



## Op-Ed on BizPacReview March 2, 2022

[Opinion](#)

# When will we learn?

March 2, 2022 | [Richard Battle](#) |

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You've likely heard the famous quote from Winston Churchill, "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Churchill was a student of history who recited example-after-example from the books stacked in his extensive library.

As a lifelong Texan and a history buff like Churchill, it's hard to wrap my head around why in personal, family, business, and public governance, so many of us continue to ignore history when confronting present-day challenges?

For example, the first week of March 1836 in Texas could offer parallels to the first week of March 2022 on the world stage.

Ask any Texas elementary school student why March 2, 1836, is important, and they'll fill you in. Thousands of American frontier families settled into the Texas province of Mexico in the 1830s and, in doing so, automatically became Mexican citizens. After Mexican strongman dictator Santa Anna ignored the 1824 Constitution and abused his people, those tough Texans proudly declared their independence from tyranny on March 2, 1836. After Sam Houston led the Texas settlers to win the war at San Jacinto on April 21, 1836, Texas became a free republic, which is how they remained until 1845. On December 29 of that year, Texas and its freedom-loving citizens were admitted to the Union as the 28<sup>th</sup> state. Adios, Senor Santa Anna.

The Texan desire for freedom, the resolve to fight for it, and the gritty response to Santa Anna's actions secured their liberty. Sound familiar? It applies to your personal life as much as it does to those on the world stage.

Whether you're watching the fictional story in TV's *Yellowstone*, dealing with business issues at work, or horrified by the unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine, you can see similarities in the exercise of power and human interaction.

While more dramatic, the obstacles faced by the Dutton family in *Yellowstone* relate to real families and businesses because they illustrate there are few new problems; nearly all have been faced by our predecessors. Learning from their mistakes and successes will benefit us today; the immutability of human nature enables us to glean wisdom from history to deal with the present.

The present-day Russian invasion of Ukraine and the political tough talk but scant action from the world's leaders is strikingly similar to the 1930s playbook used by Neville Chamberlain during Adolph Hitler's expanse across Europe. William L. Shirer's *Berlin Diary* documented Hitler's ascension and use of power to obtain as many objectives as possible with the most negligible risks and costs.

Putin may be no Fuhrer, but he has learned to utilize power from Hitler and other blindly ambitious leaders. With his resources limited, it is a good bet Putin's objective is to extract the maximum number of concessions using the same strategy.

There are common traits among most power-hungry, self-ambitious leaders at all levels, which, if identified, can help us repel their aggression. Most will.

- Respect strength and exploit weakness
- Watch their opponent's actions and ignore their words
- Seek maximum victory with minimum risk and cost
- Make small aggressions testing opponents' resolve before larger moves
- Exercise some patience if opposed, knowing weaker leadership will eventually oppose them

We can also look to history for examples of strong leaders successfully facing self-ambitious bullies, as illustrated by President Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis and by President Reagan when confronting the former Soviet Union in the 1980s.

Both men showed strong responses to blind ambition to deter it, revealed their previous leadership experience (which increased their credibility), proved a quick responsive action to aggression is better than strong words, and showed that strong and quick responses to the aggressor's blind ambition sent the not-so-tough-guy to softer targets.

Whether the matter at hand is a bully in the schoolyard, tangling with *Yellowstone's* fiery Beth Dutton or international geopolitics with real-world implications for millions, the principles of human interaction are fundamentally the same, and scores of historical examples repeatedly prove it time and time again.

Let's all say a silent prayer not only for the brave and resolute men, women, and children of Ukraine but also that our leaders realize human progression through time doesn't change how we relate to one another. They might want to open a history book for some guidance for the future.

As Sam Houston said, and all Texans say, "remember the Alamo!"

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