

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Putin and his siloviki

For the March-April *Alberta Doctors' Digest*, I devoted my article to the truckers' convoy and its need to be viewed in the light of systemic shifts in the country. It was an account of the confusion and division in Canada in the middle of February. And as a post-script, it was a reminder of the civilized way police cleared the streets compared to many less fortunate parts of the world.

But as Harold Macmillan, former UK Prime Minister, said when asked what was the most difficult thing about being Prime Minister: "Events, dear boy, events."

On February 24, events swept the truckers' convoy and the *Canada Emergencies Act* off international and local stages, replacing them with the multi-pronged, unprovoked, illegal invasion by Putin's Russian army, navy and air force, of their neighbour, Ukraine. Russia, the world's largest country, spanning 11 time zones, attacked its recently democratic neighbour – a country having the outrageous audacity of voting for a leader, a mere comedian, who wanted to rid the country of the succession of Putin puppets and at least try to become a servant of the people in order to reduce corruption, cronyism and bullying.

A massive force of Putin's military has destroyed homes, hospitals, theatres, railway stations, airports and ports. They have tortured, raped and massacred innocent citizens. Four and a half million human beings are now refugees from their country, mostly women and children. Many more have had to abandon their homes.

"What is right and what is wrong by the Law, by the Law,

What's right and what is wrong, the weak arm and the strong,

The short sword and the long, for to draw, for to draw,

The short sword and the long for to draw."

- *Scots Song (verse 2) arranged by Robert Burns: "Ye Jacobites by Name."*



The heroes of this war will not be Putin and his forces (photo credit: Gayatri Malhotra, unsplash.com)

It was quickly obvious who had the long sword and who had the short, but in a world that's come to expect "leaders" in the face of an overwhelming attack to take flight, the determination and courage of the Ukrainians and their leaders to stay and fight brought a huge international wellspring of support for the underdog and swift contempt for the invaders. The heroes of this war will not be Putin and his forces, who will go down in history as despicable war criminals who torture, rape, and murder civilians. The heroes will be the out-numbered, out-gunned Ukrainians and their president, Volodymyr "I don't need a ride. I need ammunition" Zelensky.

The main difference between a true, functional democracy and a fake, façade democracy/autocracy are independence of institutions, freedom of speech and fraud-free elections at regular set times. We know through bitter experience the truth of the aphorism "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Wars have been fought over the centuries to get rid of corrupt leaders after five to 10 years.

And if ever there was a profound argument in support of our "inefficient, chaotic" democracies compared to an autocratic government where the addled will of a dictator living an absurd dream, with the support of an inner circle of siloviki (those charged with wielding coercion and violence in the name of the state) and some fifty cowering flunkies, can send hundreds of thousands of troops to slaughter their neighbours, it has been with this unhinged despot sitting in grand isolation in the Kremlin.

Who can forget the video clip of Putin, the Great Dictator, sitting on a dais in the gilded Hall of St. Catherine with his "advisors" cowering 30 feet away, individually called up to a lectern, grovelling, stuttering and stammering their agreement to all his plans for the invasion of Ukraine?

"What makes heroic strife, famed afar, famed afar,

What makes heroic strife to whet the assassin's knife,

And haunt a parent's life wi' bloody war, bloody war,

And haunt a parent's life wi' bloody war."

- *Scots Song (verse 3) arranged by Robert Burns: "Ye Jacobites by Name."*

Dear readers, please take the time to look at weird photographs of the wee wanna-be Napoleon, riding on horseback – a wee horse for a wee man – torso naked, staring imperiously down and to the left. Inspiring, eh? Though it would be better had he had breast reduction surgery before casting off his shirt for these crackpot snapshots. Or shake your head at video clips of the Man of the Black Belt showing a child how to throw his opponent with a simple judo move. Have you noticed how he walks with his right arm stiff by his side?

But it's the Russian propaganda machine built over the years that is the comrade of our Vlad, Russia now a fully totalitarian state. It's chilling how a captive population can deny that the Russian army is reducing towns and cities to rubble and massacring their fellow Slavs – Ukraine's citizens – all the while "liberating" the place from "Nazis" then blaming these crimes on the Ukrainians. You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but not all of the people all of the time (attributed to Abraham Lincoln).

Here's some advice for Putin's propaganda machine. If you want some "useful idiots" (Stalin's phrase) in the free world to believe these dopey releases, how about injecting a truthful headline after every other stupid denial? There's a fable even Monsieur P may have heard of called *The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf*. No, not Sergei Prokofiev's delightful 1936 musical, *Peter and the Wolf*, written to illustrate the ingenuity of Soviet youth, but Aesop's fable of the shepherd boy tending his sheep at the foot of a mountain near a dark forest. The lonely lad longed for companionship, so he rushed to the nearby village shouting, "Wolf, Wolf." The villagers came out to help him. This pleased the lad so much that the next day he tried the same trick, and again the villagers came to help. A day later a real wolf came out from the forest. The boy cried "Wolf, Wolf," louder than before. But this time the villagers, fooled twice, thought the boy was again lying. Nobody came to help. The wolf made a good meal of the boy's flock.

A repeated liar will not be believed even when telling the truth. Will anyone other than the captive Russian population ever believe anything that comes out of Russian media? The Russian army is now portrayed as "triumphant" – sustaining minimal casualties and certainly not committing atrocities. Au contraire, according to Putin's state media, it's the Ukrainian army committing atrocities – torturing, raping and murdering their own civilians; sustaining heavy losses; and losing territory. Based on what they're seeing on state TV, Russians have every reason to be proud.

According to Nic Robertson, CNN's International Diplomatic Editor based in London who has had a lifetime focus on armed conflict:

"The propaganda of the Russian Federation promotes the Russian government and a Putin personality cult. The Russian government has also been highly active in debates on Soviet history. Russia now has a number of organizations such as the *Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests* and others rewriting Russian history to justify and recreate the long-gone Russian Empire. One of the program's major projects was the creation in 2005 of *Russia Today* (now known as RT), an English language TV news channel providing 24-hour coverage; it is a continuation of the old Soviet propaganda services. Putin has ruthlessly unleashed the compliant and complicit state apparatus he has built onto the Russian people."

But this is all likely fake news according to another genius Putin Cheerleader, Donald John Trump.

I'd recommend *BBC World News* for getting news on the war. They have seasoned journalists on location in war zones, and they always try to confirm by independent observation any bulletin received from both sides and explicitly state when no confirmation is available. I'm glad to say that the CBC is also doing a good job reporting the war with experienced on-the-ground correspondents like Edmonton's Margaret Evans.



"An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile hoping it will eat him last" - Winston Churchill (photo credit: Kyle Nieber unsplash.com)

"Then let your schemes alone, in the state, in the state,

Then let your schemes alone in the state,

Then let your schemes alone, adore the rising sun,

And leave a man undone to his fate."

- *Scots Song (verse 4) arranged by Robert Burns: "Ye Jacobites by Name."*

All the evidence shows the paranoid Putin is immune to appeasement. After Georgia, Chechnya, Syria and Ukraine, whatever happens there, he will scheme to attack Moldova, then the Baltic States, Hungary, even Poland. He'll have his finger hovering over the nuclear button. But the dreadful reality is that he must be faced down. No appeasement will work with this person. Yet he must be stopped.

And his scheme? His dream? It's noble, man. To recreate the Russian Empire of old with beaten-into-submission, loving, devoted citizens paying fealty to The Great Liberator. To Make Russia Great Again. Hmm, maybe Britain should invade the Republic of Ireland? It was part of Britain till a hundred years ago. Or maybe England

should make plans to sort out the pesky Scots. Unfortunately most of the Russians who could see through this pathetic, tragic charade have fled the country or are in prison – or have been assassinated.

And the lessons for us all in the relatively free world? Most important of all, we must whole-heartedly support the efforts of the brave people of Ukraine and those Russians who stand up to this smug, dangerous man. Some sort of pyrrhic victory for Putin will have to be manufactured to end this tragic, criminal fiasco. And at a lower level, those in political or administrative positions might best restrict their times in office to five to 10 years to allow fresh ideas to flourish – and I'm not thinking of anyone in particular here...

And we must all burnish our skills at listening to all sides of a question, figuring out who can be trusted, who is trying to manipulate, what are their incentives – all the while cognizant of one's own prejudices and biases.

I'm expecting a visit shortly from the FSB (successor to the KGB).

Slava Ukraini! Banner image credit: [Gayatri Malhotra](#) on [Unsplash](#)