

David and Goliath
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Folklore across the world tell tales of giants, something that seem fixed in the human psyche. The ancient Greeks tell of the Titans, a pre-human species, one of whom stole fire from the gods and gave it to humans. The titan who did this was horribly punished by the gods for this.

The Bible story of David and Goliath describes in detail how young, small shepherd David became his tribe's hero by slaying the enemy's special warrior, a giant named Goliath. David managed to do this in one well-aimed rock in a slingshot.

In Homer's Odyssey, a malevolent one-eyed giant holds Odysseus and his ship's crew hostage in a cave. They blind the monster's one eye, and escape.

Grimm's Fairy Tales bring us medieval stories about giants: Jack the Giant Killer and Jack and the Beanstalk. In both, young humans outwitted giant adversaries, usually by trickery and help from the giant's wives.

In all of these stories, humans prevail by wit, overcoming the advantage of size of the giant. There is a universal inclination to cheer on the small one, as is happening today with the struggle between Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russia's Vladimir Putin. They are the same size, but their respective countries are not.

Putin's short size is an issue with him, compensated by his competence at wrestling and some lifts in his shoes, and his inferiority complex is hidden by his athlete's strut. Until recently, he faced the world with a face that looked like the cat that had swallowed the canary. His face now shows rage and lust for revenge.

Zelenskyy has no inferiority complex, nor need he have one. When he first appeared on the scene as the newly elected president of Ukraine, we all marveled that a TV comic could actually run a country. What we didn't know until recently that he has a law degree, is a wonderful actor and writer, and ran a TV company that was hugely popular both within Ukraine and in Russia too. What we never expected was to see this man morph into a splendid war leader who daily gives indigestion to Putin.

Putin believes his own propaganda because nobody dares challenge him. He is vengeful over the collapse of the USSR and plots to reabsorb one-by-one all the now-independent parts of the former Russian and Soviet empires. In some (in Central Asia) he has planted Russian populations and puppet leaders-for-life. In Eastern Europe, he is running into more difficulty doing this because of the US created NATO organization, created to prevent Russia from becoming the new Russian Empire again.

While he was still rational, he just walked into a part of Ukraine, Crimea, and took it without a shot fired. Outraged Europe and the US were taken by surprise and did not want to risk a nuclear war to challenge Putin. He had gotten away with the same trick in Georgia a few years earlier. Then he launched into a ten-year slow-motion insurgency on the Ukraine border with Russia. The Russian speaking region, initially pro-Russian, now knows that they are Ukrainian, not Russian.

Fareed Zakaria's splendid Sunday morning program featured a one-hour special interview with Zelenskyy (March 20), and we learned more about this unexpected leader. Putin calls him a Nazi, a shameless lie about this Jewish Ukrainian whose entire family either died at the front as soldiers fighting the Nazis or in Nazi concentration camps. Zelenskyy's father was the only survivor in his family and was a colonel in the army with medals for bravery.

We met Zelenskyy's young family, two children and a beautiful wife, who have remained in Ukraine, along with the Parliament, despite offers of safety from the US.

Zelenskyy seems never to sleep. He has addressed Parliaments in Britain, France, Israel, Canada, and Congress in the US. In all, he gets standing ovations.

We are witnessing something unusual in the world: a leader with values beyond reelection. His face reflects decency, intelligence, fearlessness, and reminds us all that heroism does exist. Zelenskyy's Ukraine is fighting the first war of democracy against dictatorship.
We are in it together.

686 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of "How Do You Know That? Contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net.