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Remembers the Lessons of World War II

What's happening today is alarmingly reminiscent of that era. We can't afford to ignore the parallels.

Пам'ятаємо уроки Другої Світової Війни

Те, що сьогодні відбувається, тривожно нагадує ту епоху. Ми не можемо дозволити собі ігнорувати ці паралелі.

Друга світова війна, що підігрівалась брехливою пропагандою і ненавистю, перетнула державні кордони по всій земній кулі, пише у своїй статті повірений у справах посольства України у Вашингтоні Ярослав Брісюк. "У ході цього конфлікту вся українська територія була зайнята і спустошена як нацистською, так і радянською "машинами війни". Втрати серед населення нації були шокующе-величезними - не менше 40% від усіх втрат в колишньому СРСР. Україна втратила 14 млн. своїх синів і дочок, якщо врахувати убитих на полі бою, мирних громадян, а також жертв концтаборів і тих, хто був примусово депортований", – продовжує він. "Однак є явні і страхітливі паралелі між подіями в Європі, які передували Другій світовій війні, і тим, що відбувається на Україні сьогодні. І тоді, і нині потенційні завойовники намагалися применшити значення давно усталених і загальноприйнятих правил поведінки на міжнародній арені: вони поступово переставали з ними рахуватися, одночасно "брязкаючи зброєю", щоб відмовити інших від втручання в ситуацію", – йдеться в статті.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-remembers-the-lessons-of-world-war-ii-1430934483>



ECHOES: There are clear and chilling parallels between the events leading up to World War II and what is happening today in Ukraine. Photo: Andrew Kravchenko/Pool/REUTERS

This weekend we commemorate the end of World War II, the deadliest conflict in the history of humankind. Fueled by false propaganda and hatred, the war crossed boundaries across the globe, unsparing of civilians of all nationalities and races alike. For Ukraine, it was a particularly dramatic and blood-draining fight.

In that conflict, the entire Ukrainian territory was invaded and laid waste by both the Nazi and Soviet war machines. Casualties for my nation were shockingly high, amounting to at least 40% of overall casualties of the former Soviet Union. Ukraine lost 14 million of its sons and daughters, including those killed on the battlefield, civilians and victims of concentration camps and those who were forcefully deported. Some 720 Ukrainian cities and 28,000 villages were turned into ruins, many of them never to be rebuilt completely.

As we approach the 70th anniversary of victory in that war, we must remember the spirit in which nations and their people fought and the high price they paid for their liberty and peace.

After the war, the world community established legal and institutional safeguards to prevent future wars. The United Nations, of which Ukraine is a founding member, as well as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, were put in place to protect the fundamental principles of respect for human rights, sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as to delegitimize the threat or use of force in international relations.

Yet there are clear and chilling parallels between the events in Europe that preceded World War II and what is happening in Ukraine today. Then as now, would-be conquerors sought to play down long-established and generally accepted rules for international behavior by gradually flouting them while engaging in saber rattling to discourage intervention.

In 2014, through a staged, sham referendum in Crimea, conducted at the points of guns held by Russian soldiers, the Kremlin attempted to illegally annex the Ukrainian peninsula, in flagrant violation of the most fundamental norms of international law. Since then, Ukrainians, Tatars and members of other nationalities have lived there under a shadow of fear, suffering from political, linguistic and cultural oppression.

Right after annexing Crimea, Russia went on to destabilize Ukraine's east, using Russian operatives to take over Ukrainian government buildings. The Kremlin installed its puppets and flooded Donbas with Russian militants and weapons, including tanks, artillery and rocket systems, such as the ones with which the separatists brought down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, killing 298 innocents.

For more than a year now, Russia has fueled this war, continuing to send soldiers, weapons and ammunition, claiming at the same time that it has nothing to do with the "internal conflict," and that disgruntled locals who hate the "Kiev Nazi junta" are waging a full-scale battle against the regular Ukrainian army. Russia's war against Ukraine has left more than 6,100 people dead, more than 15,500 wounded and more than a million displaced.

Today, the aggression continues. Russia and its separatist proxies continue to violate the Minsk agreements. Since the cease-fire was proclaimed on Feb. 15, Ukrainian positions have been shelled almost 3,000 times, 86 Ukrainian servicemen have been killed and nearly 500 wounded.

By waging war against Ukraine, Russia's President Vladimir Putin is trying to force the world into recognizing a Russian sphere of geopolitical influence using the bogus pretext of defending Russian-speaking populations from imaginary threats. He uses the memory of World War II as an instrument of propaganda against the West and neighboring countries. He also deliberately sows antagonism among people whose ancestors fought side by side against the Nazis.

Russian propaganda labels as collaborationists those in Ukraine and other post-Soviet states who stood up to both Nazi and Communist regimes. At the same time, it seeks justification for Stalin's crimes, including the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, which divided Eastern Europe between two of the most evil tyrants of the 20th century.

A clear lesson from the past is that appeasing the aggressor isn't going to bring peace and security. To prevent the conflict from escalating in Ukraine and spilling over into other countries, it is important that Ukraine's partners in the U.S. and Europe not only maintain but also increase their pressure on the Kremlin.

Without a doubt, sanctions on Russia are an effective tool and must be kept in place, but Ukraine must also receive the weapons it needs to be able to deter Mr. Putin from further adventures and to defend itself. Having voluntarily given up the world's third-largest nuclear arsenal under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum in exchange for security assurances from the West, this is not too much to ask.

Celebrating the 70th anniversary of V-E Day, we must remember that it takes a "global village" to ensure that the universal rules put in place after World War II to prevent future wars are observed by everyone. It is better to learn from history than to see it repeated.

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