.

So why start off with the quote from Lewis Carroll? I remember this as one of my favorite poems as we dissected it in a high school English class.

A recollection of those discussions came to my mind that somehow the poem might have a rational relationship to the war in Ukraine. I did some research and there it was: critics made sense of the nonsense by deducing that the poem was about encroachment and entitlement.

Recall that the poem relates how the Walrus and the Carpenter lured some young oysters from their "beds" promising them a pleasant walk and treat, hence the preamble from the

Walrus promising many wonderful stories to relate to the oysters. As you may remember, it did not end well for the oysters.

The critics/analysts view the luring of the oysters from their “beds” as the encroachment and the entitlement being the Walrus and the Carpenter eating the oysters, “because they could.”

APPLIED TO THE RUSSIAN/UKRAINIAN WAR

Russia, was never really punished for the takeover (encroachment) of the Crimea and, given that lack of resistance, confidence that the U.S. would never get militarily involved in Ukraine and Putin’s own definition of what is historically Russian, he had no qualms about going into Ukraine. He was “entitled”.

Of course Russia’s incursions and wars involving former soviet states are nothing new, usually justified as needed to protect Russian speaking partisans, as in the Battle of Grozny in 1994, the second Chechen War of 1999 and the “protective” invasion of Georgia to save S. Ossetia and Abkhazia resulting in the

fact that Russia controls about 20% of Georgia today.

As abhorrent as Putin's actions have been, did the United States truly negotiate with Russia to avoid this war or did the government of the U.S really want to see the war begin? The liberal press in the U.S. won't even ask that question. It is the main question being asked by the conservative press.

We knew that Putin's hot button was his demand that Ukraine never become a member of NATO. The U.S. refused to negotiate on that issue. It would have been so easy to sign an accord (U.S., Germany and France could have forced other NATO countries to fall in line). Then Mr. Putin would have what he said was the thing he most wanted. If, on top of that, he still invaded, we would have known his true intentions and the agreement would have been shredded.

Instead, we have a president and his administration who were in dismal shape in nearly every poll previously; a president who has now become a "war time" president, acting

very presidential – a leader of the free world, if you will. Not one U.S. service member at risk, but we’re going to station thousands of them in Poland and Romania, where on days off our service members will be found snacking on pierogis in Krakow and sarmales in Bucharest.

Yes, indeed, a large segment of conservatives believe that Russia’s invasion was just what the U.S. Government was hoping for – most negatives become of lesser importance on the home front, and president Biden is viewed as a leader of countries on the international stage.

The only problem with the latter being statements Biden made this past week telling U.S. troops they were heading for Ukraine, calling for regime change in Russia and, when asked what he would do if Russia used chemical weapons, Mr Biden stated he would respond, “in kind”. The conservatives were all over this like a tent. France’s, Mr. Macron, thought advocating regime change ill advised. So Mr. Biden’s White House staff plus Secretary of State, Blinken have had to walk back and clarify the president’s statements, after which that got walked back as the president said

everything he said was accurate, but at the same time essentially denied saying these things when interviewed by Peter Doocy of Fox news. But, not too worry, along comes Don Lemon of CNN to assure us all that this is just a tempest in a tea pot, a hatchet job on the president by the conservative media.

Then, too little, too late, poor Mr. Zelensky is offering an olive branch to Russia saying he would be willing to agree that Ukraine will never join NATO- will be a neutral country. At the same time, he won't agree to give up any territory. With Russia now on the verge of a complete takeover of the Mariupol area, Russia will have a land bridge connecting Crimea with the other breakaway regions of Ukraine in the east. Conveniently, all that territory abuts Russia and is delineated by a major highway on the western side, which becomes a ready made new border. From a supply/support standpoint, Russia should be able to manage this land mass very satisfactorily. The likelihood of Putin giving up these territories? Slim and none.

Bret Stephens, in a 3/30 column posits that Putin should be, “treated as a canny fox, not a crazy fool”, suggesting that Putin never had an ultimate goal of taking all of Ukraine. Having seized what he now has is more than enough.

By taking over eastern and south eastern Ukraine, Russia has great new ports and Ukraine becomes essentially land-locked. Ukraine’s east (now under Russian control) contains Europe’s second largest reserves of natural gas (after Norway), the break away provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk contain an enormous shale-gas field and the Crimea has huge off-shore energy fields.

Stephens goes on to say, “The shape of Putin’s ambitions become clear. He’s less interested in reuniting the Russian speaking world than he is in securing Russia’s energy dominance.”

What Stephens does not mention is that if Russia can hold this territory they would basically control the flow of agricultural and mineral products from all of Ukraine to the rest of the world because most of those products must move by sea. Shipment by rail

through Poland or Romania, and then further trans shipment to distant seaports would be extremely costly compared to the “mild” export/import fees Russia would require to access their newly “acquired” shipping locations. Why try to take over all of Ukraine militarily when you can carve out such a lucrative piece of the country’s economy? Obviously, Russia can’t try to take too many nuts out of the jar and strangle Ukraine, but a partnership, however uncomfortable, would have to be established between the two countries.

No question, Putin is an awful person conducting an inhumane war, but clearly, the U.S. chose not to pursue every avenue to avoid this situation. Now, it appears Putin will keep his new valuable real estate and Ukraine may agree never to seek NATO membership. That’s called, “eating your cake and having it too.”

BACK TO LEWIS CARROLL

An interesting coda to compare with Putin’s ambitions – encroachments/entitlements, as Putin continues a history of retaking pieces of the old Soviet Union, with future targets likely

**in view. The Walrus, of course is the stand-in
for Putin.**

**Viewing the young oysters about to be no
more:**

“ ‘It seems a shame, the Walrus said,

To play them such a trick,

After we’ve brought them out so far,

And made them trot so quick!’

The Carpenter said nothing but

‘The butter’s spread too thick!’

‘I weep for you, the Walrus said:

I deeply sympathize.’

With sobs and tears he sorted out

Those of the largest size,

Holding his pocket handkerchief

Before his streaming eyes.

'O oysters' said the carpenter

'You've had a pleasant run!

Shall we be trotting home again?'

But answer came there none-

And this was scarcely odd, because

They'd eaten every one."

Your faithful scribe,

PB