

Vlad the Assailer

The violent history of Eastern Europe resulted in the classic horror character Dracula being created by the Irish author Bram Stoker in 1897. Stoker based his vampire character on a Romanian ruler named Vlad Tepes who, in the 15th century, committed incredible atrocities like impaling thousands of captured people on felled trees. Nice guy.

For this, Tepes was called "Vlad the Impaler."

Now we have Vladimir Putin, the Russian martinet, who is orchestrating the violence in Georgia in order to show the world that the Russian military is back in fighting form. Using the old Third Reich ruse of "protecting" ethnic "Russians" who are living in Georgian territory, Putin has launched a violent action that has angered most decent people.

For this, Putin should be known as "Vlad the Assailer."

But why is Putin doing this? Well, like Dracula, it is in his blood. As a former Soviet Secret Police director, Putin has no problem using harsh methods to achieve his goals. Under his former presidency, Russia turned into a crime-ridden state where dissenters (and Putin's business competitors) were routinely beaten, imprisoned and, on occasion, murdered.

No question in my mind that Putin is a thug and is still calling the shots in Russia despite the election of his protégé, Dimitry Medvedev, as President.

Putin's vision is a Russia that dominates the countries on its borders and competes with the United States and China for global influence. He has done everything he can to weaken America, even selling Iran sophisticated weaponry including the Tor-MI air defence system as well as 500 surface-to-air missiles. Obviously, Putin is no friend of ours.

The United States has tweaked Putin back by supporting Georgia's entry into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and that is the crux of the current conflict. Realizing that the Bush administration cannot handle another armed conflict right now, Putin decided to show the world that he could punish America's friend, Georgia, without a meaningful response. He has succeeded in doing that.

Down the road, either John McCain or Barack Obama will have to deal with Vlad the Assailer. This dour, brutal man senses weakness in both America and Europe, weakness that will drive him to become bolder. The only thing a guy like Vlad understands is the stick.

But how to wield it—that is the question. As with Iran, diplomacy is not likely to deter Putin, because Europe needs Russian natural gas and oil and is not likely to challenge Russia by supporting sanctions. So it will come down to the USA vs. Russia, mano-a-mano.

Putin is one tough customer. It will be interesting to see if the United States will elect a leader who can effectively neutralize him. Because if that does not happen, old Vlad, like Dracula, will commit scourge on the countryside.