

Ambassador Dmitry Polyanskiy about Russian Foreign Policy



On April 6, 2019, Utah Valley University had the honor of hosting Dmitry Polynaskiy, the Russian Ambassador to the UN Security Council. The event began with some background on Ambassador Polyanskiy. He was born in Moscow, and went on to study at Moscow State University, with a special interest in Arabic. Soon after, he became Russia's Ambassador to Poland. After serving in that position for several years, he was chosen to be the director of the Russian Institute for CIS countries. He was eventually chosen to be one of key diplomats of Russian Federation at the UN Security Council and he continues to serve in that position. Mr. Polyanskiy began by saying that he wanted us, the students, to ask questions so that we could dictate and choose what we wanted to talk about. He offered a short 5-minute intro, explaining how his goal on the Security Council was to explain and defend Russia's interests. He talked about the difficulties of the job, stating that he has "to find common ground and cooperate with very different countries." His main job is to deal with world peace and security issues. The speech was then opened up into more of a discussion, and the first student asked about the ongoing situation in Donbass, Ukraine, and whether or not the Ukrainian election would influence the situation at

all. This question sparked the ongoing theme in the debate, and that was that we need to find as many sources of information as possible, and not to trust the mainstream media. Mr. Polyanskiy argued that the situation is simplified in the media as a story of Russian aggression, and that there was so much more to the story. He then went back in time and began to explain the origins of the conflict in Ukraine. He explained to the students that in Ukraine, there is a large Russian speaking population that were very similar to the Russians in culture. When the USSR collapsed, Crimea was asked if they wanted to be a part of Russia. According to Mr. Polyanskiy, the citizens of Crimea wanted to join Russia. As Russia and Ukraine began to develop relationships with the West, Russia asked the EU if residents of Crimea could be allowed to choose which country to be a citizen of. This idea was shot down by both the EU and the US. After giving the students about ten minutes of background on the issue, Mr. Polyanskiy began to explain the ongoing issue in Donbass. The desire of the citizens to be Russian citizens became violent, and it resulted in 45 people being burned alive in House of Trade Union. Ukrainian Military eventually intervened in the situation, and it continued to escalate. According to Mr. Polyanskiy, Russian “volunteers” went to aid in the situation, but they were not military members or sent by the government, they were Russian citizens sent to help the situation. These volunteers had military training but were not military members. Ukraine tried to prove that Russian military members had influenced the situation, but according to the speaker, were not able to and therefore delegitimized Ukraine’s stance on the situation.

As the discussion continued, two themes emerged. One was that we must seek as many sources of information as possible on certain issues, and the other was that foreign governments need to stay out of other country’s business. Mr. Polyanskiy pressed the issue that Washington needs to stop interfering in Russia’s relations with other countries, and that US media only pushes one narrative. When asked about Venezuela, he held the stance that the world needs to stay out of the power grab going on, stating that the world should not decide who their president should be, it is up to the citizens and the constitutional rules of Venezuela. He believes that all the countries that declared Maduro an illegitimate president violated international law. The Venezuela topic led to some pretty heated arguments, as students began to ask why Russia did not care about the humanitarian emergency in Venezuela. Mr. Polyanskiy once again held that it is not the world’s job to get involved in another country’s government. He ended by saying that we need to challenge ourselves to find other sources of information, and not to believe everything we see.

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