

D day

Imagine the fear and the adrenaline rush for those young men in 1944 as the landing craft beached and opened them to German fire for the first time. There were many who had to brave the privations and dangers of the soldiers life as the largest amphibious landing was underway against Germany's brutal fortress Europe. We owe them all so much, that for 79 years now many European peoples have been able to live in democracies freed from Nazi tyranny and mass murder.

The US and U.K. had to bring together a huge army, massive supplies, and a large seaborne force to ferry them. The airforces had to control the skies, drop troops behind enemy lines and bomb enemy defences. There were innovations including floating harbours, a pipeline under the ocean, adaptations of fighting vehicles to tackle mine strewn beaches. There was superior Intelligence and carefully placed disinformation to allow some surprise.

It should serve as a reminder that we need to keep strong defences and use diplomacy backed by lethal force to deter and prevent evil triumphing again in the way it did in 1940 s Europe. It is a worry that war stalks Europe again in Ukraine, with continuing tensions in countries near Russia's borders and in the Balkans. The foundations of NATO emerged from the Allied victory in 1945. With the emergence of a modern Italy and Germany pledged to democracy and Western values they too came to join the Alliance.

NATO was tested by the Cold War against the USSR. The Alliance allowed Russia to dominate countries like Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland that wished to revolt against Soviet rule, whilst preventing and deterring any further expansion of the USSR westwards. The tensions over Russian missiles going to Cuba with US missiles in Turkey brought war close, narrowly avoided by diplomatic exchanges.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gorbachev reforms gave us the opportunity of a new and improved relationship between a Russia shedding reluctant USSR member states and a NATO with no territorial claims of its own. Unfortunately in recent years the opportunity has slipped away, with a mutual suspicion bringing back a new kind of Cold War. Mr Putin's wish to recreate a wider Russian zone of influence has spread to invasion creating challenges for NATO.

1944 can remind us that the resolve of the democracies, slow to rouse, can bring victory over tyrannies. It should make both sides to the current tensions and both combatants in the Ukraine war want to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.