

Random Notes



From the desk of Michael Willard, chairman of Willard International. Random Notes are written for a few special friends of Willard (the agency and the guy).

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The Power of the Maidan



Sergey Fonomarev—The New York Times/Redux
Dec. 12, 2013. Ukrainian and European Union flags fly over the newly-erected barricades at Independence Square in Kiev, Ukraine.

I think it is easy to underestimate the power of the *Maidan* and its influence on world events. Many people already have.

Predictably, the media spotlight has switched to other parts of the world, pushing the Ukraine headline off the front pages and into the “news roundups”. Someone the other day in the U.S. indicated to me that “Ukraine fatigue” was setting in.

Ho-hum.

Many journalists have been re-assigned to Iraq and Syria. It was as if the giant camera filming important world events had simply moved to another sound stage.

In my view, this is *dangerous*—not because of any great wish for Ukraine to remain in the spotlight—but because it is so short-sighted. The spirit of Maidan is a talisman for future protests and righting wrongs around the world.

Because of Maidan, people tired of corruption and autocratic leadership will be surprised at what they can achieve.

My guess is that the leaders of China, Turkey, Belarus, Venezuela and we know Russia (among others), closely watched the events on Maidan to determine what imperialistic and incompetent President Yanukovych did wrong.

In reaction, Russia mounted a translucent (for most thinking people) propaganda barrage, invaded and occupied Crimea, and sponsored terrorism in Donetsk and Lugansk regions. "I'll show those *'Little Russia'* upstarts," Vladimir blustered.

I believe this was more a Putin temper tantrum than a well-thought out strategy. It was strictly re-active.

The *Lizard of Oz* in the Kremlin can bare his chest all he wants, but I believe he's scared as hell, wondering what will happen when a petrol-economy collapses and he is left with only a gaggle of oligarchs as diehard supporters.

My wife and I were on the Maidan that November evening when there were 200 people protesting Ukraine's shift away from the EU. We were disappointed in the numbers, and went away thinking the embers of protest were dying.

However, before morning, after we had long since turned in, riot police raided and heads were bashed. That incident brought hundreds of thousands of protesters from all areas of Ukraine and from all political persuasions.

A hundred years from now, the history of Maidan and the 100 heroes who died in February will be a highlighted chapter, not unlike the stories of America's revolution. It will be one of the country's proudest moments.

A *miracle* happened on the Maidan. People went against overwhelming odds to fight not just for a European trade agreement, but for a transformation from an autocratic kleptocracy to all the values Europeans and Americans hold dear.

This should mean something to the west. If it doesn't, the values of Europe and America mean little to anyone.

Meeting the Media: Some Pointers

The story goes that entrepreneur *Richard Branson* walked up to a bank of cameras at a news conference and, addressing the journalists, quipped: "I sure hope you have questions for all my answers."

The reporters laughed. They shouldn't have.

Branson had every intention of delivering his messages and had no plans of going beyond them. The Branson story is an old one.



It is the job of newsmakers to deliver their *messages*. It is the job of the media to ferret out news. Often, these two assignments are on the same wave length, but not always.

Having worked both in the PR and the journalism worlds, I recognize various myths and truths associated with the interaction of legitimate news and well-intentioned newsmakers

- “I got only bad questions at the news conference. “ This is a common complaint when an interview didn’t come out as well as expected. The fact is, however, there are no bad questions, *only bad answers*.
- “All that reporter cared about was selling newspapers.” Journalists rarely make the connection between the job they do and selling newspapers or air space. They just want a good story.
- In an advertisement for his CNN program, Larry King Live, the former host remarked: “A good interview is when the person being interviewed answers the question asked.” No. A good interview is when news is made.
- “I went off the record, but they quoted me just the same.” Never go off the record on really sensitive matters that would embarrass you if they were printed or broadcast.

There are cases, of course, where the newsmaker has his or her idea on what to make news and the journalist wants to ask about something else entirely, or pursue a totally different angle.

This is a legitimate arena for mental combat and where effectively communicating messages is *important*.

The relationship between journalist and newsmaker is adversarial, though it needn't be unfriendly. This is necessary to facilitate a *free press*, and for the journalism community to maintain its role as society's watchdog.

And now, stay tuned for this commercial but really good message....

Urainia: A Fable



For a while, I thought time had by-passed my last year's novel, *Urainia: A Fable* which is out in both English and Ukrainian. It took a book presentation at Chitay-Gorad store in Kyiv and a word from the Malaysian ambassador to convince me otherwise.

At the presentation, there was a lot of enthusiasm for the satirical novel about what could happen if a leader in an emerging country suddenly decided his legacy for his children and grandchildren was much more important than riches.

Besides, as I suggested during the event, one can only live in one room of a mansion at a time, and one's bottom can only sit in one automobile at a time.

Ambassador Chuah Teong Ban suggested that the novel was sufficiently close to the scenario that occurred in Ukraine that I could take credit for having second-sight. I had not had my first cup of coffee when I saw him, so I agreed (*Hey, I'm in PR*).

Fact is, the book is sheer entertainment. "Your characters pop so much you can almost dance with them," said David Burke. David should know. He's no slouch, having written and produced such hits as "Law & Order" on TV.

If you go to *Amazon.com*, there's a smorgasbord of books by Michael Willard both fiction and non-fiction, including my latest about Ukraine, a thriller called "***A Thief Wears a Burning Hat***". Still available also is "***Killing Friends***", and the biographical "***Optimistic Alien***".

I also welcome you to visit the Willard Reader website at www.michaelwillard.org. On it are a collection of my books, paintings and songs I have written that have been recorded by my son, Rob.

Have a great July.



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