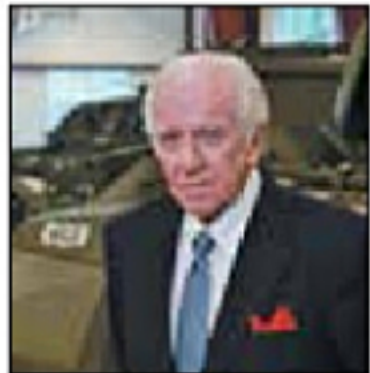


OPINION

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The stark history of World War II has a new and terrible chapter



Lawrence KADISH

Suddenly, the study of World War II has become as relevant as the hourly news update.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is following a playbook in Ukraine that is stunningly reminiscent of the events that led up to World War II.

Consider: His not so clandestine military support over the years of those seeking to annex eastern Ukraine to Russia follows the same strategy that the Third Reich pursued in the months before they were welcomed by cheering crowds in Vienna. In that instance the Austrian Nazis had already dismantled potential opposition by murdering Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss as part of their calculated plan of sustained and bloody political violence and intimidation.

Taking another chapter from Hitler's playbook, Putin has claimed Ukraine is an historic part of the Russian empire, suggesting that, given the number of Russians in Ukraine, it's time for Ukraine to "come home."

In 1938, the Sudetenland was part of Czechoslovakia whose borders were drawn after World War I. Inside that region were a number of citizens of German heritage. Hitler declared these in-

dividuals should, by blood, be part of his new Greater Reich. He threatened war if those provinces weren't ceded to Germany. Western Democracies proceeded to capitulate in what would become a craven act of historic appeasement that dismantled Czechoslovakia. By 1939, Hitler would take over the rest of the country without firing a shot. The Reich dictator said at the time that it was his last territorial demand in Europe.

While out of power but very much an astute observer, Winston Churchill told then British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, "You were given the choice between war and dishonor. You chose dishonor and you will have war."

Putin has made bizarre claims that Russians have been subjected to genocide in Ukraine for which there is absolutely no evidence. In his latest speech Putin maintains, "The so-called civilized world, the representatives of the self-proclaimed western colleagues, they act as if they do not notice anything. As if nothing is happening, as if this nightmare did not exist."

And yet Hitler made the same claims that Germans were being targeted in the Sudetenland and used to further justify his takeover of a sovereign nation.

Nor is a violent false-flag strategy that seeks to justify a naked act of aggression unique to Putin. Hitler's strategy was the same on Sept. 1, 1939, when he announced before his fellow Nazis in Berlin, "This night for the first time Polish regular soldiers fired on our own territory. Since 5:45 a.m. we have been returning the fire, and from now on bombs will be met with bombs...I will continue this

struggle, no matter against whom, until the safety of the Reich and its rights are secured."

Historians would uncover documents after the war that "dead German troops" at the border were concentration camp inmates dressed in German uniforms and shot by the SS.

Now, American intelligence reports that Putin has drawn up a list of Ukrainian intellectuals and patriots who will either be executed or sent to the gulag after their invasion. Based on Stalin's gruesome legacy, it is doubtful the Gestapo could offer useful pointers.

These parallels between Putin and Hitler are not just the actions of two despots who crush human rights while dispatching tanks to gain empire. It is probable that few American students understand that what they are seeing has historical precedence. The reason for that is simple. History has become marginalized in the classroom. While science, math, and technology are critical to our future, understanding our past is nothing less than vital in navigating an unforgiving world. Yet, in school districts across Long Island, there has been a steady retreat in class time devoted to history as the Board of Regents abandons studies as a teaching mandate.

The legacies of World War II and the Cold War that followed are not just in our family scrapbooks. Another chapter is being written today on every border of the Russian frontier. It is a lesson for every student and those who instruct them in their classroom studies.

Lawrence Kadish is president and founder of the Museum of American Armor, Old Bethpage Village Restoration.