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Here’s how a real American leader would have responded at the U.N. to Putin

Unlike Trump, American presidents like Ronald Reagan actually understood how to play a winning hand against paper tigers like Putin

By **Brett Wagner, J. Holmes Armstead**, Contributors
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A portrait of former President Ronald Reagan hangs above President Donald Trump as he speaks to reporters in the Oval Office on Feb. 13 with Howard Lutnick, who is now commerce secretary. Reagan might have dealt with Russia differently from Trump.

Ben Curtis/Associated Press



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Here’s how a real American leader would have responded at the U.N. to Putin

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On Tuesday, our president stood before the United Nations General Assembly on the occasion of its 80th anniversary and delivered, what was for all practical purposes, an almost hour-long MAGA rant.

Several embarrassing minutes, of course, telling the global community how great he is, were followed by telling our allies that their countries “are going to hell.”

Trump went on to claim credit for resolving seven wars (some real, some imagined) and declared, as he always does, that his buddy Vlad would have never invaded Ukraine on his watch.

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The problem is — that's what Russian President Vladimir Putin is essentially doing right now. This weekend, for example, Russia hit Ukraine with the single largest drone attack yet in the war.

Recent premeditated attacks by Russia have violated NATO airspace with dozens of drones designed for everything from kamikaze missions to extending the operational range for future air assaults. It marked the first time NATO has been forced to engage an enemy over its territory.

The fact that none of these drones appeared to be armed only advances the notion that they were never intended to hit Ukraine, but to test the resolve of the Atlantic alliance following the recent meeting of the Putin fan club in Anchorage: Donald J. Trump, president.

It's all a far cry from the distant days of American diplomacy, when American presidents like Ronald Reagan actually understood how to play a winning hand.

The Gipper, of course, would already have a bone to pick with the former reality star for pirating his trademark 1980 campaign slogan "Let's Make America Great Again," and then, for all effective purposes, switching sides in what still is — whether we like to call it that, or not — the Cold War.

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Our adversaries may have changed names three decades ago, dropped the hammer and sickle, but the weapons are still there. More than 5,000 nuclear warheads, to be more specific. Plus, they're aggressively pursuing hypersonic first-strike capabilities.

Simply put: Putin is no man to be trusted.

No sooner had the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Russia, concluded, for example, than the host of those doping-disgraced games broke the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, where Moscow promised, in exchange for Ukraine's share of the Soviet nuclear strategic arsenal, never to invade Ukraine.

Spotting a moment of weakness, Putin flooded the Crimean peninsula with Russian troops and claimed it as his own.

Fast forward to 2022, when the emboldened Russian dictator decided it was time for a full-scale invasion, a quarter of a million strong, with the goal of claiming the entire country of Ukraine.

Unable to achieve the speedy victory he believed was his for the taking, thanks in part to extraordinary support for Ukraine from the Biden administration, Putin then waged a years-long brutal and savage war of attrition, mostly against civilians and cities, with drones, bombs, missiles and, of course, thousands of Russian and North Korean conscripts that he treats like cannon fodder.

This monster even targeted the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Europe's largest. If Zaporizhzhia were hit directly, there would have likely been an even larger disaster than when the Soviet Union mismanaged Ukraine's other now notorious nuclear power plant, Chernobyl, resulting in the world's largest nuclear meltdown.

Again, this guy is not to be trusted — a now obvious lesson, but one Trump has not demonstrated he understands.

Enter Ronald Reagan.

Unlike Trump, Reagan would have done his homework — and learned, after watching nearly three years of this brutal war

unfold, that Moscow was no longer a superpower.

Far from it.

Rather than negotiating from a position of strength, Putin is little more than a struggling dictator, having suffered nearly a million casualties, having lost thousands of tanks and hundreds of airplanes, and who was, in the end, unable to overcome a neighbor with less than one-third the population.

A struggling dictator who was now presiding over a rapidly declining economic base. Who, according to some accounts, barely survived a coup attempt by the head of the infamous Kremlin-backed international mercenaries, the Wagner Group, which staged a march on Moscow before being turned back less than 100 miles from the capital.

So, let's get real: Had Reagan been our president these past few months, things would be going very differently right now.

First, in consultation with our allies, he would have declared the two invasions of Ukraine by Russia to be unlawful.

He would have immediately declared a no-fly zone over Ukraine and the airspace of our NATO allies. Supported, of course, by inserting sufficient air resources with fighter and fighter-bomber squadrons, supported by ground-based air defense battalions along the front.

Putin would have no choice but to come to the table, tail between his legs.

No nuclear saber-rattling with Reagan. Putin would know better. The United States enjoys complete strategic dominance in that realm as well. And, what's more, Putin would know he could never, ever, in a million years, push Reagan around the same way he does Trump.

It's hard to say what Reagan might do next. He might strike a deal with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, for example, to lease the naval base where Russian ships now anchor. Were that to happen, one might reasonably assume that elements of the U.S. Navy's Fifth and Sixth fleets, including at least two fast attack carrier groups and one

amphibious ready group, with an embarked Marine expeditionary unit, would already be passing through the Bosphorus, entering the Black Sea, dwarfing Russian capabilities there.

So, if we were to parse this down to just a few words, what would Reagan have told Putin?

“Get the hell out of Ukraine, or else.”

Knowing there wasn’t a damn thing the struggling dictator could do about it.

End of discussion.

Of course, Trump is no Reagan. And neither would anyone expect him to be. But just minutes following his U.N. address, Trump seemed to have the secular equivalent of a “Come to Reagan Moment.”

After meeting behind closed doors with Zelenskyy, Trump posted to Truth Social that [he now thinks Ukraine, with Western support](#), could “take back their country in its original form.”

From the “paper tiger” that is Russia.

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We couldn’t agree more. But achieving victory and a lasting peace will take more than words.

And, of course: Trump Always Chickens Out.

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