

# OPINION

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## Putin's war forces us to revisit our relationships



Howard  
FENSTERMAN

What irony it will be when we look back at how Russia's bloody invasion of Ukraine began to heal America's political divide.

Over the last unprecedented five years, business relationships and personal friendships have fractured and fallen over national politics and public policy. What used to be a respectful debate among colleagues regarding Democratic or Republican positions became an inflammatory series of sneers, rhetoric, and catcalls.

With no room for reasonable discussion, business colleagues began to block each other on social media platforms as part of their efforts to dismiss another point of view. Otherwise thoughtful individuals became embedded in their own dogma and ideology. Relationships began to distort and shatter as politics became more and more extreme. It left no room for the possibility that the other point of view had any validity.

One result of this dangerous direction in our national discourse was that it began to create serious stress lines in our democracy – an objective that has long been the strategic intent of nations hostile to our global leadership. We created our own "Fifth Column" of hate that presented an existential threat to freedom of speech and a legacy of thoughtful examination of any and all issues.

Unfortunately, this experience has not been unique to our nation. In the days leading up to Imperial Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor America was fiercely divided over whether to assist a beleaguered Great Britain reeling from the victories of Nazi Germany. The isolationists had powerful allies in their corner and championed "American First."

No less a celebrity as Charles Lindbergh was publicly warning that America confronting Hitler was solely the work of President Franklin Roosevelt and the Jews.

He told a radio audience in 1941, "No person of honesty and vision can look on their pro-war policy here today without seeing the dangers involved

in such a policy both for us and for them. Instead of agitating for war, the Jewish groups in this country should be opposing it in every possible way for they will be among the first to feel its consequences."

It took the devastating attack on Pearl Harbor to unite a country at a time when such destructive and hateful language was part of the national dialogue. Even on Dec. 8, 1941 we were not a nation with the singular purpose of confronting evil until Hitler declared war on the United States days later.

In the wake of the attack on Ukraine and the threat Russia poses to Europe, America has collectively recognized that when we disparage our fellow citizens over domestic politics we are directly assisting a despot who believes a weakened, dispirited democracy has neither the will or the weapons to confront his aggression. History records he is the not to first underestimate America.

To paraphrase a nervous Japanese admiral who masterminded the Pearl Harbor attack, all Putin has done is to awaken a sleeping giant fully capable of putting aside its bitter political differences to confront evil. Putin has allowed us to refocus and reassert our leadership. Our challenge will be to maintain that sense of American solidarity when Putin is forced to acknowledge his disastrous invasion has created a far stronger, far more vigilant democracy.

It might be helpful to reflect on the fact that our nation's flag includes the colors blue and red, colors that news cable columnists casually use to label our various states and their supposed political leanings. They miss the point. Those colors don't represent separate camps. They represent Americans all who have now been dramatically reminded that our enemies have an agenda that depends upon us to see colors as opposed to our fellow citizens. It would not be inappropriate to remind ourselves that we have all pledged allegiance to that flag and in doing so, the words "one nation, under G-d, indivisible." It is a moral imperative that we maintain that pledge, and by doing so, make our nation stronger.

The people of Ukraine already know the power of that kind of pledge. It is time we relearned it.

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## On baseball's new rules: Say it ain't so



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ROSENBERG

Hey baseball fans! Put an asterisk after the inked 2022 agreement between Major League Baseball and its players.

One could suggest it requires that special notation because we all experienced an historic 99-day MLB imposed lockout, which avid fans will remind us was the second longest work stoppage in baseball history. But that's not it. You could also make a case that it's about the league's tone deaf approach to hiking minimum player salaries from \$129,500 to \$700,000 at a time when galloping inflation is robbing the earning power of everyone in the bleachers. But that's not the reason for an asterisk either.

How about the loss of tiebreaker games that have traditionally added drama in determining who will advance towards competing for that World Series ring? Alas, MLB is adopting a version of what the National Football League uses to determine ties which can only be explained by the number of injuries on the gridiron. Close, but still not the reason for the asterisk. For those who have long despised the Universal Designated Hitter rule, get used to it. This contract agreement will see the National League use the designated hitter as a regular component of the game. NOW we are getting closer to the asterisk.

Consider this clause in the 2022 agreement: "Shortened Period For (the Baseball) Commissioner To Implement On-Field Changes." Until now the Commissioner had the power to unilaterally make on-the-field rule changes with one

a change of the rule's midseason! Baseball management thinks this is going to improve the game. This baseball fan thinks that it stinks.

The changes expected to be imposed under this new rule include a 14-second pitch clock with no runners, a 19-second pitch clock with runners, limitations on defensive shifts, and the use of larger bases. (These changes will not take effect until the 2023 season which gives us plenty of time to start watching more exciting LI Ducks games.) And this is where the asterisk belongs because it will have a direct, adverse, and deadening effect on the game.

Let's agree that while baseball may try to improve the pace of play, eliminating such basic tactics as preventing the defense from shifting their field position based on who is at bat is beyond absurd. It will contribute to a further distancing of fans to the action that attracted us in the first place, that precise moment when a pitcher seeks to defeat the batter. Even Bugs Bunny knew the element of the game when he defeated the Gas House Gorillas by telling the audience, "Aah, I think I'll perplex 'em with my slowball!"

Sports commentators have observed, "...hitters tolerate strikeouts so they can try to hit home runs; pitchers tolerate home runs so they can try to rack up strikeouts. Viewership has slowed along with the sport..."

After a 99 day lockout you would have thought owners and players would have decided on a far more effective way of improving the pace of play. Instead, as one fan said trying very hard to stay connected to the game, "What this MLB contract has accomplished is allowing our national pastime to transform itself from a calculating game of chess to a pedestrian contest of checkers."

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