

Le Québécois Libre



Montreal, August 15, 2004 / No 145

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OPINION

INTERVENTIONISM LEADS TO WAR, WAR GENERATES MORE INTERVENTIONISM

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by Chris Leithner

One of today's biggest threats to (or perhaps absurdities of) Western civilisation is that more and more people are passing longer and longer periods of time in universities and are receiving greater numbers of more advanced degrees. Alas, the "outputs" of Western degree factories can be as shoddy as the widgets produced in Soviet industrial plants. As Sir Robert Menzies, Australia's longest-serving Prime Minister (1939-1941, 1949-1966) put it in 1951, "the amount of muddled thinking and speaking that can proceed from minds that are supposed to be improved by university degrees in some cases is quite baffling to me."

Yet these minds seem to conform to the intention of these degrees' designers. Western credential-holders are more – not less – susceptible to their rulers' relentless cant, myths, omissions, misrepresentations and blatant lies. A good example occurred on 6 June 2004. On that day politicians from Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Russia, the U.S. and other countries congregated in Normandy. They did so ostensibly to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied France. But they drew inadvertent attention to an enduring lesson whose implications are very different from the "spin" they intended to convey.

The speeches, ceremonies and news coverage on 6 June, considered as a whole, invited their viewers and readers to accept three sets of conclusions. First, despite Vladimir Putin's presence it was implied that Anglo-American – and particularly American – armed forces conquered Nazi Germany. More generally, Allied governments and Western democracy were inherently good and Hitlerism was innately evil. Further, Western governments' interventionist policies were unarguably virtuous; and the extinction of Nazism, which commenced on the beaches of Normandy, confirmed both these governments' nobility and their policies' efficacy.

A second set of conclusions is closely related to the first. National Socialism was sui generis. Perhaps it had something to do with the German "national character," but Allied countries played absolutely no role in its rise during the 1920s and 1930s. Similarly, major Western governments bear none of the blame for the start of the Second World War. More generally, Msrs Blair, Bush and Howard seemed to say on 6 June, military interventionism led by America and dutifully supported by Britain and other British countries is not just the most appropriate way – it is ultimately the only possible way – to vanquish evil.

A third set of conclusions links past triumphs to current tribulations. Nazi totalitarianism and Islamic fundamentalism ("Islamofascism") are cut from the same cloth. Each is inherently evil; each targets the

good, noble and innocent; and just as Rome destroyed Carthage and sowed salt into its fields, America, ably led by its neo-conservatives and supported by like-minded leaders in other countries, must uproot and destroy Islamic fundamentalism. Nothing else, say the neo-cons, will preserve and protect the West's intrinsic decency, nobility and innocence.

A few truths, many misrepresentations, omissions, and lies

These three sets of conclusions contain a few important truths, many misrepresentations and omissions, and some brazen lies. With respect to the first set, Nazism was certainly fundamentally evil. But it is much less certain that Western interventionism defeated it. Few Americans, Britons or other Westerners know – or care – that in June 1944 the Red Army also commenced a massive offensive. It involved 1.2 million Soviet soldiers, 4,000 tanks, 24,400 cannon and 5,300 aeroplanes, and its front line extended from Leningrad in the north to Odessa in the south. In these respects it was much bigger than the Normandy invasion – indeed, it was arguably history's largest military operation. It cost more than 500,000 lives and produced one of the war's most decisive victories. At its conclusion towards the end of the northern summer, large parts of the German Army were shattered and the stage was set for the Red Army's drive into Poland and Germany.

If Stalingrad was the end of the beginning, then the puncture of the Ukrainian and Normandy fronts in 1944 was the beginning of the end. It therefore seems reasonable that the Anglo-American and Soviet campaigns were individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions of the destruction of Hitler. If so, then the critical point is that Nazi totalitarianism was defeated at least as much by another evil, Soviet totalitarianism, as it was by the Western welfare-warfare state.

With respect to the second set of conclusions, to say that America, Britain and France had nothing whatsoever to do with the rise of National Socialism, or more generally that Western interventionism had nothing to do with the Second World War, is not just flatly false: it breeds costly delusions that have bedevilled Western politicians to this day. During the Great War, which is the primary cause of the Second World War, Britain enforced a blockade that cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of German civilians. After the Armistice – which Germany signed on the basis of Woodrow Wilson's idealistic Fourteen Points – the blockade nonetheless continued and cost further hundreds of thousands of lives in Germany and Central Europe. Again mocking the Fourteen Points, at Versailles in 1919 British and French politicians, together with Wilson, imposed upon Germany the absurdly unjust notion that it was solely responsible for the war; and Britain and France forced upon it reparations that were extraordinarily harsh and – they suspected but did not care – impossible to fulfil.

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According to Herbert Hoover, who moved heaven and earth in order to feed millions of hungry mouths during and after the war, the Treaty of Versailles was “an abomination” that would “pull down the whole continent” and “contained the seeds of another war.” A prominent British economist, John Maynard Keynes, concurred. In [*The Economic Consequences of the Peace*](#) (Penguin, 1919, 1995) Keynes savaged the American, British and French politicians who framed the Treaty. He also prophesied that the amount and manner of payment of reparations would cripple Germany's economy and tempt its politicians both to kindle inflation and repudiate the Treaty (which they did). These provocations and retaliations, in turn, would exacerbate hatred, provoke rearmament and ultimately incite another war (which they did).

Western politicians did these abominable and self-destructive things because they believed their own propaganda. For half a century, many people in France had bitterly resented and sought to avenge the results of the Franco-Prussian war; and since the late nineteenth century, many Britons had feared the growing ability of German industry to produce more and better products at lower cost. The result was a lengthy, extraordinarily vitriolic and quite effective campaign of anti-German and anti-Wilhelmine hysteria

(see, for example, Cate Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning: Propaganda in the Great War*, Allen Lane, 1977, and Thomas Fleming, *The Illusion of Victory: America in World War I*, Basic Books, 2003).

The Anglo-French hatred of Germany produced the British blockade during the war and the onerous terms of the Treaty thereafter; these things, in turn, helped to wreak economic devastation, chaos and despair in post-war Germany. They also generated outrage and resentment, and eventually enmity and lust for retaliation. These catastrophes of policy – not to mention the mammoth bungs at the Bank of England and Federal Reserve that helped to turn a recession in 1929-1930 into the Great Depression – contributed to a climate in Germany in which evil madmen could and did thrive. The Great War thus set in motion a train of extremely costly unintended consequences. They included not just millions of deaths in 1914-1918, but also the subsequent collapse of [classical liberalism](#) and the [classical gold standard](#), the rise of totalitarianism in Germany and Russia, an even more terrible war and the Holocaust.

American, British and French politicians' illusions and delusions, then, did nothing to mitigate and indirectly and inadvertently encouraged the rise of Hitlerism. During the Second World War, these delusions mutated into Americans' and Britons' refusal even to consider the possibility that an internal opposition to Hitler might exist, and therefore into an implacable insistence upon unconditional surrender. This policy lengthened and intensified the war. Like the Allies' deliberate decision to bomb German civilians, it cost hundreds of thousands of lives.

It is equally false to say that the Second World War produced peace – at least in the sense that our forebears knew it after Waterloo and before Sarajevo. To hold this position is to distract attention from another series of catastrophic miscalculations. It also excuses their major progenitor. Franklin Roosevelt's breathtakingly naïve attitude towards Joseph Stalin (FDR felt he “understood Stalin,” believed that the Soviet dictator had a “sincere desire” for peace so that he could make “industrial and social changes” in Russia that would lead to “true democracy”) was premised upon his delusion that he could charm this mass murderer into becoming a liberal democrat and help his country turn into a Slavic version of New Deal America (see John T. Flynn, *The Roosevelt Myth*, Fox & Wilkes, 50th Anniversary Edition, 1998, and Thomas Fleming, *The New Dealers' War: FDR and the War Within World War II*, Basic Books, 2001). The Second World War, like the Great War, produced a range of costly and unintended consequences. Perhaps the most notable was the Cold War (and its “hot” outbreaks in Korea and Vietnam).

The unheralded lesson

The fundamental lesson, then, obscured and ignored at the recent commemorations in Normandy, is that interventionist politicians inevitably make calamitous mistakes. The most costly of these mistakes is total war. The errors committed during war, in turn, inescapably generate yet more interventionism – which typically leads to yet more war. To reflect upon the myths, omissions and lies uttered on 6 June is therefore to recognise that politicians are too arrogant or stupid (or, more likely, both) – and that journalists are too lazy and academics too venal – to grasp this hard lesson. The most disturbing spectacle on that day was the sight and sound of politicians, especially Msrs Blair, Bush and Howard, who were either oblivious to the historical record or resolved to ignore it (and are thus bound to repeat it). Consciously or otherwise, they took the easy option of mouthing their usual litany of cant and lies, and of associating themselves with the memory of slaughtered farm boys and factory hands.

After two world wars, what have we in Europe? An economic reality that is remarkably similar to one envisaged a century ago. Wilhelmine Germany's aims, viewed with a century of hindsight, were modest. It sought an acknowledgement of the obvious fact that it was Europe's biggest economy. Good fences make civil neighbours, and to keep Russia a safe distance from its eastern frontier it wanted independence for Poland and the Baltic states. If goods do not move freely across borders, then (as the French classical liberal, Frédéric Bastiat, argued) soldiers will. To provide a bigger market for its manufactures, Germany also sought a free-trade zone encompassing France, Italy, the Benelux countries, Scandinavia and Austria-Hungary. Germany aspired, in other words, to a role much like the one it plays today (see Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 1998). But for decades British and French politicians utterly refused to countenance it; and because of their obstinacy – and American politicians' disavowal of George Washington's noble and wise [Farewell Address to the American People](#) – scores of millions had to die.

Extrapolating this point, what will the Anglo-American politicians' idiotic "war on terror" achieve? Many completely futile deaths and much hatred for many years. Grieving the death of his only son during the war to end all wars, in 1919 Rudyard Kipling wrote "if any question why we died, tell them because our fathers lied." Peace will not come until these politicians abandon what they arrogantly believe is their right – to treat the Arab and Muslim world like pawns on a chessboard, drawing its boundaries, making and breaking incompatible promises, constantly meddling in its affairs and establishing and supporting puppets that oppress local populations. During the twentieth century, American, British and other politicians' illusions and delusions did nothing to mitigate – and indirectly and inadvertently encouraged – the rise of extremism. Today they are doing exactly the same.

A just and enduring peace can come only if governments stop contributing to a state of affairs in which extremists thrive. And given their appalling historical form, that will take an unconscionably long time. In the mean time, Australia must indeed adhere strictly to a pro-American policy. Critically, however, it must be "pro-American" in the proper sense of that term – one, alas, that is utterly alien to the Commonwealth Government. As Amir Butler puts it in an outstanding article, [Australia Must Follow Washington](#) – George Washington, that is.

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