



COMMENTARY

As Putin bullies Ukraine, signs of European unity

George F. Will

Eighty Januarys ago, Russia's winter was the West's ally. After the ill-equipped German army's disastrous 1941-42 winter there, Winston Churchill told his nation: "There is a winter, you know, in Russia. ... Hitler forgot about this Russian winter. He must have been very loosely educated."

Today, hard-frozen ground would facilitate the movement of heavy Russian weaponry against Ukraine. There is, however, accumulating evidence that Vladimir Putin's ongoing bullying and dismemberment of the largest nation entirely in Europe, Ukraine, might further European unity.

On Jan. 1, Finnish President Sauli Niinisto pointedly said that his nation's freedom of "maneuver" and "choice" could include "applying for NATO membership."

Paraphrasing Henry Kissinger, he said: "Whenever avoidance of war has been the primary objective of a group of powers, the international system has been at the mercy of its most ruthless member."

The same day, Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin said, "We have shown that we have learned from the past; we will not let go of our room for maneuver."

Finland's past includes fierce resistance that astonished the invading Soviet army during the 1939-40 Winter War.

Furthermore, it was in Finland in 1975 that 35 nations, including the Soviet Union, signed the Helsinki Final Act, affirming, inter alia, "rights inherent in and encompassed by (each nation's) sovereignty," including "the right to be ... party to treaties of alliance."

Four days before the Sept. 30, 1938, Munich conference ratified the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, Hitler said: "This is the last territorial demand I have to make in Europe."

In Putin's March 18, 2014, address following Russia's invasion of Crimea, he said: "Do not believe those who want you to fear Russia, shouting that other regions will follow Crimea."

"We do not want to divide Ukraine; we do not need that."

The word "need" was ominous: Putin's "needs" mutate and he feels entitled to seize what he needs.

The loosely educated Putin plagiarizes a previous aggressor's playbook, so remember Sept. 1, 1939, when Hitler told the Reichstag, "We have been returning fire since 5:45 a.m."

The previous evening, SS soldiers dressed as Poles seized a radio transmitter and called for the Poles to take up arms against the Germans at the German border town of Gleiwitz.

This false-flag operation was Germany's excuse for "returning fire."

The war began.

The Putin regime's propaganda includes lurid fabrications about Ukrainian provocations, including "genocide" against ethnic Russians. Abusing Ukraine comes naturally to Putin, who is Stalin's spawn.

Last month Russia's supreme court abolished Memorial, the post-Soviet-era human rights organization whose first mission was to document Stalin's crimes, including the engineered 1932-33 Ukraine famine. This was genocidal in intent and effect: Approximately 3.3 million died.

At its worst 10,000 were dying each day, more than the 6,000 who perished daily at the peak of the Auschwitz exterminations. The Russian prosecutor charged that Memorial "creates a false image of the Soviet Union as a terrorist state."

The event that precipitated the crushing of Memorial might have been its October screening of a film about the famine.

Putin is revising the Brezhnev Doctrine, which stipulated that commu-



Russian President Vladimir Putin observes a military exercise in Russia's Nizhny Novgorod region in September. The implicit Putin Doctrine is that Russia is forever entitled to a sphere of influence over other nations, comparable to the Soviet Union's.

Last week, however, Josep Borrell, the European Union's principal foreign policy official, issued a warning. Anticipating U.S.-NATO negotiations with Russia about Ukraine, he said the E.U. should be involved: "We are no longer in Yalta times. Spheres of influence for two big powers do not belong" in 2022.

At the Yalta Conference (Feb. 4 to 11, 1945), Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill negotiated the postwar settlement of Europe.

Four months before that, at an Oct. 9, 1944, meeting in Moscow, Churchill passed to Stalin a sheet of paper with proposed percentages of postwar influence that the allies would accept for the Soviet Union in some European countries: Romania 90, Bulgaria 75, Yugoslavia and Hungary 50, Greece 10.

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In his war memoirs Churchill insisted that he urged Stalin to burn the paper and said the percentages were meant to pertain only to "immediate wartime arrangements."

The minutes of the meeting do not indicate that Churchill said the percentages were to be temporary.

Three days later, Churchill showed W. Averell Harriman, U.S. ambassador to Moscow, a letter he intended to present to Stalin, affirming the percentages.

Harriman in his memoirs said he firmly objected, saying that President Franklin D. Roosevelt would "repudiate the letter if it was sent."

The Biden administration should be similarly brusque in rejecting any Russian demand that derogates any European nation's sovereignty.

Will is a Washington Post columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bibb, Gray need to support efforts to save Shaker Square

As a friend of Shaker Square and a Cleveland voter, I wanted to ask newly inaugurated Ward 4 Councilwoman Deborah Gray and Mayor Justin Bibb to support the ordinance to save Shaker Square and avoid the cost and risk of a yearlong foreclosure process.

It was good to see Gray's email contact information on the City Council website on the day she took office. Sorry to say that, as of Saturday Jan. 8, a week after Bibb took office, our Cleveland City Hall website has not published an email address for citizens to use to contact our new mayor.

Arnold Berger, Cleveland

A history of inequities needn't be our future, too

Regarding the Jan. 5 commentary "History texts deliver a skewed lesson for girls," thank you for featuring on your Forum cover Micaela Wells' essay exposing a systemic, top-down, gender-based bias in the textbook used in her Advanced Placement history class. It is refreshing to see America's young people justifiably asserting themselves.

Her words bear repeating: "As we work toward women's equality, education is holding us back. Here in 2021, young women are told we can make history and achieve anything. But that's difficult to believe when history curriculums marginalize or ignore women's accomplishments."

Our history of inequities — as true as it is — is what it is. Consider, and not rhetorically, will we ever correct the Declaration of Independence's words "all men are created equal," to read, "all (people) are created equal"?

One solution lies in the heart of the phrase inscribed above the entrance to the U.S. Supreme Court: "Equal Justice Under Law." We need to establish centers for equal justice under law at the collegiate level in every state. Said centers would provide the permanent infrastructure to sustain a fact-based awareness and dialogue for the development and implementation of better ways and practices to eliminate injustices and pernicious biases.

Lou Horwitz, St. Peters, Missouri

Vouchers undermine Ohio's ability to educate all students

In his Jan. 9 column, "Ohio Democrats are at a loss," Thomas Suddes opposes the lawsuit filed by 100 Ohio school districts to block the state's EdChoice school vouchers as unconstitutional. Suddes contends that school vouchers give poor people a school choice. He ignores that the funds for the vouchers are extracted from Ohio's School Foundation budget, which provides the state's funding for public education.

In some school districts, the state undermines the district's capacity to provide adequate education by spending more money on the vouchers students carry to private schools than what the state invests in the much larger number of students enrolled in the district's public schools. The Ohio Constitution protects a uniform system of public common schools for all of Ohio's 1.8 million students.

Jan Resseger, Cleveland Heights

Why no masks among visitors at hockey game?

I attended a kids' hockey game in Cleveland Heights on Saturday. Apparently, COVID-19 hasn't hit Wooster yet because all the parents and relatives in the stands were unmasked during the game and afterwards, even though there was a sign on the door urging everyone to wear a mask.

Or maybe those Wooster parents feel safe in Cleveland Heights because we all mask up.

Anne Billington, Cleveland Heights

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