

Kiev or Kyiv? #KyivNotKiev



A difference in spelling the name of the capital city has emerged since the threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine was first mooted. The shift indicates an almost universal reluctance to use the former *Kiev* as it is a transliteration from the Russian Cyrillic alphabet. The new (to us in the West) *Kyiv* is the local Ukrainian usage. Thus, solidarity in a spelling bee can be shown with those of us who are horrified at the increasing terror of Russian imperialism and accompanying military violence towards a near neighbour.

Indisputably, there are many historic, cultural, linguistic, religious and familial ties between the two countries but this is no excuse, as Russian propaganda makes it, for a wholesale and increasingly bloody takeover. The annexation of Crimea¹ in 2014 was indeed made the easier by the fact that it is, at least in part, culturally and was politically until 1954², Russian. The recent eight-year war of attrition in the Eastern part of Ukraine was much more contrived and bankrolled by Russia.

These complexities are hard to understand but nearer to home there is the analogous British imperialistic policy towards Ireland since the time of the Tudors. Today this has left a divided island with a 'loyalist' North and a now independent South. Sadly, the post Brexit outcome of Britain's 'taking back control' has destabilised what had proved to be a largely successful peaceful and prosperous settlement within the European fold.

Meanwhile, back in Ukraine, relatives and friends are now pitched against each other. The fact that the Ukrainians have thus far put up such a brave and spirited resistance is remarkable, even to the point of arming civilians. Unexpectedly, the largely conscript army of Russia, whilst it is numerically much larger and militarily better equipped, is obviously struggling. The danger now is that a politically beleaguered Vladimir Putin will contemplate using the terrifying thermobaric bombs that literally suck the life out of their victims or even *in extremis* turn to his nuclear option in the literal sense. He has already put his nuclear forces on 'special alert'³.

In short, Europe is now seeing the like of which has not happened since the Second World War, almost beyond living memory. The Western response at first faltering is now gathering pace at least in terms of economic sanctions, although these will take time to have effect and any real sanction is still wanting.

Again, not seen since the middle of the 20th century large numbers of European refugees are now on the move. Warmly welcomed by European countries such as Poland the British response has been at best lukewarm. Hardly able or rather seemingly reluctant even to tackle the problem of Russian oligarchs in London, the British government is not covering itself in glory or setting any real example. This is an isolationist position that is not compensated for by a Prime Minister who (having had a smarten-up haircut) might find that dashing around Eastern Europe

giving pseudo-Churchillian speeches is a convenient distraction from his own leadership problems at home.

At least on Sunday 27th February churches up and down the nation heeded a call from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to observe the day as one of prayer for Ukraine⁴. Turning things over to the Almighty in prayer is a good thing but as St Teresa of Avila reminded us, it is we are now those with the hands, feet and eyes of Christ to show compassion⁵. In this case it might be good to add to the mix some political clout and call on the government at least to be more generous towards refugees. If the Church doesn't get more involved too its *Kiev* will be no more effective than the chicken dish associated with the old Russian name.

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¹ The status of Crimea is disputed. In 2014 The Republic of Crimea declared its independence from Ukraine following a disputed referendum on 16th March, deemed illegal by Ukraine and most countries, which was held on the issue of reunification with Russia. The official results showed over 90% support for reunification, but the vote was boycotted by many loyal to Ukraine.

² In 1954, the Soviet Union transferred Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic from the Russian. This transfer to Ukraine was made by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, who it is said was drunk at the time!

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60547473>

⁴ <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/churches-prepare-national-day-prayer-ukraine>

⁵ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/66880-christ-has-no-body-now-but-yours-no-hands-no>