

Letters to Financial Times, February 28, 2014

Lesson for Ukraine is that resistance worked for Finland.

Sir, Geoffrey Roberts appears eager to give Stalin's aggression against Finland in 1939-40 a pass by suggesting he was motivated only by the need to strengthen Leningrad's security and by the fact that Finland later joined in the German attack on the USSR ("The real lessons..." letter Feb 26 2014).

Mr Roberts neglects to mention, however, that in 1939-40, Stalin was Hitler's ally by treaty and the Soviets' initial defeat at the hands of little Finland caused Hitler to doubt Soviet military competence and capability, emboldening him to contemplate early the invasion he would undertake a year later.

It is also the case that under the Nazi-Soviet pact, Hitler not only acceded to Stalin's wish to take eastern Poland, but also the Baltic states and to invade Finland, as part of a larger design to reconstitute Tsarist imperial hegemony. That Stalin settled for less in Finland was dictated by the exigencies of the moment: it is doubtful he could have sustained an occupation of the Finnish capital, particularly after heroic Finnish resistance, much less withstand an Anglo-French intervention.

Finland joined in the attack on Russia in the same spirit as did Spain: out of anti-communism and because of her recent victimization by Stalin. Like Spain, she remained neutral in the war in the west, and for this reason retained her independence after the war, and given the proximity of her Soviet neighbor, which had become a behemoth, she had no choice but to remain neutral in the cold war.

The real lesson for Ukraine is that resistance worked in Finland under more difficult circumstances, that Putin's Russia pales in significance to Soviet power, and that Ukraine now has the real chance to leap to the west under the rubric of self-determination that Lenin, after all, had acceded to her in 1917 (however much he may have reneged by 1924).