

# Irish Foreign Affairs

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“Every nation, if it is to survive as a nation, must study its own history and have a foreign policy”  
—C.J. O’Donnell, *The Lordship of the World*, 1924, p.145

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## Editorial

### The Three Ingredients of Progress

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The Irish state had friendly political relations and profitable trade relations with Iraq when Iraq was a secular state whose social culture was developing on European liberal lines.

Then Britain and the United States decided to wreck the Iraqi State on the flimsiest of excuses—on the basis of an excuse that was a dressed-up pretence. The pretence was that Iraq just might possibly have some weapons of mass destruction—or, if it hadn't, that it had the intention of getting them at some point in the future if it was not destroyed.

The Irish Government went along with this pretence—at least in the sense of not disputing it—and it gave as much assistance to the invasion of Iraq as was required of it by the United States.

It might be said in defence of the Irish Government that the Irish state is a small, weak, marginal element in the life of the world, and that, if it had refused to comply with United States requirements, it would have been punished for it by Washington—and the invasion would have gone ahead regardless. In fact, that is what was said by Martin Mansergh on its behalf.

What this means is that Ireland is too weak to have a foreign policy. And it was certainly the case in 2003 that it was too weak to do anything but what was required of it by the Great Powers. The honourable thing to have done in those circumstances would have been to discard the pretence of foreign policy on the ground that the condition of the international order put it beyond the reach of small states.

But the weakness was only partly a matter of external compulsion. It was chiefly a matter of weakness of character. De Valera had established *de facto* Irish independence with an infinitely more difficult act of foreign policy. And Charles Haughey had acted in the De Valera spirit in the Anglo/Argentine War—and was only condemned for it by his own Department of External Affairs, whose chief had become habituated to doing what was required of it by others ever since Taoiseach Lynch disowned his own Northern policy under mild British pressure in 1970 acting through the Irish Opposition.

The war in Iraq is still going on, and there is no end in sight. If something resembling a settlement had been concocted in a year or two, it seems a virtual certainty that there would have been a war of destruction on Iran.

Iran was saved from invasion by the way things developed in Iraq. It would probably have survived invasion because it is a historic state with roots going back to a time before Europe was invented and its internal social composition is coherent—unlike that of Iraq, which was thrown together hastily by Britain for an Imperial purpose without regard to viability.

Invasion of Iran around 2004 was considered to be too reckless even for the United States. Washington, which is not used to restraining itself, restrained itself. It preferred war but it decided instead to destroy Iran by means of the global money system which it has been constructing ever since 1945. But Iran

survived the sanctions. And it is now a major player in Middle East politics, active in Iraq, and supporting the secular state in Syria which Britain and the USA are intent on destroying.

And, of course, the war in Afghanistan is on-going.

The resurgence of Islamism, as a comprehensive alternative to Euro/American culture, which the United States stoked up and financed and publicised for the purpose of undermining the internally-constructed Afghan state supported by Communist Russia, shows no signs of decline.

*War With Everybody* was the title of an editorial published in *The Nation* on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1842. The situation it describes has been working itself out ever since:

“War with everybody is at present the enviable condition of our amiable sister of England [sisters under the Union].

“At the uttermost end of the earth her soldiers and sailors are triumphing—if triumph that can be called which is victory without glory—over a nation of feminine creatures, destitute even of the brute instinct of resistance, and apparently incapable of imitating the most timid animals, which become valorous by despair. Thousands of these unhappy wretches, who yet, be it remembered, are human beings, nurtured to man's estate, not without sufferings, tears and cares,—every one of them having parents, wives, children, friends, or some or all of these to lament their loss—are being butchered mercilessly—mowed down by canister and grape, or driven into the rivers at the point of the bayonet—and for what?

“Why, simply, because a horde of scoundrel smugglers, busy in the pursuit of unhallowed gain, have been interdicted by the Emperor of China—a potentate whose relation towards his subjects is less monarchical than paternal—from poisoning with their contraband opium the bodies, and rendering more imbecile the minds of his People...

“Then, in the country beyond the Indus, where, really and truly, they had no business whatever—in Afghanistan—where ruled a monarch friendly, or at least not hostile, to the British—some insane fear of Russia and Persia, or rather some accursed lust of power, plunder, and blood-shedding, disguised under the mask of affected fear, set armies in motion through dangerous passes, and over barren mountains, to achieve a semblance of a triumph in the capture of Cabul, and the dethronement of *Dost Mahomed*—the best, if not the only friend the English had in these barbarous regions.

“But there are no Chinese men-women in Afghanistan, nor is Akhbar Khan a mandarin of the third button.

“The doctrine of resistance is perfectly well understood among these fierce children of the crescent, and fearfully have they carried this doctrine into practice. Let the bones of thirteen thousand British subjects, whitening in the wintry blast, testify how dearly England has paid for her unjust, and worse than that—her foolish, her stupid aggression upon this indomitable People.

“There is no disguising the fact—England has been ‘thrashed’ by a fellow living at the back of a mountain, this said *Akhbar*

*Khan*. He shot down their Envoy—exterminated their legions—carried away captive their women and children; and the whole energy, wisdom and bravery of their rulers are now put in action, not to subdue the Afghans... but to buy off British women and children...” (Quoted from *The Nation*: Selections 1842-1844, Aubane Historical Society 2000, p29).

Those were the First Opium War (or First Anglo-Chinese War), and the First Afghan War.

When the current Afghan War (the Fourth?) was put on the British political agenda, Paddy Ashdown—the Ulster Protestant who was for a while the leader of the Liberals (or Liberal-Democratic, or Democratic Liberal) Party—perked up considerably. He announced that his grand-mother (or great-grandmother, or whatever) had been in the First Afghan War in which the Afghans killed nearly all the invaders and he was looking forward to the Fourth replay. War with the Afghans is a British tradition.

\*

English Imperialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a blend of the Renaissance and the Reformation, of aristocracy and go-ahead populism, of scepticism and theocratic self-righteousness.

17<sup>th</sup> century England was driven by what might be called Christianity. 18<sup>th</sup> century England was masterminded by a landed aristocracy with financialist proclivities, which was philosophically sceptical after the ambiguous fashion of John Locke, but had to live with and rule over the Christianity of the developing middle class populace. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century these two strains were blended by the 1832 Reform.

The Reform was conceded to a threatened business revolt by the Christianist middle class. The ruling class, which did not care to probe the ground of Christian belief, remained in place formally, along with the State Christianity of the Church of England. While in the bulk of English society there was a great Christianist revival of preaching and chapel building and industrial capitalism—and the chapels began to call themselves churches.

The Christianist Revival began around the end of the Great War against France (1793-1815) and began to run out of steam in the 1890s. It undermined itself intellectually because in its origin it combined Biblicalism with business technology and science and applied the latter to the former. At the mass level it was punctured by the first English Socialist writer with a mass readership, Robert Blatford, who, in his phenomenally popular theological tract, *Not Guilty!*, told the working class it was all nonsense got up to bewilder them.

Both aristocracy and Christianity were in the process of being undermined together at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but somehow the Imperialist impulse they had combined to foster in English society continued without them.

Christianism might be described as Roman Catholicism purified of all the qualities that made it human. It subordinates this world to another world, and makes that other world the reason for the existence of this world. Insofar as people in the world are not preoccupied with that other world, and are not preparing themselves for it, they are wasting their time. Nothing of that other world is tangibly present in this world—idolatry is shunned. All that is present of it in this world is an otherworldly spirit—and yet it works very profitably in this world.

It is satirized marvellously in the *Irish Magazine* published around 1810 by Walter Cox—who had seen it at close quarters in the 1790s.

Christianism gained the power of State in England in 1641, proved incompetent in the matter of statecraft, collapsed in 1659, and was subordinated to monarchy/aristocracy in 1660 and was accorded a place as the business class. In 1832 it forced its way back into State politics.

With that fearful synthesis of Renaissance and Reformation the Imperialist world began. Hitherto Britain had waged wars of conquest, and plunder, and extermination and slavery. While it continued doing all of these things, it now took on the additional task of remaking the world in its image.

The great non-Christian civilisation was China. The greatest civilisation that had the form of a State was China. The state which had the greatest complexity of economic life within it was China. The most self-sufficient large section of the world was China. China was a disgrace! Neither capitalist nor Christian. Neither Christian nor even capitalist! It was more than Christianist capitalism could tolerate.

The life of the new English ruling class became genteel in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The foundations of its gentility were the slave labour camps in the Caribbean and the plunder of India. Genteel living needed porcelain. Porcelain could not be counterfeited in Manchester. Authentic gentility needed the genuine article to demonstrate that it was genteel—one presumes that even gentlemen were able to feed themselves off local earthenware. Porcelain could only be got for real money—for money whose value was determined independently of law. Magic money is infinite in quantity but there is only a limited quantity of hard cash—and China would only sell its porcelain for hard cash. Gold and silver were leaking out of England at an increasing rate to supply the Town Houses and Country Houses with porcelain. And the Chinese did not feel that they needed to buy any of the products of Manchester Capitalism. But British merchants in India found that, if they smuggled opium into China, they could sell it.

That was the occasion of the first British war on the Chinese Empire—which was an Empire in the sense of being a self-contained civilisation, and therefore essentially different from the randomly acquired conquests dispersed around the globe

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that was called the British Empire. Peking decided to curb the activities of the British opium merchants in Canton, and to impose terms of trade on Britain. So Britain made war on it in the manner described by *The Nation*, mowing down the too-civilised Chinese. Then it made a peace settlement by means of the first of a series of *Unequal Treaties*, imposed a fine in compensation for interference with British opium merchants, and gained territorial concessions.

Other Opium Wars followed and other territorial concessions. Then other European Powers followed the British precedent and gained their concessions. Finally the United States declared its *Open Door* China policy.

It took China 108 years to recover from the destructive consequences of Britain's First Opium War.

The one-sided exchange of gold and silver for porcelain hardly seems sufficient reason for this globalist wrecking activity—given the position of China as by far the largest and most civilised state on the globe, how else can it be described? The ruling class of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 had hitherto been prudent in its aggressions, taking a bit here and bit there and managing them.

(The United States was a special case. It was not really a conquest that was lost. It was a colony that took off on its own—a Puritan colony not effectively absorbed into the Restoration system, but essentially a piece of England. And, insofar as it was a conquest, it was continued and intensified by the colony in its independence. The colony continued the genocide to the Pacific while the Mother Country continued it to Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

Failure to distinguish between colonialism and conquest, and colonial conquest and Imperial conquest, leads to great confusion in Irish affairs, particularly of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.)

In the light of traditional ruling class prudence hitherto, it seems reasonable to attribute the reckless new departure of 1840 to the Christianist influence brought to the corridors of power by the 1832 Reform. And to suggest that perhaps Christianity played a part in the progress from the international exchange of goods to the export of capital, culminating in finance capital, with its implication of global uniformity. Does not money made from money appear almost spiritual beside the grossness of Manchester industrial capitalism? Usury made sacred became the spirit that moved the world and that will redeem it.

It is interesting in this connection to take some account of the withering away of Jacobitism in England, and now even in Ireland. A pamphlet called *Jacobite Socialism* was published in London in 1945. No heed was taken of it. It was sheer eccentricity. But is Socialism possible on Hanoverian terms?

The term has no meaning today. It is therefore assumed to be historically meaningless, except as a synonym for reaction.

Jacobitism was defeated in the Hanoverian *coup d'état* of 1714. Swift was a Jacobite pamphleteer in the years before 1714. He saw the tendency in English society that came to triumph in 1714 as the tendency to subordinate all value to the value of money. And this tendency was associated with Nonconformity, which was the form taken by Puritanism after the Restoration. Nonconformity was excluded from political power in 1660 but was privileged under the *Act of Toleration* of 1690, which set about exterminating Catholicism. Whig and Tory collaborated under the last Stuart monarch, Queen Anne, but at the point of transition to an imported German monarch on the death of the Queen, the Whigs denounced the Tories as Jacobite adherents of the Catholic Pretender and enacted a *coup* that was more than Parliamentary.

Swift was already in what he considered exile in Dublin. Bolingbroke escaped to France. Somebody whose name is forgotten was executed. The Whig Ascendancy began. Robert Walpole constructed the British Constitution. He made the Prime Ministership as the *de facto* monarchy, and overcame the divisive conflict of principle in practical politics by means of corruption. He said, "*Every man has his price*" and proved it.

But Jacobite sentiment lingered on. Dr. Johnson—who was remembered for centuries as the wisest man in England and the most characteristic Englishman—was a Jacobite. Bonnie Prince Charlie might have regained the throne, to popular approval, in 1745, but for Hanoverians in his entourage who misdirected him. And Jacobite influence lingered on after 1745 despite the fierce pacification that followed. The subordination of all value to money value took many generations.

The freedom of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, on which the notion of Constitutional freedom was based, was the freedom of landowners in their localities, and the freedom of commerce of all kinds, protected from foreign competition. It was freedom from the State. It was freedom of the strong forces in civil society. But there were extensive elements in the society that was being brought about by the activity of those forces, which could only acquire a degree of freedom for themselves within the network of a national state—the mass proletariat created by the expanding capitalist system being the chief of these.

The need arose to restrict the freedom of Aristocracy and of Capitalism and restore something of the national state structure that had been cast aside after 1688, and this need was first expressed in Jacobite terms.

In another society the restrictions might have been imposed by traditional social forces, but in England all traditional social institutions had been melted down by the singular English Reformation, which in the course of about a century and a half of effective iconoclasm provided the clear space in which a free capitalism, unbound by law or custom, could take off.

This capitalism took the place of society and of the State and became the ground on which the State and society had to be reconstructed. Wild capitalism would certainly have destroyed itself if a State had not been constructed around it to preserve it by imposing restraints on it.

The reconstruction of the national State was projected by the Jacobite atheist Bolingbroke, Swift's colleague in the time of Queen Anne, who escaped the Whig *coup* of 1714 by fleeing to France dressed as a woman, returned to England after the heat had died down, insinuated himself into the household of the new German royalty, Anglicised the heirs of George II and gave them the notion of being Kings in earnest instead of mere stooges to the Prime Minister.

The heir to the throne, Frederick, died too soon, but his brother George had got the idea and tried to put it into effect. He did not quite succeed, but neither did he fail altogether. Under the long reign of George III, a national framework of State began to be restored, chiefly by the prodigy Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger, who began as a Whig but evolved into a 19<sup>th</sup> century Tory under the pressure of the requirements of statecraft and of the war on France.

Toryism tended towards Jacobitism, towards the paternalistic idea of the State. When radical Whiggery triumphed in the 1832 Reform, and all hell threatened to break loose with *laissez faire* capitalism in the corridors of power, the Jacobite Tories organised against it. The Tory Party became the first mass party. It organised against the ideology of the radical elite,



and brought in the first Factory Act restrictions on capitalist freedom.

\*

In 1839 Lin Tse-hsu was sent from Peking to Canton with plenipotentiary powers to suppress the opium trade. There was a Whig/Liberal Government in London. It decided that it could not tolerate Lin's interference with this valuable trade. There was war, and the British War Minister was the outstanding ideologist of Liberalism, T. B. Macaulay, whose *Essays* educated the English middle class in history and politics for the next century and a half.

Arthur Waley, a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century translator of Chinese poems and stories, gives a translation of a letter written by Lin to Queen Victoria:

“The Way of Heaven is fairness to all; it does not suffer us to harm others in order to benefit ourselves. Men are alike in this all the world over: that they cherish life and hate what endangers life. Your country lies 20,000 leagues away; but for all that the Way of Heaven holds good for you as for us, and your instincts are no different from ours; for nowhere are there men so blind as not to distinguish between what brings life and what brings death... Our Heavenly Court treats all within the Four Seas as one great family; the goodness of our great Emperor is like Heaven, that covers all things. There is no region so wild or so remote that he does not cherish and tend it. Ever since the port of Canton was first opened, trade has flourished... Rhubarb, tea, silk are all valuable products of ours, without which foreigners could not live. The Heavenly Court... allows these things to be sold and carried away across the sea not grudging them even to remote domains...

“But there is a class of evil foreigner that makes opium and brings it for sale, tempting fools to destroy themselves, merely in order to reap profit. Formerly the numbers of opium smokers was small; but now the vice has spread far and wide... If there are some foolish people who yield to this craving to their own detriment, it is they who have brought upon themselves their own ruin, and in a country so populous and flourishing, we can well do without them. But our great, unified Manchu Empire regards itself as responsible for the habits and morals of its subjects and cannot rest content to see any of them become victims to a deadly poison. For this reason we have decided to inflict very severe penalties on opium dealers and opium smokers, in order to put a stop forever to the propagation of this vice. It appears that this poisonous article is manufactured by certain devilish persons in places subject to your rule. It is not, of course, either made or sold at your bidding, nor do all the countries you rule produce it... Your Majesty has not before been thus officially notified, and you many plead ignorance of the severity of our laws. But I now give you assurance that we mean to cut off this harmful drug forever. What it is here forbidden to consume, your dependencies must be forbidden to manufacture...

The laws against the consumption of opium are now so strict in China that if you continue to make it, you will find that no one buys it and no more fortunes will be made. Rather than waste your efforts on a hopeless endeavour, would it not be better to devise some other form of trade...” (*The Opium War Through Chinese Eyes*, 1958, p28).

But Britain was a revolutionary state—revolutionary both in its internal functioning and in its action against the world. It was its destiny, as expressed by Cromwell's Secretary of State, Milton, the jihadi poet, “to teach the nations how to live”. It had itself no settled way of life, a fact which Milton knew very well, but that did not detract from his conviction that it was its

mission to do to the world what it was doing to itself—to throw it into convulsions. It was convulsing itself in the service of the Lord. It convulsed Ireland as a matter of course. But did not the whole world belong to the Lord, and did it not equally require to be reduced to His service, by the application of whatever drastic methods were found to be necessary?

Christianism is iconoclasm applied to Roman Catholicism, purifying it of its worldly dimension. Rome lived in civilised intercourse with the world, always giving the world its due. It had its occasional Savonarolas but never let them get out of hand. It was the religion of civilisation and it bore a dimension of that civilisation along within it when the Empire declined. It was never entirely submerged in the world, nor did it ever come to see the world as mere Evil.

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The First Opium War—the first of the wars of regime change waged by Britain in China—preceded the Irish Famine/Holocaust by about half a dozen years. It was the work of the same force in English society—aristocracy spiced up with Christianity. It seems unlikely that either mere aristocratic ambition or mere Christianist enthusiasm would have accomplished either the Irish Holocaust or the subversion of Chinese civilisation on its own. What was deadly was the mix of the two. Only a force for which the actual life of this world counted for little, or was seen as positively evil, could cheerfully set itself the task of destroying the biggest and most ancient civilisation by rotting its brains, and could make war to ensure market access for the poison, and could make a speech exalting the morality of it, as War Secretary Macaulay did.

With regard to the Famine: the Tories were in office when the potato blight struck, and they were still sufficiently Jacobite in spirit to meet the food shortage by emergency feeding measures. It needed a change in the Government to bring about a realisation that, in the eyes of Eternity, the crisis was an opportunity. Trevelyan came to Office and saw that Providence had taken the matter in hand and was solving by practical means the problem of which the new science of Political Economy had been contemplating helplessly for a generation—the problem of the millions of improvident Irish who, with their sheer lust for life, were so thick on the ground that they stifled market development and rationalisation.

But all of this was inevitable! Progress must happen! The Chinese could not be allowed to live apart from the world as a world unto themselves. And the Irish, torn from their Gaelic cocoon by English rule and brought to the half-way house of incoherent mass improvidence, had to be impelled along the rest of the journey by whatever means were found to be necessary.

True enough! Progress had to happen. England insisted on it and England had the means to make it happen.

But what was Progress? It was what England wanted to happen in the world, and what it had the means to make happen.

England did not intend that Irish society should remain as it was when *The Nation* was launched. And it didn't. Its transformation began when a Whig/Radical Government replaced the Conservative Tories and the potato blight was enhanced into the Famine.

And the Irish did not resist Progress. They submitted themselves to it. A century and a half of Penal Laws had done for them, and they lay down and died—and their one flicker of resistance has been ridiculed ever since by people who are in tune with Progress.

What is nowadays summed up glibly as Progress had three essential ingredients. The first is that the English ruling class that became the English State after 1688 made itself into a disciplined Naval force and set out to dominate the seas of the world. The second is the great British Slave Labour Camps that were set up on the Caribbean islands for the production of sugar by pioneering industrial methods, and the Triangular Trade associated with them, establishing a kind of Atlantic world market. The third is the Christianist spirit which drove the middle class at home, which was commercially free but excluded from State affairs for a century and half before being unleashed into politics after 1832.

Progress came into its own on a world scale in the 1840s. Progress was Britain. There was no Progress apart from Britain which was compelling Britain to do what it did.

Britain did what it did willingly. It had the idea of doing it and it did it—and *Ón uair a chinn sí air, ní staonfadh sí go deo*. (From the time she conceived it, she never desisted) until it got rid of more than half of the Irish in a clean sweep and carried its iconoclasm to the Court of Imperial China, as well as to the minds of the millions of Chinese which the Emperor tried to protect from British opium.

Now, a century and three-quarters later, the Chinese State, which lay in ruins for a century, has reassembled itself. It has secured itself against capitalist penetration by the Imperialist West by simulating a capitalist development of its own and going into Western markets with it. The West—the United States, which is the concentrated outcome of English Christianism—does not believe that Chinese Capitalism is for real because it is not subject to dollar control, and obviously has it in mind to bring it to order by means of war.

(The USA did not take part in Britain's Opium Wars. As distinct from the European States which all gained territorial enclaves for themselves in the disintegrating Chinese state, the USA adopted an Open Door policy for China—meaning that China was to be open to everybody.)

China is open to everybody, on more or less equal capitalist terms. But that doesn't seem to be quite what Washington means.

The USA, which established a viable capitalist system in Western Europe in 1945, after Europe had made a mess of itself at Britain's instigation, sees itself as the guide and guardian of the capitalist system in the world. And in 1945 it regarded Kuomintang China as a client society which it would cultivate on capitalist lines. But, within a decade, China had escaped from it, constructed itself into an absolutely sovereign state, and devised its own capitalism to serve its own purposes.

There are now two absolute sovereignties in the world, and from a Washington viewpoint that is one too many. And if the US/EU sanctions against Putin do not cause capitalist Russia to crumble, there will soon be three absolute sovereignties. The possibility of a Unipolar World—of One World, in the sense preached by Wendell Willkie in 1943—is passing away. If China is not brought to heel we will soon be back in the 19th century situation of a number of Great Powers between which smaller states can find space to live their own lives.

And it is appropriate that Afghan society is still there, living its own life, just as it was when this wild escapade in human affairs took off in the 1840s with the Opium War, the Afghan War, the Providential Irish Holocaust, and the Repeal of the Corn Laws, which signalled the construction of Globalist Capitalism in the British interest. □

# THE NATION.

VOL. II.—No. 61      DUBLIN, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1843.      PRICE 6d.

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Mr. S. begs to add that since his Peal was made, a magnificent set has been completed, through his kind influence, for the Most Reverend Dr. Gore, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Madras and Bengal, by order of as true an Irishman as ever lived—the Right Rev. Dr. Gillis, Coadjutor to his Grace, and intended for the Gothic Cathedral of St. John & Thomas, Calcutta, East India.

Mr. S. having gone to great expense in preparing for this new undertaking, and having now engaged the first-rate Mechanics in the Bell Foundry Trade that could be found in the Three Kingdoms, sincerely hopes to receive encouragement.

A continuation of Orders would enable him to cope with any other Scientific Bell Foundry in Europe. By practice and perseverance he could, with confidence, undertake to make a Bell as large as Big Tom of Lincoln, which weighs Five Tons, or as the larger one lately shipped off from London for the Roman Catholic Church of Montreal, in Canada, which weighed Seven Tons Fourteen Cwt and was the largest one ever made in England.

In conclusion, Mr. S. refers, with pride and gratitude, to the favorable testimony of his venerated and respected friends, the Very Reverend Dr. Gore, and the Most Reverend and

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# Syria: What the US and Russia Agreed

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**By David Morrison**

On 9 September 2016 in Geneva, US Secretary of State, John Kerry, and Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, came to an agreement about Syria. If you rely on the mainstream media in Britain for your information about the ongoing conflict in Syria, you will probably think the agreement was to have a cessation of hostilities and then provide humanitarian relief to besieged populations, in particular, to the eastern part of the city of Aleppo, which is under the control of anti-Government forces.

In fact, the agreements – there are actually four of them – are much more fundamental than that. In one of them, the US agreed to join with the Syrian Government and Russia in taking military action against Jabhat al-Nusra, the erstwhile al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, which plays a leading role in the armed opposition to the Syrian Government, in the northwest of the country including in eastern Aleppo. To facilitate this, the US undertook to separate the so-called “moderate” groups in the armed opposition (some of whom are armed and supported by the US) from al-Nusra with whom the ‘moderates’ co-operate.

This extraordinary proposal has gone largely unreported by the mainstream media, for whom a headline along the lines of “US joins Assad in fighting al-Qaeda in Syria” would not have been inappropriate.

The US and Russia already engage in military action from the air against Da’esh (aka ISIS or ISIL), the other al-Qaeda offshoot in Syria. In Geneva, they proposed to establish a Joint Implementation Center to co-ordinate military action from the air against both Da’esh and Nusrah. Standing beside Sergei Lavrov at the press conference announcing the agreements, John Kerry said: “US and Russian experts will work together to defeat Da’esh and Nusrah”.

## **Attack on humanitarian convoy**

The agreements also promised a ceasefire (though not against Da’esh and al-Nusra) beginning on 12 September 2016 and the Joint Implementation Center was due to be established after the ceasefire had been in operation for seven days.

But it didn’t happen, because of an attack on a UN humanitarian convoy on its way to eastern Aleppo on 19 September 2016, for which the US immediately blamed Russia (see *Another Kerry Rush to Judgment on Syria* by Robert Parry, Consortium News, 24 September 2016 [1]). The convoy was in opposition controlled territory at the time. Both Russia and Syria have denied responsibility for the attack, but as a result of it relations between the US and Russia have been ruptured.

## **Whose interests were served?**

If you are trying to identify who is responsible for an act of this kind, it is common sense to ask whose interests are served by it. Russian interests were certainly not served by this act: as we will see, they have spent almost a year trying to persuade the US to (in John Kerry’s words) “work together to defeat to defeat Da’esh and Nusrah”. It is inconceivable that they would have committed this act which predictably scuppered the detailed proposals they had patiently negotiated with the US for this purpose.

It is also inconceivable that the Syrian Government was responsible: it would be extremely unwise of them to wreck proposals dear to the heart of their most important ally, without whose military intervention they might have collapsed last autumn. Also, there was a possibility that, if implemented, the proposals would severely damage al-Nusra’s military capacity and thereby seriously weaken the armed opposition overall and make the Government’s position more secure.

By removing that possibility, the attack on the UN convoy served the interests of the armed opposition and it is most likely that the perpetrators came from that quarter.

## **Al-Nusra plays a leading role**

As I have said, al-Nusra plays a leading role in the armed opposition in the northwest of Syria, often in co-operation with so-called “moderate” groups, including groups armed and supported by the US. Lest there be any doubt about this, here are the words of Robert Ford in February 2015:

“For a long time, we [the US] have looked the other way while the Nusra Front and armed groups on the ground, some of whom are getting help from us, have coordinated in military operations against the regime.” [2]

Robert Ford was US Ambassador to Syria until he resigned in February 2014.

And here are the words of Colonel Stephen Warren in April 2016:

“It’s primarily al-Nusra who holds Aleppo.” [3]

He is the spokesman for the US anti-ISIS military campaign in Iraq and Syria. The Russian UN Ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, told the Security Council on 25 September 2016:

“Al-Nusra Front is currently the most powerful group fighting against the government in Aleppo, with 2,000 out of 3,500 militants in the city the group’s members.” [4]



## Al-Nusra: a US designated terrorist group

Al-Nusra is on the US State Department's list of designated terrorist groups. It was added by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in December 2012. To be precise, it was deemed to be an extension into Syria of the group al-Qaeda in Iraq and it was added to the list of aliases for that group, which was already designated [5].

The US has tolerated coordination by its client groups with al-Nusra, despite it being designated as a terrorist group. Also, while the US has been attacking Da'esh from the air since September 2014, it has largely left al-Nusra alone. The guiding principle of the US in these matters has been that any organisation that is militarily effective against the Syrian Government is good – since, they say, this was the only way to get the Syrian Government to enter into negotiations.

Now, apparently, this has changed: in co-ordination with Russia, it appears to be prepared to target al-Nusra as well as Da'esh. We will never know if it really has changed, now that the arrangements are unlikely to be put into operation.

## Divided opinion on deal in Washington

After Kerry and Lavrov had made a deal in Geneva on 9 September 2016, the assembled journalists had to wait around for five hours for it to be announced at a press conference, while Kerry persuaded Washington to accept it.

It took all that time because there is a significant divergence of opinion within the national security establishment in Washington about military co-operation with Russia and about lifting the military pressure on the Syrian Government. The Pentagon seems to be opposed to both and therefore to this deal.

The operation of the Joint Implementation Center necessarily involves sharing intelligence on al-Nusra and Da'esh and selecting targets based on that intelligence. But on 22 September 2016, not long after the US agreed to the establishment of such a Center, the chairman of the US military's Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that any such military coordination with Russia would be "extremely limited" and that "the military had no intention of forging an intelligence sharing arrangement with Russia" [6]. That has a smell of insubordination about it.

Dunford was also asked what it would take for the US to "control the airspace" over Syria, that is, to impose a no-fly zone. He replied:

"Right now... for us to control all of the airspace in Syria would require us to go to war against Syria and Russia." [7]

Perhaps, this remark was aimed at would be President Clinton, who since she left office in the State Department in 2012 has talked incessantly about imposing a no-fly zone in Syria.

Various people in Washington have proposed military intervention by the US against the Syrian Government. For

example, last June 51 State Department officials signed a memo urging such a course of action. And former acting CIA Director Michael Morell has proposed in a TV interview that US policy in Syria should be to make Iran and Russia "pay a price" by arming local groups and instructing them to kill Iranian and Russian personnel in the country [8]. He has recently endorsed Hillary Clinton for President.

The *Washington Post* condemned the deal in the following terms in an editorial on 12 September 2012:

"When Russia launched its direct military intervention in Syria a year ago, President Obama predicted its only result would be a quagmire. Instead, the agreement struck by Secretary of State John F. Kerry on Friday with his Russian counterpart offers Mr. Putin everything he sought. The Assad regime, which was tottering a year ago, will be entrenched and its opposition dealt a powerful blow. The United States will meanwhile grant Mr. Putin's long-standing demand that it join with Russia in targeting groups deemed to be terrorists. If serious political negotiations on Syria's future ever take place — an unlikely prospect, at least in the Obama administration's remaining months — the Assad regime and its Russian and Iranian backers will hold a commanding position." [9]

## Russia's key objective

Establishing co-operation arrangements of this kind with the US has been a key Russian objective in Syria since it intervened militarily in support of (and at the invitation of) the Syrian Government in late September 2015.

The initial intervention itself has been successful militarily in that the regime which was in danger of being overthrown has been stabilised. The murderous anarchy which would have followed regime collapse and caused millions more Syrians to flee their homeland for Europe has been averted, at least for now. A little gratitude from Europe towards Russia would be in order.

Alongside this military intervention, Russia embarked on a political initiative to attempt to bring about a political settlement based on what is left of the Baathist state.

## Geneva framework

The last attempt at political negotiations in early 2014 under the so-called Geneva framework [10] got nowhere. There, the opposition was represented by the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), which demanded that the Syrian Government immediately transfer power to a transitional authority without Assad. The Syrian Government refused – and that was that.

This was a completely pointless exercise since the SNC were not representative of the opposition militias fighting in Syria and, in the highly unlikely event of a deal being done, they would have been powerless to help bring the war to an end. The BBC reported that as a fact before the "negotiations" began: on Newsnight on 20 January 2014, standing in Turkey on its border with Syria, Ian Pannell said:



“If these talks actually happen ... those fighting on the other side of the border won’t be represented and they are unlikely to be persuaded by any deal.”

## Russia’s framework

If there was to be any hope of success then those around the table had to be prepared to make a deal with the Syrian Government. So, there was no point in having Da’esh or al-Nusra and its associates around the table – they would have to be eliminated militarily and there was no hope of a functional political settlement until that was done. And if it was done, or was on the way to being done, the rest of the armed opposition would be more likely to make a deal with the Syrian Government. That is why Russia set out to persuade the US that they should take military action together against Da’esh and al-Nusra – and a year later it succeeded.

At the insistence of Russia, an International Syria Support Group (ISSG) was established to attempt to bind all the parties to the conflict into this diplomatic process, including states on opposite sides such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. The ISSG met for the first time in Vienna on 30 October 2015 “to discuss the grave situation in Syria and how to bring about an end to the violence as soon as possible”, to quote from the communiqué issued afterwards [11].

(The parties represented at that meeting were China, Egypt, the EU, France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United Nations, and the United States.)

The participants “reached a mutual understanding” on a series of points, according to the communiqué, including (obviously) the need for an end to the war and a political process leading to a new constitution and elections. The first point was:

“Syria’s unity, independence, territorial integrity, and secular character are fundamental”

The phrase “secular character” to describe the Syrian state was not in the earlier Geneva Framework – it was agreed by Lavrov and Kerry at the end of September 2015 [12], presumably with the object of determining which opposition groups would be allowed to take part in the peace process and which would be excluded.

(As for the “territorial integrity” of the Syrian state, it has been violated by Israel for nigh on half a century, ever since it took over the Golan Heights by force in 1967, ethnically cleansing around 100,000 people in the process. It’s long past time for Israel to be compelled to restore the territory to Syria.)

Significantly, point 6 states:

“Da’esh, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the UN Security Council, and further, as agreed by the participants, must be defeated.”

And at the next ISSG meeting on 14 November 2015 (the day after the ISIS attacks in Paris), it was agreed to add al-Nusra to the list of “terrorist” groups that have to be defeated

and to which a ceasefire would not apply. A statement issued afterwards said:

“Regarding the fight against terrorism, and pursuant to clause 6 of the Vienna Communiqué, the ISSG reiterated that Da’esh, Nusra, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the UN Security Council, and further, as agreed by the participants and endorsed by the UN Security Council, must be defeated. ... The ceasefire would not apply to offensive or defensive actions against Da’esh or Nusra or any other group the ISSG agrees to deem terrorist.” [13]

In other words, military action by the Syrian Army and its allies against Da’esh or al-Nusra would not be in breach of the ceasefire that was envisaged.

## Framework endorsed by the Security Council

Shortly afterwards, the Security Council endorsed military action against Da’esh and al-Nusra, in Resolution 2249 passed unanimously on 20 November 2015. This endorsement was re-iterated in Resolution 2254 passed unanimously on 13 December 2015, which stated:

“[The Security Council] Reiterates its call in resolution 2249 (2015) for Member States to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da’esh), Al-Nusra Front (ANF), and all other individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with Al Qaeda or ISIL, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the Security Council, and as may further be agreed by the ISSG and determined by the Security Council, pursuant to the Statement of the ISSG of 14 November 2015, and to eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Syria, and notes that the aforementioned ceasefire will not apply to offensive or defensive actions against these individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, as set forth in the 14 November 2015 ISSG Statement;” [14]

From that point onwards, all UN members states, including the US and its allies, were supposed to do everything in their power to suppress al-Nusra, which was then and still is a major force in the opposition to the Syrian Government.

## February cessation of hostilities

A cessation of hostilities was announced by the US and Russia on 22 February 2016 to start four days later [15]. The story of the next six months, as told by the mainstream media in Britain, was one of unending breaches of the cessation by the Syrian army and its allies.

Almost entirely missing from the story was the fact that under the terms of the cessation, only those anti-Government groups that had formally notified their acceptance of the cessation to the US or Russia were no longer to be targeted. Military action against Da’esh or al-Nusra was not proscribed under the terms of the cessation, which stated:

“The nationwide cessation of hostilities is to apply to any party currently engaged in military or paramilitary hostilities against

any other parties other than Da'esh, Jabhat al-Nusra, or other terrorist organizations designated by the UN Security Council.”

So, military action by the Syrian army and its allies against al-Nusra and its associated groups, some supported by the US, was not obviously in breach of the cessation. Under the terms of the cessation, Al-Nusra (and Da'esh) continued to be legitimate targets: it could hardly be otherwise since military action to “eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Syria” was endorsed unanimously by the Security Council in December 2015.

Furthermore, the Syrian Government could hardly be expected to refrain from responding to the major offensive launched by al-Nusra and its associates in early April 2016 south of Aleppo. As Charles Lister reported:

“Beginning around March 20, the al Qaeda affiliate convened a series of meetings with armed opposition groups active in northern Hama, Latakia, and southern Aleppo, with the intention of persuading them that their interests were better served in fighting than in supporting the political process in Geneva. ...

“Three weeks later, simultaneous offensives were launched in all three operational zones — all led by Nusra Front. Within hours, Nusra Front had regained its status as a necessary opposition ally in its bitter and brutal revolutionary struggle, while the moderate opposition reassumed secondary importance.” [16]

## US promised separation

The clear implication of the February agreement was that, not only al-Nusra continued to be a legitimate target, but also that any military forces operating alongside al-Nusra forces would have to separate themselves physically from al-Nusra or risk been caught up in attacks on al-Nusra.

That was the impression given by spokesman, Mark Toner, in a State Department briefing on the day the cessation was announced. Asked if the US was calling on “the Syrian opposition moderate groups to stop fighting alongside al-Nusra” to avoid being “targeted from Russia or the Syrian regime”, he replied:

“... we, the ISSG, have been very clear in saying that al-Nusra and Da'esh are not part of any kind of ceasefire or any kind of negotiated cessation of hostilities. So if you hang out with the wrong folks, then you make that decision. ... you choose ... who you hang out with, and that sends a signal.” [17]

But the separation, which the US promised, simply didn't take place, despite the fact that, according to Russia's UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, senior US officials had assured Russia that it would take only “two to three weeks” to complete [18].

On 25 April 2016, Sergei Lavrov said:

“We agreed long ago that groups that found themselves on the positions of terrorists but that are not terrorists and want to

participate in the political process, should leave the territories of terrorist positions. ... We agreed with the Americans that they would use their influence on these ‘good opposition members’ and will take them out of there so that no one prevents to destroy the terrorist group Jabhat al-Nusra. The firm promise of the US that it gave to us to carry out this demarcation has not been fulfilled for two months already.”

At a State Department briefing on 27 May 2016, it was revealed that the groups that had accepted the ceasefire had been sent a letter by Michael Ratney, the US Special Envoy for Syria, stating:

“The Syrian people and revolutionary factions must continue to reject terrorism in all its forms and distance themselves from the terrorists to the maximum degree possible.” [19]

On 22 April 2016, John Kerry was interviewed by the *New York Times* and confirmed that the objective was to separate “members of the Al Nusra Front” who “were terrorists not party to the cease-fire” and “insurgent groups that oppose Mr. Assad and have agreed to the cease-fire”. But, it “has proven harder to separate them than we thought”, he said. And he went on to admit “there's a Russian impatience and a regime impatience with the terrorists who are behaving like terrorists and laying siege to places on their side and killing people”.

The separation promised by the US didn't take place.

## September ceasefire arrangements

The September ceasefire arrangements announced by Kerry and Lavrov on 9 September 2016 also promised separation, this time explicitly. Having failed to separate the so-called “moderate” opposition from al-Nusra in the aftermath of the cessation of hostilities in February, it's puzzling why the US made this promise explicitly – and went on to propose that US and Russia take military action jointly against al-Nusra.

These arrangements involved five agreements, the text of which, for reasons which are unclear, the US didn't want to be published (whereas Russia was in favour of publication). The text of one of them entitled *Reducing Violence, Restoring Access and Establishing the JIC* was leaked to Associated Press. It begins as follows:

“The Russian Federation and the United States (hereafter - “the Sides”) intend to undertake joint efforts to stabilize the situation in Syria, with special measures for the Aleppo region. Delineation of territories controlled by ISIL, Jabhat Al-Nusra, and moderate armed opposition forces remains a key priority, as does separating moderate opposition forces from Nusra.” [20]

And, this time Michael Ratney, the US Special Envoy for Syria, threatened “moderate” rebels with unspecified “severe consequences” if they didn't separate from al-Nusra, saying in a letter to opposition groups on 10 September 2016:

“We urge the rebels to distance themselves and cut all ties with Fateh of Sham, formerly Nusra Front, or there will be severe consequences.”

(Quoted in *Al Qaeda's Ties to US-Backed Syrian Rebels* by Gareth Porter, Consortium News, 13 September 2016 [21]).

At his press conference with Lavrov announcing the deal, Kerry said:

“If groups within the legitimate opposition want to retain their legitimacy, they need to distance themselves in every way possible from Nusrah and Da’esh. ...

“So the warning we give to opposition groups who have up until now found it convenient to sort of work with them is it would not be wise to do so in the future. It’s wise to separate oneself.” [22]

At this press conference, Kerry was also at pains to emphasise that the US was serious about dealing with al-Nusra:

“I want to be clear about one thing particularly on this, because I’ve seen reporting that somehow suggests otherwise: Going after Nusrah is not a concession to anybody. It is profoundly in the interests of the United States to target al-Qaida – to target al-Qaida’s affiliate in Syria, which is Nusrah, an organization that is opposed to a peaceful transition, an organization that is an enemy of the legitimate opposition, an organization that is currently plotting attacks beyond Syria’s borders, including against the United States.”

On the face of it, it’s odd that a US Secretary of State felt the need to make a case for attacking al-Qaeda. It must be directed at his opponents in Washington who prefer to stick to the previous US stance of leaving al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria alone, since it is an effective anti-Government force.

Lavrov responded to this in his remarks at the press conference, saying:

“And I’m very glad that John said a very important thing. He said that the US is firmly aimed to fight Nusrah and those who believe that the fighting with Nusrah is a concession to Russia are wrong. That is a very important ... statement, because a lot of people supposed that the US are really not very desirable to fight with Nusrah; they just keeping Nusrah as Plan B for overthrowing of the regime. So today’s statement of John is greatly welcomed by me.”

## Establishing a Joint Implementation Center

In a press conference at the UN on 17 September 2016, Vitaly Churkin, the Russian Ambassador, read out the first few sentences of another agreed document (which isn’t in the public domain), this one on the proposed Joint Implementation Center:

“The purpose of the Joint Implementation Group is to enable expanded co-operation between the US and the Russian Federation. The participants, the US and the Russian Federation, through the Joint Implementation Group, are to work together to defeat Jabhat Al-Nusra and Da’esh within the context of

strengthening the cessation of hostilities and supporting the political transition process, outlined in UN Security Council resolution 2254.” [23]

(‘Group’ and ‘Center’ have been used interchangeably in talking about the Joint Implementation entity).

John Kerry explained at his press conference that “preparatory work for a Joint Implementation Center” would commence on 12 September 2016 (when the ceasefire was due to come into effect). This would include “initial discussions and some sharing of information necessary for the delineation of territories controlled by Nusrah and opposition groups in the area of active hostilities”. The Center was supposed to be established on 19 September 2016 “after seven continuous days of adherence to the cessation of hostilities”. Then “the more comprehensive process of delineation” was to be conducted by US and Russian experts, who “will work together to defeat Da’esh and Nusrah”.

In his remarks at the press conference, Lavrov explained that “once the practical matters of delimitation and separation of terrorists from the moderate opposition” there would be “strikes of the airspace forces of Russia and the air forces of the US” against al-Nusra and Da’esh in agreed areas. He also said that the Syrian Government had agreed that in those areas “only the air forces of Russia and the U.S. will be functional”. However, “the Syrian air forces will be functional in other areas outside those that we have singled out for Russian-American military cooperation”.

Very little of this extraordinary plan for the US and Russia to take military action jointly against Da’esh and al-Nusra has appeared in the mainstream media. And the following article, not available at the time of writing, [How the Pentagon sank the US-Russia deal in Syria – and the ceasefire](#) [24] by Gareth Porter, seems to prove that the Pentagon’s role in wrecking this plan was much more significant than has been written here.

## David Morrison 27 September 2016

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(Continued from p.32)

the US military, intelligence agencies, virtually everybody is committed to global dominance, or liberal hegemony, call it what you want. So it is a widespread consensus.

But there's more to it than that: the second reason that we continue on this foolish path is because the US is the most secure great power in the history of the world. We are free to do foolish things because there are hardly any consequences at all. And the most of you when you hear Americans come through hear about the dangerous threatening environment in which we live in and this threat here and that threat there. This is all nonsense.

The US is a remarkably secure great power: first of all we're separated from Europe and East Asia, which are the areas of the world where there are great powers, by two giant oceans. We are very hard to get at. Second, we have thousands of nuclear weapons, the ultimate deterrent and third if you believe we live in a unipolar world as most people do, that means by definition we're the only great power on the planet. I want to know how a country that is as big and powerful as the US that is physically separated from all its potential adversaries by two giant moats, has thousands of nuclear weapons and really has no great power rivals is insecure or faced with existential threats, here, there and everywhere. This is just the typical threat inflation that you get in the US.

Do you know that in the 1930s when Adolph Hitler was on the march in Europe and the imperial Japanese were on the march in Asia – and we did not have nuclear weapons – Franklin D Roosevelt could not beat the isolationists? Relying strictly on the argument that these two moats protected us in the face of Hitler and the imperial Japanese, Roosevelt could not defeat the isolationists. It was Pearl Harbor that did it. Had we not had Pearl Harbor, we would not have gotten into the war. That's how powerful the isolationist argument was in that strategic context, without nuclear weapons.

Now, we're in an era of unipolarity, we've got thousands of nuclear weapons and the last time I checked those oceans were still there. We are remarkably secure and this is what allows us to run around the world doing all these crazy things and continuing to pursue policies that fail. Because there's no great cost to us. Just think of the refugee problem: it's you in Europe who are endangered by this flow of refugees, not the US, because the Atlantic Ocean separates us from the greater Middle East.

The point I made to you is that first of all you have the cause that revolves around the fact we have a deep seated commitment to global hegemony and the establishment group think. The second point is our geography. Third is that we have a military that represents a very narrow slice of the population and that means that we're not drafting people to fight these wars. As [Congressman] Charles Rangel said before the Iraq war in 2003, if we had a draft there would have been no Iraq war. All these kids graduating from Harvard and Yale and Berkley they don't want to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan.

By the way, if you're in the American military, and you're in for any appreciable period of time, you're going to go back to Iraq and Afghanistan three, four, five times. I just scratch my head and say, as somebody who served in the military during the Vietnam war from 1965 to 1975, how is this happening, how can they get people to go back there every other year for five or six or seven or ten years to fight wars that they're going to lose, and it don't matter very much.

Well the fact is this narrow slice of the society that serves in the military, all volunteer force, is deeply committed to fighting these wars. They view themselves as part of the security establishment, that they're protecting the US, they've bought into this threat inflation, they think it's their patriotic duty and that they do it. And this means the elite – rest assured that their children or hardly any of their children serve in the military – have this instrument that they can use to pursue these escapades. And of course their allies, especially in Europe, go along with this. WE need their help. The British have been with us in almost all these excursions into the greater Middle East – they're right there next to us – and the Europeans in general support us, in large part because the Europeans don't want us to leave Europe, so they're very nice to us. There's a lot of help there. This is the basic cause of the mess. This is why we can't reform.

Now, let me say a few words in conclusion about what is the likelihood that this is going to change. I don't think that the consensus that now exists in favour of liberal hegemony – global domination – is going to be undermined any time soon. I actually find it quite remarkable when I go to Washington just how deep seated this consensus is. That's not going to change. The geography's not going to change. The sense that we're not going to become terribly vulnerable any time soon. I'll say more about this in a second.

In terms of the American military, I see no sign that anything is changing in their attitude towards waging these wars which they lose. No evidence of a revolt of the generals, or of a problematical ... civil-military relations. And as far as our allies are concerned, you don't bark at the US, right, because you want the US to stay in Europe, you want to keep NATO intact, so you don't want to make the US angry. In the case of Britain especially, you like going on these excursions with

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## Thoughts on Lord Esher (Part Four)

By Pat Walsh

[Introductory Note: Lord Esher is not a household name, but reviews of biographies of his contemporaries treat him as a well known figure: Richard Davenport-Hines reviewed *Sylvia, Queen of the Headhunters* by Philip Eade in *the Daily Telegraph* 5 July 2007. He said:

‘Sylvia was the delinquent survivor of a miserable upbringing....

Her father Lord Esher, the sardonic Machiavellian éminence grise of Edwardian England....’

A Review of *Rosebery: Statesman in Turmoil* by Leo McKinstry in the *Spectator* 2005 said of Rosebery:

‘Clever, idle and ‘lady-like’, he was a favourite of his tutor, William Johnson, a sinister homosexual who was infatuated with him. Pederasts pop up again and again in Rosebery’s life: his best friend was Reggie Brett, Lord Esher, whom he met at Eton, another shocking pederast.’

‘*Esher’s Political Biography*’ by Peter Fraser (1973), eschewed the personal and explained the historical importance of Lord Esher. Since England had a party system, a large electorate, especially after the 1832 Reform, and a powerful popular press, there had to be a way of managing war and peace matters away from these possible sources of dissent and turmoil. Fraser wrote:

‘...politicians of all shades admitted that some element of stability, immune from the swing of the electorate and the immediate exigencies of party, was desirable in the country’s defence arrangements. This was the feeling which made Balfour’s establishment of the Committee of Imperial Defence immediately acceptable to the majority of both parties.... Esher was associated, through the various aspects and episodes of his career with those ideals and values. ...Even a brief survey of Esher’s career will indicate clearly enough that he possessed the political and ideological confidence of men who from the party standpoint were poles apart.’

His power and influence were not the result of his official positions, had he held such a position he would have been hemmed in by his political party; he refused public office and operated behind the scenes, and in so doing, ‘he was excused and connived at by leaders of both parties’ in Fraser’s words.

‘He was the caretaker of the Committee of Imperial Defence whose structure and permanent secretariat he invented. Able to consult persons on all sides without any ties, Esher moved freely and informally between Buckingham Palace and Downing Street, between the Committee of Imperial Defence in Whitehall Gardens and the War Office.’

‘The defence reorganization of 1904 was Esher’s masterpiece, but it was also the beginning of his political career behind the scenes.’

‘The CID served to shroud defence policies from the more pacific section of the cabinet, so that the military conversations with the French general staff initiated by the secretariat in December 1905, ... remained a secret from half the cabinet

till 1911 when these ministers discovered to their dismay that a commitment to fight in France had been incurred.’

In this four part study Pat Walsh explains Lord Esher’s behind the scene role in the preparation of the Great War against Germany, using Esher’s own words in letters and diaries. Part 4, which concludes the series in this issue of *Irish Foreign Affairs*, sees Esher contemplating in 1917 the financial ruin of Britain and the problematic dependence on the United States resulting from the war. C.W.]

This concluding part of ‘Thoughts on Lord Esher’ deals with some little known aspects of the Great War in the period 1916-18 when Britain was in great danger of losing it, or conceding to a peace short of the defeat of Germany – which was understood as losing it. It is a period historians have shown little interest in.

Lloyd George once said that Britain’s enemies could find the first hundred millions needed for warfare as easily as England but not the last. But what would happen if England also could not find the last hundred million? How could the War on Germany and the Ottomans be kept going?

Britain increasingly financed the War on the Allied side as its allies’ hundreds of millions began to drain away with Germany still in the field. John Maynard Keynes was paymaster to the Allies. He gave a talk to the Admiralty in March 1916 in which he told them: “*We bribe whole populations. It is our money that keeps the Allies sweet.*”

In October 1916 Keynes issued an important memo from the British Treasury entitled ‘*The Financial Dependence of the United Kingdom on the United States of America*’. It noted that up until that point Britain had been funding its Great War 3/5 by selling its gold and securities and 2/5 by obtaining loans on the international market.

The problem emerging was that the gold and securities accumulated by the Empire through its slave trade and then Manchester Capitalism were running out. During the following 6 months if the War was to be waged as vigorously as it had, Keynes calculated that the gold and securities available to the Treasury would only fund 1/5 of the War, leaving 4/5 to be funded by loans. And then it would be nearly 5/5 through loans, by the end of 1917. This financial exhaustion was going to make Britain highly dependent on the goodwill of the U.S. in being able to continue its War. As Keynes noted:

“A statement from the United States Executive deprecating or disapproving of such loans would render their floatation in sufficient volume a practical impossibility, and thus lead to a situation of the utmost gravity... Any feeling of irritation or lack of sympathy with this country or with its policy in the minds of the American public... would render it exceedingly difficult,

if not impossible, to carry through financial operations on a scale adequate to her needs. The sums which this country will require to borrow in the U.S.A. in the next six or nine months, are so enormous, amounting to several times the entire national debt of that country, that it will be necessary to appeal to every class and section of the investing public.

“It will be hardly an exaggeration to say that in a few months time the American executive and the American public will be in a position to dictate to this country on matters that affect us more nearly than them. It is, therefore, the view of the Treasury, having regard to their special responsibilities, that the policy of this country towards the U.S.A. should be so directed as not only to avoid any form of reprisal or active irritation, but also to conciliate and to please.” (10.10.16)

At this point the U.S. was also supplying 50% of Britain’s large guns, 30% of its large shells and components and over 1 million rifles were on order from American suppliers, according to a Ministry of Munitions memo prompted by the Keynes warning.

The financial crisis raised the issue of War aims, since the possibility of having to conclude a peace was now, for the first time, considered. Lord Lansdowne, in a memo to the cabinet on 13 November, on the subject of what terms peace might be dictated to the enemy emphasized the cost of the Great War and how it might affect the peace if the War continued into 1917 and beyond:

“Shall we even then be strong enough to ‘dictate’ terms?... We have obtained within the last few days from the different Departments of the Government a good deal of information as to the situation, naval, military, and economic. It is far from reassuring. What does the prolongation of the war mean?”

“Our own casualties already amount to over 1,100,000. We have had 15,000 officers killed, not including those who are missing. There is no reason to suppose that, as the force at the front in the different theatres of war increases, the casualties will increase at a slower rate. We are slowly but surely killing off the best of the male population of these islands. The figures representing the casualties of our Allies are not before me. The total must be appalling.

“The financial burden which we have already accumulated is almost incalculable. We are adding to it at a rate of over £5,000,000 per day. Generations will have to come and go before the country recovers from the loss which it has sustained in human beings, and from the financial ruin and the destruction of the means of production which are taking place.

“All this is, no doubt, our duty to bear, but only if it can be shown that the sacrifice will have its reward. If it is to be made in vain, if the additional year, or two years, or three years, finds us still unable to dictate terms, the war with its nameless horrors will have been needlessly prolonged, and the responsibility of those who needlessly prolong such a war is not less than that of those who needlessly provoked it.

“Many of us, however, must of late have asked ourselves how this war is ever to be brought to an end. If we are told that the deliberate conclusion of the Government is that it must be fought until Germany has been beaten to the ground and

*sues for peace on any terms on which we are pleased to accord to her, my only observation would be that we ought to know something of the data upon which this conclusion has been reached.”* (Cab 37/159/32, 13.11.16)

This must surely have been a bombshell to the Cabinet. Edward Grey in his reply said that it would be “*premature*” to look for peace and a “*betrayal of the interests of this country*” to advocate it as long as there was a belief Germany could be defeated; or the military situation was likely to improve in the Allies favour; or that Germany was injured internally more so than England, making recovery more difficult for her. It was only if the situation was predicted to deteriorate for the Allies over the following months that it would be justified to “*wind up the war at once on the best terms achievable.*” (Cab 37/160/20)

Shortly after this Asquith resigned as Prime Minister, giving way to Lloyd George.

From late 1916 it was becoming apparent to Lord Esher that Britain’s Great War had been expanded in a reckless fashion and it was failing to achieve its objectives with the alliance that it had constructed to fight it. That alliance was buckling under the strain of the German and Turkish defence and England’s allies were in danger of cracking.

Initially the February Revolution within the Russian ally was seen as a useful thing in Britain, but Esher was concerned:

*“The Russian revolution is considered wholly good. No revolution can be wholly good. The Tsar’s abdication has been finely carried through... But the middle class Girondins who have dethroned the Tsar and killed the old odious bureaucratic system will probably themselves have their throats cut by the “Mountain” that is always lying in wait upon revolution.”* (Journal 17.3.17)

Esher was convinced that despite the belief that a democratic Russia would rejuvenate the War effort it did not have the staying power to see out the War:

*“In February 1915 I wrote a paper for the Defence Committee pointing out that Russia never has been (and never can be) steadfast to the bitter end. For one reason or another Russia from the days of Catherine the Great has collapsed before she could obtain her objectives... Let us hope she will remain on the defensive for another short space of time.”* (Letter to Lord Derby, 12.4.17)

As for France:

*“France is the most feminine of nations. The qualities in a man that capture a woman’s affections are precisely those that are required to dominate the French. It never appears to me that our people understand this, whether statesmen or journalists.”* (Letter to William Robertson, 9.4.17)

Esher was half-French, as his mother was a Frenchwoman. He had a great regard for France, which he saw as his second nation and despaired of the English failure to fully understand the French and their qualities, entirely different to England.



On the question of femininity: It should be pointed out that Esher, despite being happily married with children, was an active homosexual. He had a great liking for Eton boys in particular. At Eton Reggie Brett was taught by the influential Master William Johnson Cory, whose students included the future Prime Minister Lord Rosebery, and many others in the highest layer of British society. Johnson was forced to resign as Housemaster in 1872 after he and the homosexual activities that had been tolerated/encouraged were exposed by a boy's letter to his parents.

Lord Esher had a series of affairs with Eton boys he became infatuated with over the decades and was a friend of the notorious pederast Lord "Lou Lou" Harcourt, son of the famous Harcourt who nearly succeeded Gladstone as Liberal Leader. Parents of Eton boys warned their sons to steer clear of Reggie and "Lou Lou" when they paid visits to the school to make their selections. When "Lou Lou" killed himself after threatened public exposure Esher had to rescue his friend's massive pornography collection – reputed the best in Europe, by those in the know – before the nosy middle-class press discovered it (These aspects of Esher's life are detailed in James Lees-Milne's interesting biography of Esher, *The Enigmatic Victorian*).

By early 1917, after France had suffered tremendous losses at Verdun, the British became convinced that the French were "no longer fighting". Esher shared this view and communicated it to Lloyd George, via a letter to Lord Derby, who was in charge of recruiting and instituting the transition between voluntarism and compulsion:

*"There are certain things that you and the Prime Minister should know and digest... The discouragement and fatigue, physical and moral, of the French women, especially of the peasants and the working class... The growing reluctance of the French soldier to go over the parapet. The deductions, I want you to understand... are that we have arrived at a psychological moment when discouragement may lead to any sort of acquiescence in any sort of peace rather than continue the war... If the French enfeeble and morally collapse, they will blame England, such is the curious working of the feminine strain that runs now, as ever, through the race. Already they begin to note that we have possession of all the German Colonies and that we have military control of Mesopotamia and of Syria... Already they begin to speculate upon the intentions of the nation boutiquière... It was always anticipated that in order to impose the will of the Allies upon the enemy England would have to take command. Russia has collapsed as a state organism; Italy is torn by conflicting sympathies and hopes and fears; France is very, very tired..."* (Letter to Lord Derby, 17.4.17)

The British Government needed to grab a hold of the French to keep them in the War. Esher told the Prime Minister:

*"There is a general malaise or ferment of uneasiness among the people, the shopkeepers, and in the faubourgs. They are so intelligent and well-informed that they realise the failure of their offensive- the Great Offensive... It is more than ever necessary to catch the French a bit tighter by the head. They have, as I told you, no statesman of their own who can do this... It is criminal to neglect this opportunity."* (Letter to Lloyd George, 25.4.17)

But time was running out not only for the Allies, but also for Britain herself:

*"I still think that peace will be forced on Europe almost immediately by famine and hardship. We are all getting to the end of our tether. Submarines and blockades are both telling their tale. However, our Government may know better. It has never seemed to me possible to flatten nations where population counts in millions. All war of this character... ends in compromises. There never has been any exception – whether the Thirty or Seven Years' War, or the struggle that ended in the Congress of Vienna. Woe to the victors even more than to the vanquished..."* (Letter to Rev. C.D. Williamson, 1.5.17)

The problem was that the investing of a great moral dimension to the War of 1914 made it much harder to stop than these previous great wars.

As the necessity of America coming to England's assistance directly by entering the war had become more and more inevitable Esher realised the problem of this in future peace making:

*"America drifts nearer to war. If she comes in, she will claim to have won the war. Wilson will dominate the Peace Conference! On the other hand we shall get the use of America's wealth, credit, interned German ships, American destroyers and ultimately Men, if they are required. The balance is on our side. That was always Kitchener's view..."* (Journal 7.2.17)

But Esher warned that Britain could not afford to wait for America. It needed to push the War it was waging to prevent its soldiers drawing the wrong conclusion and behaving like the Russian masses:

*"You cannot reconcile waiting for American armies with the anxiety of the masses to get a decision speedily... The supreme risk of allowing the people, and the armies that are so subtly interwoven in sentiment with the people, to think that they must 'wait for America,' is that the soldiers will insist upon returning to their homes – like their "brothers in Russia." I can only pray that the monumental error of Russian disorder may not extend to France. That there are signs of it, no one who lives in France can doubt."* (Letter to Lloyd George, 5.6.17)

Esher, on diplomatic/intelligence work, reported from France in 1917:

*"All along the French lines the troops are tired and discontented. There are unpleasant signs of disintegration... The French permissionnaires have two stock phrases: 'If the English want to win the war, let them win it themselves.' 'If the politicians want Alsace and Lorraine, let them go and take them.' ... Our hope of breaking the Boche rests to-day upon Douglas Haig and his armies – supplemented by the mirage of American millions of pounds and thousands of aeroplanes. Half or a third of what America dangles before the French eyes, if quickly materialised, would end the war before the winter."* (Letter to Lord Derby, 26.6.17)

President Wilson, a few days after the abdication of the Tsar, sought the agreement of Congress to go to war and after

a brief opposition from some Senators the U.S. declared war on Germany in April 1917. In entering the Great War the U.S. inevitably changed its character, and what it was about, and this was problematic for England.

Esher met Henry Morgenthau, whom President Wilson had appointed as U.S. Ambassador to Constantinople, to discuss this aspect in mid-1917. Esher saw danger in the fact that England's Puritan off-spring across the Atlantic regarded the War as a moral crusade, like the English Liberals:

*"Mr. Morgenthau asked me to call on him in the Ritz Hotel to-day. Mr. Morgenthau was one of the principal supporters of President Wilson in the campaign for the Presidency, and he possesses the friendship and confidence of the President... The war appears to these idealists a Crusade, and they call it by that name... Objectively the United States is at war on behalf of that form of national political control that goes by the name of democracy; against individual personal rule associated in the public mind with the Governments of Germany, Austria and Turkey. President Wilson's greatest difficulty in entering upon the war was the inclusion among the Allies of the Russian autocracy. Since the Russian revolution the feeling of the great masses of the American people who were hostile to the war has changed. The Crusade now possesses a material objective and the American idealists do not intend to accept a peace that will leave the world at the mercy of the strongest armed nation or group of nations..."*

*President Wilson is faced, however, with a difficulty... The predominance of any one country at sea appears to be another form of militarism, and its maintenance seems to be inconsistent with the principles laid down by the Allied nations... I told Mr. Morgenthau that while full of sympathy with his ideals I had no great belief in their practical efficacy, and that, as he had been so frank with me, I wished him to understand that I was a shocking materialist; that I did not believe this was a war to end all war, and that, if we beat the Germans, England, France and the United States would be exceedingly foolish if they failed to get all the material guarantees they could get, so that when the next war comes, each of these nations would be stronger... Mr. Morgenthau replied it would be impossible for any American to give expression to such views, so far removed from the views of the President, and that any suspicion that they were held by the Allies of the United States would destroy enthusiasm for the war in America and diminish her potential activities." (Memorandum, 11.8.17)*

In December 1916 Lloyd George had issued a hard-line statement of Allied War Aims including harsh territorial demands of both Germany and the Ottomans in response to a German offer of peace by negotiation. The effect of this was to weaken the moderates in Germany and bring on the U-Boat offensive that brought the U.S. into the War. Then in October 1917 Lloyd George, mindful of the U.S. position, attempted to undermine German resistance by presenting Britain's War Aims as entirely moderate and defensive. Esher wrote to General Haig:

*"I see columns of rhetoric from L.G. in this morning's papers. He tells the Germans that we are none of us out for territorial readjustments, when he knows well... that he dare not relinquish the Colonies we have taken and that he himself means to establish a British Protectorate over Mesopotamia and Palestine, if he can. What is the use of it? Who is deceived,*

*except a few Americans living apart from the world in New England?" (23.10.17)*

Esher's Journal entry of October 17<sup>th</sup> 1917 reveals that by this time only Britain was keeping the Great War going. Russia had collapsed, the French could give no military support beyond defence, Italy could no longer find men for the ranks, Austria sought peace, Germany was also looking for a settlement: *"England was the only country that was fighting at all."*

Lord Esher concluded that the only thing to do was to hold the line until American numbers arrived and then attack Germany, and only then:

*"This policy was based on the assumption that the offensive on the Western Front could have no chance of success so long as the forces were approximately equal, and that without a great superiority no offensive had succeeded in the history of the world. (The effect of the adoption of the policy would be that so long as the forces in the West were approximately equal, the policy of General Pétain would be adopted.) This is in fact a complete reversal of the 'Western Military Policy,' and an admission that the military policy of Great Britain since January 1915, incited since August 1914, had been based upon principles wholly unsound, and has proved a failure."*

The military policy Esher referred to as having failed was that which relied on a greater kill ratio of Germans to succeed by basically wearing their numbers down through a war of attrition. It had actually resulted in the Allies losing greater numbers than the Germans (2:1) and becoming in danger of losing the War. In fact, the Allies England had started the War with had largely disappeared or had become incapable of offensive fighting. The only chance England had of avoiding defeat, or a poor settlement on terms that nullified the main objective of the War, to see off Germany, was to hang on until the Americans arrived.

And even that was only a hope for Esher:

*"That is the only policy left to the Allies, and what a policy! To wait for a military effort that cannot materialise until 1919, and even then will yield very little more than the wastage of one of the two armies now on the Western Front. Were I in the counsels of Hindenburg I should expect to find him complacent at such a prospect. No worries from England and France for eighteen months. Italy out of the war altogether. Russia ready now to be exploited." (Letter to Sir William Robertson, 22.10.17)*

This is illustrative of the despondent state of mind of the British ruling class in late 1917 that saw the War going on for another couple of years at least, but at the same time having all the will in the world to prolong the agony for Europe and the world. That is not to say Esher was the worst of them.

After Lord Lansdowne had written his letter to the press advocating peace and had been denounced for breaking ranks in war-time, Esher wrote privately in his journal:

*"In war, 'enough for the day' is the safest maxim, while in peace it is the most dangerous of fallacies. To buy future peace by the extinction of the German nation is a futile dream. But were it*

*not so, I doubt the right to purchase it at the price of holocaust of young lives. There are many things for which men fight... But among these things cannot be rationally counted the future peace of the world or the future supremacy of any ideals that may prove to be false to generations unborn.”* (2.12.17)

This was the voice of the old gentry that had waged war and concluded peace on rational grounds, always advantageous to the Empire. It was now confronted with the idealist, moralistic rhetoric of the middle class which had delusions that were very dangerous in the world and would lead to more killing and dying, rather than less, and an inability to stop it until the unrealisable were achieved – which, of course, it never would.

By January 1918 Esher was writing to the famous editor, J.A. Spender:

*“the greatest of all evils would be the break up of our entente, we must prepare for a war that cannot end militarily before 1921; and our people and the French should be told the plain truth.”* (13.1.18)

As Captain Grenfell of the Royal Navy, writing as “T124” later noted, without the U.S. intervention Britain’s Great War would have ended in a defeat on points:

*“By the spring of 1917, our international credit was virtually exhausted, and had it not been for the entry of the United States into the war on the side of the Allies, the extent of our war effort would undoubtedly have had to be drastically reduced. We entered the war the richest country in the world, with abounding supplies of capital invested abroad. In two and a half years of war, we had practically run through our entire fortune and were on the verge of collapse. The effort to fight a first class war on both sea and land at the same time had proved too much for our finances.”* (Sea Power, p.95)

Two military events upset Esher’s pessimistic/realistic calculations and bailed out the British. Firstly, the German decision not to put up with such a scenario and launch a final great offensive that would settle the issue one way or another. That offensive in 1918 nearly succeeded but in not doing so weakened the Germans. The second thing that then came into play was not just American numbers but the great fighting ability of the U.S. that the Germans had not encountered before. Pershing, the U.S. commander, refused point-blank to join the French and British armies in their War. He insisted that the U.S. Army fight as a completely independent military force in the interests of America alone. He would have no truck with the idea of being cannon-fodder for those who had mismanaged their military affairs for 4 years and wasted hundreds of thousands of lives.

In early 1918 Esher wrote to the Prime Minister after hearing of the bungled opportunity of concluding a separate peace with Austria/Hungary:

*“You remember the conversations we had in Paris... The two points we so often discussed were the necessity of dominating the French and of separating Austria and Germany. The first was a necessity. The second a great chance. Both have been missed... The diplomatic failure to take advantage of the state*

*of mind disclosed by the Emperor’s letter is disgraceful to our diplomacy. How many thousands lives have been wasted? What high interests imperilled by this failure?”* (Letter to Lloyd George, 13.4.18)

The Sixtus affair was an attempt by the Austrian Emperor to conclude a peace with the Allies using his brother-in-law Prince Sixtus, an officer in the Belgian army, as intermediary. In early 1918 these secret negotiations were disclosed by the Allies, driving a wedge between Austria and Germany and ensuring the destruction of the Hapsburg state.

A letter from Esher to his son emphasised his anger about the failure to follow through on this.

*“I cannot get over the cardinal error of not taking advantage of the Emperor Karl’s friendly offer, and secondly the meanness of giving him away... I mean in March 1917. I don’t care if the enemy occupies Boulogne they cannot destroy the hegemony of England over the oceans of the world. We hold all their possessions in fee. Let them get out of that. Antwerp matters nothing in comparison to Baghdad... We may become a satrapy of the United States, but never of the Boche. That role is reserved for the French...”* (Letter to his son, Maurice, 13.4.18)

As 1918 continued Esher wrote to Lord Derby:

*“The grave issue before us is the dwindling of our Imperial position as America looms larger in Europe, in France, in the mercantile marine. This cannot be avoided, but it should be foreseen and handled... The British Empire is a very heterogeneous thing and for England ‘prestige’ is everything.”* (Letter to Lord Derby, 19.6.18)

The Great War might be won after all but what would be the result of the winning of it? The handling of the dwindling position of England at the moment of victory was all-important for the future of the Empire. □

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## A Good 'Great War' Book Trips up on its Own 'Good Story'.

by Manus O'Riordan

The lecture on “**Inter-imperialist rivalry and World War 1: Britain’s role**”, by Gerry Docherty, co-author of *Hidden History: the Secret Origins of the First World War* (with Jim Macgregor), at the Desmond Greaves Weekend School in Dublin on 13 September 2015, was published in full in the December 2015 issue of *Irish Foreign Affairs*. That same issue carried my own article, entitled “**Connolly, Casement, Childers and the War: A Response to Gerry Docherty**”, with such sub-headings as “Connolly - a glaring omission”, “Casement distorted and Childers condemned” and “The case for Childers”. I had been drafted in last minute by the Greaves School to speak as a respondent to the Gerry Docherty lecture and, in fairness, he admitted that he had not hitherto been aware of Connolly’s writings, while also stating that he would reflect on my defence of Casement and Childers.

My article acknowledged:

“I opened by welcoming the fact that, within Britain itself, Docherty was challenging the received British narrative on the 1914-18 Imperialist War which, with the supine acquiescence of the Fine Gael/Labour Government and the Fianna Fáil Opposition, was now being pushed as the ‘appropriate’ narrative for us in Ireland to follow. There was a wealth of detail, the extent of which I was previously unaware, on the intensity of a common Anglo-Russian long term strategy for war. And Docherty, both in the book and in his address to the Greaves School, had thoroughly enlightened me as to the extent to which Belgium, far from being the innocent ‘neutral’, had been a co-conspirator with Britain in its war plans. Docherty stated that six years ago he had not heard of Alfred Milner, and wondered, perhaps, if we had. Well, yes, those of us in the hall, perhaps a small minority, who were familiar with the publications of Athol Books, and particularly with *The Great Fraud of 1914-18* by Pat Walsh, which was published in book form March 2014 following its serialisation in *Irish Foreign Affairs*, were certainly very well informed about the role of Alfred Milner and the secret Committee of Imperial Defence.”

Moreover, the same December 2015 issue began publication of another series by Pat Walsh, entitled “**Thoughts on Lord Esher**”, which further enhanced our understanding of those forces intent on making war on Germany. My own article concluded: “I limited my critique of *Hidden History* to issues of Irish history, in particular, its ‘sins’ against those three great Cs of the Irish Revolution, one of omission in the case of Connolly, distortion in the case of Casement, and character assassination in the case of Childers. Yet there is a more fundamental problem with *Hidden History* that also needs to be discussed.”

In their *Hidden History*, Docherty and Macgregor elaborated on some of the key *dramatis personae* of their story, as follows:

“It was the heyday of both Jack the Ripper and Queen Victoria. The latter, having confronted her anti-Semitic prejudices, began a personal friendship with a member of the Rothschild dynasty, which played an important role in what was to follow... Though

they were outsiders at the start of the nineteenth century, by the end of that same epoch the Rothschilds’ wealth proved to be the key to open doors previously barred by the sectarian bigotry that regularly beset them because of their Jewish roots. The English branch, N. M. Rothschild & Co., headed by Lionel Rothschild, became the main force within the dynasty. He promoted the family interests by befriending Queen Victoria’s husband, Prince Albert, whose chronic shortage of money provided easy access to his patronage. The Rothschilds bought shares for Albert through an intermediary, and in 1850 Lionel ‘loaned’ Queen Victoria and her consort sufficient funds to purchase the lease on Balmoral Castle and its 10,000 acres. Lionel was succeeded by his son Nathaniel, or Natty, who as head of the London House became by far the richest man in the world.” (pp 17 and 24).

“A secret society would be formed and run by a small, close-knit clique. The leader was to be Cecil Rhodes... The meeting in February 1891 (of Rhodes, W. T. Stead and Lord Esher) was not some chance encounter... A year earlier, on 15 February 1890, Rhodes journeyed from South Africa to Lord Rothschild’s country estate to present his plan. Nathaniel Rothschild, together with Lord Esher and some other very senior members of the British Establishment were present... By February 1891, the time had come to move from ideal to action, and the formation of the secret society was agreed... Rhodes was the prime minister of Cape Colony and master and commander of a vast area of southern Africa that some were beginning to call Rhodesia. He was held to be a statesman, answerable to the British Colonial Office in terms of his governance, but in reality was a land-grabbing opportunist whose fortune was based on the Kimberley diamond mines. His wealth had been underwritten by brutal native suppression and the global mining interests of the House of Rothschild, to which he was also answerable... His approach to native affairs was brutal. In 1890, he instructed the House of Assembly in Cape Town that ‘the native is to be treated as a child and denied the franchise; we must adapt a system of despotism, such as works so well in India, in our relations with the barbarians of South Africa.’” (pp 18-20).

“Taken together, the five principal players - Rhodes, Stead, Esher, Rothschild and Alfred Milner - represented a new force that was emerging inside British politics... At the diamond fields of Kimberley (in the 1870s), Rhodes attracted the attention of the Rothschild agent Albert Gansi, who was assessing the local prospects for investment in diamonds. Backed by Rothschild funding, Rhodes bought out many small mining concerns, rapidly gained monopoly control and became intrinsically linked to the House of Rothschild. Although Rhodes was credited with transforming the De Beers Consolidated Mines into the world’s biggest diamond supplier, his success was largely due to the financial backing of Lord Natty Rothschild, who held more shares in the company than Rhodes himself. Rothschild backed Rhodes not only in his mining ventures but on the issues of British race supremacy and expansion of the Empire. Neither had any qualms about the use of force against African tribes in their relentless drive to increase British dominance in Africa.” (pp 28 and 31).

“In 1890, when Rhodes became prime minister of Cape Colony, his aggressive policies reignited old conflicts with the independent Boer Republics of Transvaal and the Orange River Colony... By the 1890s the Boer Republics had become increasingly problematic for Rhodes... The explosion of wealth in the Transvaal immediately transformed its importance. Political control lay in the hands of the rural, backward, Bible-bashing Boers, while economic control was increasingly in the hands of British immigrants sucked into the interior by the gold rush. These outsiders, or Uitlanders as the Boers termed them, had money but no political power. Despite the fact that Uitlander numbers rapidly rose to twice that of the original settlers, President Paul Kruger disbarred them from full citizenship until they had settled for a minimum of 14 years... The British-Boer conflict was all about the Transvaal’s gold. The Secret Elite wanted it and decided to take it by force. In December 1895, they planned to provoke an Uitlander uprising in Johannesburg as an excuse to seize the Republic... Word of the intended raid had been leaked ... and President Kruger had his forces ready... The entire venture was a fiasco. Rhodes was forced to resign as Cape Colony prime minister and ordered to London... Immediately Rhodes disembarked he was met by Natty Rothschild carrying a confidential message from Joseph Chamberlain, who had secretly approved the raid... (But) the government made no attempt to limit the powers of the Rothschild/Rhodes British South African Company... Rothschild, Esher, Stead and Milner met urgently to determine the Secret Elite strategy of denial.” (pp 33-35).

Yet the conspirators would finally get their desired Boer War of 1899-1902:

“Milner’s appointment (in 1897) as High Commissioner for South Africa was a coup for the Secret Elite... His mission was absolutely clear: govern South Africa, all of it, remove Boer obstacles to complete British domination and take the Transvaal’s gold. Milner knew it would mean all-out war... Milner returned to England in 1898 to build support for ‘*an active and resolute policy of action*’ ... and briefed members (of the Secret Elite) including Lords Curzon, Roseberry and Rothschild... (Following the outbreak of war in October 1899) Milner had the grace to confess in a letter to Lord Roberts, commander-in-chief in South Africa, that: ‘*I precipitated the crisis, which was inevitable, before it was too late. It is not very agreeable, and in many eyes, not a very creditable piece of business to have been largely instrumental in bringing about a big war.*’ ... One year before, in a private letter, Milner explained very clearly that the backward, almost medieval Boers could not be allowed to control the future of South Africa: ‘*The (Boers) race-oligarchy has got to go, and I see no sign of it removing itself.*’ ... From November 1900, the British Army had introduced new tactics in an attempt to break the Boers’ guerrilla campaign... The country was swept bare of everything that could give sustenance to the guerrillas, including women and children. Some 30,000 Boer farms were burned to the ground and their animals slaughtered. It was the clearance of civilians, virtual ethnic cleansing, uprooting a whole nation... A total of 45 camps were built for Boer internees and 64 for native Africans... The vast majority in the camps were women and children. Inadequate shelter, poor diet, total lack of hygiene and overcrowding led to malnutrition and endemic contagious diseases such as measles, typhoid and dysentery. Coupled with a shortage of medical facilities, over 26,000 women and children were to perish in the British concentration camps... W. T. Stead [who had defected, in horror, from his co-conspirators - MO’R] ... wrote: ‘*Every one of these children who died as a result of the halving of their rations, thereby exerting pressure*

*onto their families still on the battlefield, was purposefully murdered.*’ ... (By July 1901) there were 93,940 whites and 24,457 blacks in ‘camps of refuge’ ... as the death rates grew higher and higher. To Milner, the life or death of 118,000 Boer and African civilians therein rated as an abysmally low priority... (Under the May 1902 Treaty of Vereeniging) the Boer Republics were annexed to the British Empire. The winner took all... The Transvaal’s gold was finally in the hands of the Secret Elite at the cost of 32,000 deaths in the concentration camps, including more than 20,000 children.” (pp 38-39; 43; 47-50).

I find all of the above very convincing, leading to the conclusion that Rothschild was to the fore in a core group bearing responsibility and culpability for a course of British imperialist expansion that had led to those war crimes in South Africa. But what of the subsequent 400 pages that address the main theme of the book, “the inner circle of the Secret Elite” and “their plan for the destruction of Germany”? The authors had gone to great trouble in identifying that “inner circle” as the quintet of Rhodes, Stead, Milner, Esher and Rothschild. Rhodes died in 1902, while Stead had defected to the side of the Boer opposition, before perishing on the *Titanic* in 1912. By the time of the 1914 War on Germany, then, only the triumvirate of Milner, Esher and Rothschild remained of that original quintet. The authors’ continuing narrative includes the following:

“King Edward’s association with the inner circle of the Secret Elite, and his role in their plan for the destruction of Germany, was strengthened by his first lieutenant, Lord Esher... Following the signing of the (1907) Anglo-Russian Convention, plans were set for what was billed as a (1908) family visit between King Edward VII and Czar Nicholas at Reval (Tallinn)... The king was made an admiral of the ‘young and growing fleet’ that the Secret Elite were encouraging Russia to rebuild after the Tsushima disaster (where, during the Russo-Japanese War in May 1905, two thirds of its fleet had been destroyed). Massive profits were accrued by British and French bankers, and King Edward greased the path for his close friend, and Secret Elite financier, Sir Ernest Cassel, to be granted an interview with the Czar. It was an abuse of his friendship, but the king had to repay his debts somehow. One positive action stemmed from the meeting at Reval. King Edward responded to an appeal from the Rothschild brothers to speak to the Czar about protection for Russian Jews under threat from brutal pogroms. He did, but little changed in that anti-Semitic court.” (pp 71 and 124-5).

“Vickers was launched on the international road to prosperity, backed by funding from Rothschild and Cassel. The Secret Elite held sway at the very heart of the armaments industry. The Rothschilds had always understood the enormous profits generated by these industries. Financing wars had been their preserve for nearly a century. Bankers, industrialists and other members of the Secret Elite, the same men who were planning the destruction of Germany, stood to make massive profits from it... After the Russian fleet had been destroyed at Tsushima, Russia was provided with high-interest-bearing loans of £190 million to rebuild her navy... Like Lord Natty Rothschild in London, Baron Edouard de Rothschild in Paris controlled massive swathes of global investment banking. The London and Paris cousins worked in tandem so that the funds that flowed to Russia were strictly directed to the war aims of the Secret Elite.” (pp 141 and 206).

And by August 1914, when the conspirators finally succeeded in unleashing their War upon the German Nation:

“Inside Parliament, (British Foreign Secretary) Sir Edward Grey had far more support from the (Conservative and

Unionist) opposition benches than from his own (Liberal) party. Balfour, Bonar Law, F. E. Smith and Carson had been advised in advance of the likelihood of war and promised unreserved support. In the House of Lords, many powerful men stood ready to ensure that every sinew was strained to approve war. Lords Derby, Landsdowne, Rothschild (my emphasis – MO'R), Curzon and Milner, the beating heart of the Secret Elite, were joined by the press baron Lord Northcliffe, and the financial, industrial and commercial interests that bore not a single name. Grey would be the focus of attention in Parliament, but at no stage was he acting alone. As Members of Parliament gathered in the House of Commons at 3 pm that day (August 3, 1914), many would have read the *Times*' full-blooded call to arms against Germany... *The Times* was the voice of the Secret Elite and well informed in all aspects of its business." (pp 330-1).

Something jarred my memory that all was not right with this narrative. 15 years previously I had read of a very different role played by Rothschild, when researching for a 2001 lecture, subsequently published in 2006 by the Aubane Historical Society as a pamphlet entitled *James Connolly Re-Assessed: The Irish and European Context*. (See [www.indymedia.ie/article/76008?userlanguage=ga&save\\_prefs=true](http://www.indymedia.ie/article/76008?userlanguage=ga&save_prefs=true) for another lecture that I gave in 2006, with an almost identical text).

Much of the earlier biographical details on Rothschild given in the Docherty and Macgregor narrative are derived from the 1998 book by Niall Ferguson, *The House of Rothschild: The World's Banker*, and Ferguson is duly acknowledged by the authors. Their bibliography also includes another 1998 book by Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*. Here, then, is what Niall Ferguson had to say in the latter book, regarding the Rothschild role in respect of World War One:

"Dynastic ties joined the financial elites of the two countries (Britain and Germany); the Rothschilds in particular retained links with their German relatives. Lord Nathaniel Rothschild was married to one of his Frankfurt-born relatives... When he saw the German ambassador at Tring in March 1914, Lord Rothschild 'said most decidedly that as far as he could see and as far as he knew, there was no reason for fear of war and no complications ahead'." (pp 25 and 70).

"The British branch of the Rothschilds' bank, which epitomised for Marxists and anti-Semites alike the malign power of international capital, had financial links with the Maxim-Nordenfellt company [the British armaments firm, later subsumed by Vickers - MO'R]... Inconveniently for Marxist theory, however, ... in London the overwhelming majority of bankers were appalled at the prospect (of a major European war), not least because war threatened to bankrupt most if not all of the major acceptance houses engaged in financing international trade. The Rothschilds strove vainly to avert an Anglo-German conflict, and for their pains were accused by the foreign editor of *The Times*, Henry Wickham Stead, of 'a dirty German-Jewish international financial attempt to bully us into advocating neutrality'." (p 32).

"Lord Rothschild was quick to discern the limits of German power. 'The German Government is very hard up' Rothschild noted in April 1906, as yet another Reich loan was put on the market. Nor did he overlook the difficulties experienced by the Reichsbank during the international financial crisis of 1907... Rothschild was especially struck by the German need to sell bonds on foreign capital markets, an expedient to which neither Britain nor France had to resort to in peacetime. The impression of an over-stretched Reich was further confirmed by the large Prussian bond

issue in April 1908 and by the Reich budget deficit... To the bankers, then, Germany seemed weak, not strong." (p 139).

"The French socialist Jean Jaurès declared that 'international movement of capital is the biggest single guarantor of world peace'. The idea of economic constraints on war was widely believed, and not just on the political Left... The (1914) crisis was not really detectable in London until 27 July - the day before the Austrian declaration of war on Serbia - when German banks began to withdraw deposits and wind up positions. That this was only the beginning became apparent the next day when - in a development which took Lord Rothschild wholly by surprise - his Paris cousins sent a coded telegram requesting the sale of 'a vast quantity of Consols here for the French Govt & Savings banks'. He refused, first on the purely technical ground that 'in the actual state of our markets it is quite impossible to do anything at all'; then adding the more political argument that it would produce 'a deplorable effect ... if we were to send gold to a Continental Power for the purpose of strengthening itself at a moment when War (Rothschild's own emphasis) is in the mouths of everyman'... Just as Jaurès and the rest had predicted, bankers strove as far as they were able to avoid war in 1914: they saw even more clearly than the politicians that the outbreak of a major war would bring financial chaos. As Lord Rothschild told his cousins on 27 July, 'No one in the City thinks and talks about anything else but the European situation and the consequences which might arise if serious steps were not taken to prevent a European conflagration. "Clumsy as Austria may have been', he wrote on 30 July, 'it would be ultra-criminal if millions of lives (Rothschild's own emphasis) were sacrificed in order to sanctify the theory of murder, a brutal murder which the Servians have committed'."

"The next day he urged his French cousins to get (French President) Poincaré to 'impress upon the Russian Govt: (1) that the result of a war, however powerful a country their ally may be, is doubtful, but whatever the result may be, the sacrifices and misery attendant upon it are stupendous & untold. In this case the calamity would be greater than anything ever seen or known before. (2) France is Russia's greatest creditor, in fact the financial and economic conditions of the two countries are intimately connected & we hope you will do your best to bring any influence you may have, to bear upon your statesmen even at the last moment, to prevent this hideous struggle from taking place, and to point out to Russia that she owes this to France.'" (pp 190-193).

"On 31 July Rothschild implored *The Times* to tone down its leading articles, which were 'hounding the country into war'; but both the foreign editor Henry Wickham Stead and his proprietor Lord Northcliffe regarded this as 'a dirty German-Jewish international financial attempt to bully us into advocating neutrality' and concluded that 'the proper answer would be a still stiffer leading article tomorrow'. 'We dare not stand aside', Saturday's leader duly thundered." (p 195).

This was the very quotation from Ferguson that I had cited in both my 2001 and 2006 lectures, while arguing in justification of Connolly's pro-German stand in response to Britain's imperialist war. Ferguson concluded the Rothschild theme, as follows:

"Rothschild frantically sought to keep his channels of communication to Berlin via Paul Schwabach open; he even sent a personal appeal for peace directly to the Kaiser. [Paul von Schwabach had gone from being Bismarck's banker to become Kaiser Wilhelm II's own personal banker. A baptised Jew, he would commit suicide in Berlin in November 1938, in the wake of the Nazi Kristallnacht pogroms - MO'R]... Echoing



Wickham Steed, Cambon (the French ambassador in London) informed the Quai d'Orsay (the French Foreign Office) of the 'Extraordinary efforts being made by the business world to prevent the Government from intervening against Germany. The City financiers, governors of the Bank of England, more or less under the domination of bankers of German origin, are carrying on a very dangerous campaign.' ... The gloom of bankers may be imagined... Alfred de Rothschild (Natty's brother) wrote to his Paris cousins on 3 August, when it was clear to him that Britain would intervene. He could not think of the 'military & moral spectacle which we have before us with its painful details looming in the distance ... without shuddering'. There may indeed have been people in 1914 who sincerely believed that the war would be short and sweet. But the bankers were not among them - any more than were the German General Staff." (195-197).

The evidence presented by Ferguson, in a book cited by Docherty and Macgregor as among their own sources, flies in the face of what they themselves have gone on to claim. Why? Anti-Semitism is abhorrent to them, particularly the persecution of Jews in Tsarist Russia. They would have no truck with such a Tsarist forgery as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. But why have they themselves persisted with this false narrative of the

House of Rothschild? They had a great story of historical fact to tell, based on exhaustive research, and producing conclusive evidence regarding Britain's overriding responsibility and culpability for the First World War. In this journal, Pat Walsh has highlighted the key roles of Milner and Esher, but he has told that story - of what Connolly called *The War upon the German Nation* - in a non-sensationalist way. Docherty and Macgregor, however, decided to 'sex up' the story with their 'Secret Five'. Rhodes passed away, and the authors acknowledge that Stead had gone on to defect in horror at Milner, Esher and Rothschild's criminal Boer War. Perhaps the authors had already gone too far along their chosen style of narrative before they discovered that Rothschild would himself defect when it came to the War on Germany. "To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness", Oscar Wilde had Lady Bracknell say by way of rebuke in *The Importance of Being Ernest*. Perhaps Docherty and Macgregor did not want to acknowledge losing Rothschild as well as Stead, and being left with just a duet of Milner and Esher out of the original quintet. What a pity! I would still recommend their book as a valuable source of some key facts regarding Britain's War on Germany; but with the health warning that the authors have also prevented some other key facts from "getting in the way of a good story". □

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(Continued from p. 12)

us, because liberalism is deeply embedded in your psyche as well as in ours. And you tell yourself stories about how this all makes sense.

I think there's only one hope. The only thing that I think will change this is the rise of China. I think if China continues to rise, the US will have to put the pivot strategy into practice in a big way. There are a lot of Chinese people and we're hypothesising a situation here where they have a lot of wealth and a lot of military might. Taking the Chinese on in the East Chinese Sea, the South China Sea, these are going to be very tricky issues. And the US has to deal seriously with the Chinese, it's going to have to be very careful and very smart about how it deals with the Persian Gulf, which is really the heart and soul of the Middle East, because what happens with regard to the Chinese and the Indians and the Persian Gulf, go together. China imports 50% of its oil and of that 50% that it imports half of it comes from the Gulf: that means, 25% of Chinese oil comes from the Gulf and those numbers are expected to go up. So the Chinese are going to pay really careful attention to the Middle East/Gulf. It's no accident that Xi Jinping was in Tehran early this year (2016) and signed 17 separate agreements with the Iranians. That's going to happen. So the US, if China continues to rise, will have to focus on East Asia in a way it has not up to now and it will have to be strategically very smart because it's then going to be dealing with a potential peer competitor. And that's going to have ramifications for the Middle East. And I believe that will make us much smarter. (Continued p. 11)

(Continued from p. )

But, if that does not happen, and let me conclude on this point, if that does not happen, if China does not continue to rise, let's just imagine a situation where the Chinese economy more or less flatlines, the US in the year 2050 will be much more powerful relative to every other country on the planet than it is today. Just think about it, there are three principal competitors from the 20<sup>th</sup> century: America's three principal competitors, Germany depopulating, Japan depopulating, Russia/Soviet Union depopulating. The balance of power between the US

and those three countries is going like that. India's not going to be a potential peer competitor, Brazil no way. There's only one country on the planet that can give us a run for our money and that's China. And as I said to you, if China does give us a run for our money, that will force us to think strategically, to behave smartly, because we won't be able to afford to screw up. Also, what I'm saying to you is if Chinese growth levels off, or goes up at a very, very slow rate, the end result is we will be more powerful than ever and we will be more irresponsible than ever.

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/event/can-us-overcome-its-failed-middle-east-policies>

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Websites associated with atholbooks.org:

<http://www.david-morrison.org.uk>

<http://www.british-values.com>

<http://drpatwalsh.com>

<https://lefroggydotcom.wordpress.com>

<http://heideggerreview.org>

<http://atholstreetpeople.org>

# Domenico Losurdo

## The Germans: A Sonderweg of a cursed nation?

### Chapter 3 Germany and the Revolution

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#### [Editorial note.

Keeping the Germans feeling guilty for the Nazi treatment of the Jews two generations on requires believing that actions of a particular regime are caused by the characteristics and actions of a people as a whole. It requires believing that all the members of a population do exhibit the same characteristics, and that these characteristics don't change: two generations later, the same characteristics are there.

As Losurdo explains in Chapter 3 of *The Germans, The Sonderweg of a Cursed People*, this way of thinking has been applied to people other than the Germans. In the 1920s Gobetti, a liberal anti-fascist journalist, applied these beliefs to Italy, saying that its people were always content to be slaves and because of that fascism happened in that country. The Italian Communist Party later refused this type of thinking and promoted the revolutions and resistance movements that Italians had taken part in, to put forward another view of the national character and history.

In the same way, those who say Germany has a cursed destiny—*Sonderweg*—focus on the reactionary regimes there and ignore the revolutions and progressive movements in Germany. To counter this, Losurdo lists the revolutions of 1848, which made Germany the epitome of revolutionary countries in Europe, then the wars of liberation against the rule of Napoleon, and finally the revolutions of 1918, to show that Germany was not always 'reactionary'.

In the case of 1918, Losurdo both overstates and understates the case. He overstates the case when he says that these revolutions 'forced the end of the war and of the Second Reich'; more determinant were the arrival of the United States army on French soil and their decisive military intervention on the side of France and England, as well as the vital influence of the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, and his '14 Points' for the establishment of democracy in Germany and Europe, that persuaded Germany that it was safe to accept to end the war with an armistice.

On the other hand, Losurdo understates the case, as he could have explained how the Germans in their innocence believed the democratic rhetoric of the US. They believed that the war propaganda only applied to the Germany of the Kaiser, and if they adopted democracy and expelled the Kaiser, they would be treated as equals at the end of the war. In other words, they were ready for democracy.

Losurdo's second line of argument is that countries proud of their revolutionary history are also guilty of heinous crimes. This is quite right of course, and Losurdo cites the case of France. He would have been justified in pointing to France's treatment of her colonies, and the egregious example of the massacres conducted in 1945 in Algeria, not to mention the Algerian war later. Instead he chooses the period of German occupation and says that the 'republic of Vichy', a slip of the pen there, 'collaborated with the crimes of the Third Reich and even with the 'final solution'. In reality Vichy mitigated the Jewish policy of the occupiers. This was recognised by the authority on the question of the destruction of the Jews of Europe, Raul Hilberg, and by the French historian Léon Poliakov:

"Vichy was the chief factor accounting for the relatively more lenient fate of the French Jews. [...] In the matter of the 'final solution', Vichy's position was essentially determined by Pierre Laval. His policy seems to have been to get rid of the foreign Jews, but to protect French Jews in the two zones as much as possible."

Léon Poliakov, *Bréviaire de la Haine, le IIIème Reich et les Juifs* Calmann-Lévy, 1951 (Harvest of Hate, the IIIrd Reich and the Jews).

"In its reactions to German pressures, the Vichy government tried to confine the destruction process to certain limits. [...] When German pressure was intensified in 1942, the Vichy government fell back upon a second line of defence. The foreign Jews and immigrants were abandoned, and an effort was made to protect the native Jews. To some extent, that strategy met with success. By giving up a part, most of the whole was saved."

Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Gallimard, 2006

The 1961 version said: 'To no small extent that Vichy strategy met with success. By giving up a part, most of the whole was saved.'

More recently, on 4 August 2016, a review in the *Times Literary Supplement* of a book by the French historian and Resistant Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac said:

"While Jacques Semelin has recently argued that three-quarters of Jews in France survived the Holocaust because of the helping hands of generous French people, providing food, shelter and escape routes, Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac ripostes that the "protective" policy of Vichy has to be taken into account." Historically, as the French/Israeli historian Alain Michel has shown, neither the population nor the Resistance played a part in saving the majority of French Jews, except on an individual basis.

Finally Losurdo makes the general point that countries with 'bourgeois democratic revolutions are not immune to fascism'. It would have been better for him to have said that it is precisely countries with a parliamentary system that develop fascism when bourgeois order is drastically threatened, as in Italy and Germany after the utter turmoil caused by World War 1. Fascism is not the same as military dictatorship.

The editorial in *Irish Foreign Affairs* of March 2016, taking the example of Spain, explained fascism as follows:

"The Franco dictatorship was the means by which a democracy that had gone wild was restored to a form of social and political order that was capable of being governed. In very recent times it seems to have been denied in principle that democracies *can* go wild, but for many centuries the standard view of political philosophy was that it was the natural tendency of democracies to go wild unless there were some very particular circumstance operating which overcame that tendency.

Franco apparently understood Fascism in much the same terms as Churchill did when paying homage to Mussolini.

It was a means of restoring bourgeois order in a situation in which the elements of society had flown apart and were at war with one another, but in the doing of it bourgeois liberalism, which had proved itself ineffectual, had to be overridden by a force capable of establishing authority in the state—which in effect means establishing a State. He did not try to establish dictatorship as the normal form of the State by appointing a dictator-heir, as the English dictator Cromwell did. He made arrangements instead for the restoration of functional monarchy, presumably knowing that it would evolve democratically. By means of dictatorship he made Spain a viable national state of the bourgeois kind, but a state with entrenched labour laws that obstructed liberalism.”]

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**Domenico Losurdo**

## **The Germans: A Sonderweg of a cursed nation?**

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He was a member of the Italian Communist Party until its dissolution. He has written on Kant and Hegel, the philosophers of modernity, and Nietzsche, the critic of modernity, as well as on Marx and Stalin. He criticized in particular the notion of totalitarianism, a Cold War concept which allowed Hitler and Stalin, against the evidence, to be seen as equivalent historical figures.

‘The Germans: A *Sonderweg* of a cursed nation?’ has only been published in German. The translation below is by Angela Stone for IFA.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **GERMANY AND THE REVOLUTION**

##### **1. Self-flagellation or a new definition of national identity?**

The concept of a cursed *Sonderweg* is not exclusive to Germany, and neither is the tendency for a country to respond to a catastrophic event with an approach of self-flagellation and national nihilism. We have already referred to Gobetti’s historical account of Italy after the March on Rome and it is now worth coming back to this. According to Gobetti, the success of fascism in Italy was part of the ‘autobiography of the nation’ ... ‘and so Mussolini [was] nothing new’<sup>1</sup>. An unbroken line of black reaction characterises the history of Italy, according to him, in particular in respect of the absence a Reformation. The ‘freedom’ of the ‘protestant ethic’ was not established in Italy, and instead, ‘the princely or royal courts—the only centres of intellectual life—peacefully followed Rome’s dogmatic model’. It was the root of a catastrophe. What Italy demonstrated most clearly for Gobetti was ‘the lack of freedom [...] over the course of centuries’; one should never lose sight of the ‘equivalence of fascism and the Counter-Reformation’<sup>2</sup>. It was

true, he admitted, that later on unification did take place, but this was not the result of an indigenous movement, but merely an ‘indifferent Italy [being] forced into revolution by external motives and situations in European politics.’<sup>3</sup>

This account, which appears to leave little room for the conflict between progress and reaction, implies at the same time a judgement on a whole people. Gobetti stated that ‘neither Mussolini nor Victor Emmanuel of Savoy had true leadership virtues because Italians have a real slave mentality’, they are incapable of rising to the value of freedom, ‘they require discipline and a strong state’<sup>4</sup>. Worse still, he said, instead of debating politically, Italians tended to let themselves be seduced by theatrical gestures. On the whole, he saw the history of Italy as ‘a hopeless attempt at becoming modern whilst also remaining *litterati*’, calling Italians ‘a *people à la D’Annunzio*’<sup>5</sup>, a people whose inclination for rhetoric and aesthetic posturing completely overcame any concern for political content and even more any concern for freedom and individual rights.

It was Gobetti, a courageous antifascist campaigner who expressed complete sympathy for Gramsci, for the *Ordine Nuovo* and also for the ‘great workers’ councils movement in the factories<sup>6</sup> who gave this catastrophic analysis. It is no coincidence then that Gobetti inspired the ‘Action Party’ (‘Partito d’Azione’). A party which, despite courageously establishing itself in the *Resistenza* (the anti-fascist resistance), always remained an elite party during its short existence. In the meantime, the Communist Party won mass following as it had a completely different approach to the national question. Fascism built up its mass consensus on a special idea of Italy derived from the Roman Empire; it owed its success to the glorification of the wars of conquest and aggression of the fascist regime and led to a chauvinistically-interpreted *Risorgimento*: ‘The empire has returned to the Roman hills of destiny’. To this line of development, which led to defeat in the war, the catastrophe of the military occupation of the country and its transformation into a semi colony of the Third Reich, Gramsci, Togliatti and the Italian Communist Party proposed an alternative with a different national identity.

On the one hand, they drew attention to the terrible pages written by Italian fascists and colonialists and used them to refute the myth, ‘Italians are nice people’ (*Italiani brava gente*). This should have worked to give Italy a positive *Sonderweg*, because despite everything, the Italians were strangers to the crimes that other nations had committed. On the other hand, Gramsci, Togliatti and the PCI invoked the notable good sides of Italy’s history. This included the contribution Italy had made to forming the modern world with humanism and the Renaissance. Additionally they noted the Neapolitan Revolution of 1799 and the *Risorgimento* (the Italian uprising and unification movement between 1815 and 1870) which swept away the *Ancien Régime* on the tide of the French revolution and promoted national unity. Finally, they added to this the antifascist resistance, which overthrew the dictatorship, reconquered independence and national unity, and thanks to mass participation, overcame the limitations of the *Risorgimento*’s intrinsically passive revolution.

In this respect the resistance emerged as a second *Risorgimento* with a true national character, which prepared the way for great changes of a democratic and socialist character. This was necessary to render impossible once and for all a repetition of reactionary adventures and catastrophes. In this respect, socialism did not only answer expectations for the liberty of the broad masses but also corresponded to a profound

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3 Ibid. p.13

4 Ibid. p.166

5 Ibid. pp.9, 165

6 Ibid. p.105

1 Gobetti 1983, p.165

2 Ibid. pp.10, 11, 167



national demand for an actual solution to the 'total national crisis', caused by fascism and the Crown. The case of Italy also validates Lenin's analysis of the revolutionary crisis, as we will see. The Communist Party of Italy succeeded in winning hegemony over the masses and the intellectual classes, and for a long time in holding a position, in which they simultaneously presented themselves as the pioneers of the question of class and as the interpreter of national consciousness.

Today the historical context has changed radically but, for a political power which really wants to root itself in a country and make changes, the teachings are still important.

## **2..The revolutionary tradition in Germany, England and the USA**

The stance adopted by Gramsci and Togliatti regarding the outbreak of fascist dictatorship in Italy and its long duration was similar to the stance adopted by Engels directly after the defeat of the 1848 revolution in Germany. Prior to the publication of his book on the German Peasants' War, Engels wrote: 'Even the German people have their own revolutionary tradition' (MarxEngelsWerke, (MEW) 7, 329). In fact, this is not just about the Reformation and the peasant war. No country felt the magic of the French revolution more than Germany, and it is not by chance that the movement found its highest expression in 'German classical philosophy', whose heir Engels sees in the 'German workers' movement'. And we have also seen that, for an entire historical period, international public opinion broadly viewed Germany as the epitome of revolutionary countries.

The social-chauvinist support for the First World War by the Social Democratic Party may appear to represent a significant break when you consider the many decades during which the German workers' movement in Europe was seen as the avant-garde of the revolution. However, in spite of this, it is important to remember that the November revolution took place one year after the October revolution, and was also a fight against the imperialist war. The November revolution forced not only the end of the war (and the Second Empire) but also seemed for a time to bring Germany on the wake of socialist Russia. Germany was the first country in the west after revolutionary Russia to extend active and passive political rights to women and begin to build a social state. Nazism reacted to all of this extremely violently.

The theory that Germany never had a successful democratic revolution is not only groundless but also prompts us to ask whether the tradition of revolution in England or the United States is any richer than in Germany. In England, the so-called Puritan Revolution ended in defeat. And the second English revolution which is today celebrated as 'the Glorious Revolution' was described by Marx as being in reality 'a parliamentary coup' over the transformation of 'common property' into 'private property'. (MEW, 23, 753). With this coup the country's nobility led the way for the enclosure of the common land and the eviction of the farmers. In Ireland the nobility also succeeded in consolidating its merciless domination over the unlucky Irish. We have also seen how England became the symbol of conservatism and reaction in the eyes of the broad international public, firstly through their conduct towards the French revolution of 1789 and then again in the European revolutionary development of 1848.

According to Engels, England is an 'unmovable rock of reaction in the sea' (MEW, 5, 239). And for Marx, reactionary Europe, emanating from the defeat of the revolution in Germany and the massacre of the insurgent workers in Paris in June 1871, was the Europe that 'fell back into the old double slavery, the English-Russian slavery' (MEW, 6, 369). He

considered England to be the country where forms of slave labour still existed in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (MEW, 23, 763) and which, with its liberal ruling classes in Ireland, drove a relentless policy of genocidal practices. He wrote of these practices, saying:

'Over 1,100,000 people were replaced by 9,600,000 sheep. A transformation on this scale is unheard of in the rest of Europe. The Russians displaced the Poles and replaced them with Russians, not sheep. Only under the Mongols in China was there once a discussion whether towns should be destroyed in order to make room for sheep.' (MEW, 16, 552).

Even William Ewart Gladstone, the pride of liberal England, was the leader of the 'police terrorism' which was launched on the Irish section of the International. (MEW, 18, 136).

One might suppose that Marx was alone in holding such a strong opinion. But that is not the case. Liberal Gustave Beaumont, accompanying Tocqueville on his tour of America, spoke of events in Ireland as 'a religious oppression that surpasses all imagination'. This was a nation which was not only robbed of its 'religious freedom', but which, in spite of its terrible poverty, was also forced to finance the rich Anglican churches which oppressed it. The vexation, humiliation and suffering forced upon this 'enslaved nation' by English 'tyrants' proved that 'in human institutions there is a grade of egoism and insanity, the limits of which are unbounded'<sup>7</sup>. A century later, Gandhi, shocked at London's colonial policy, went so far as to say: 'in India we have a Hitler-like government, even if it is disguised as something milder.'<sup>8</sup>

Now we come to the United States. The prominent US-American researchers of the day interpret the uprising of the English colonists in America not as a revolution but rather as a reactionary secession. Freed from the control exercised by the Crown up to that point, the rebels were in a position to strengthen their power over the black slaves, as well as now being free to bring about the expansion to the West, much to the detriment of the Indians. Of course, this argument can be contested. However, there are a few facts that have been referred to earlier in this pamphlet which are worth considering. With the victory of the insurgent colonists came the dramatic acceleration of the process of expropriation, deportation and dispersal of the Indians. In the new independent state, black slavery was abolished 30 years later than in the English colonies. As already described, the United States reintroduced slavery into Texas—taken from Mexico—after it had been abolished. Following the formal abolishment of this institution, the formation of a terrorist white supremacy regime immediately ensued, the likes of which Canada and Latin America had never known. According to a number of US-American historians, this was the most tragic period of Afro-American history; even more tragic than the centuries of slavery. This was because of the sadistic violence that the Ku Klux Klan and other groups exercised over members of the 'lower race' on a daily basis.

From the perspective of the Indians and the Blacks it does not make sense to talk of this as a democratic revolution. It is even less rational to speak of a democratic revolution when one considers the fact that the United States set the benchmark for conservatism for a long time. The Haitian Revolution which took place in Santo Domingo resulted in the abolition of slavery at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the foundation of the state of Haiti, the first state of the American continents without slavery. But following this, the landowners, robbed of their human cattle, sought and found refuge in the North American republic.

Those who hoped that slavery could be maintained turned to Washington. The USA, with the abolition of slavery and the start of a regime of white supremacy, became the model for a

7 See Losurdo 2010, chapter 10, p.1

8 Gandhi 1969-2001, vol. 8, p.200 (25 April 1941)

racial state founded on the separation and division of the races into inferior and superior—particularly in the southern states. Later, this would be a model for other racial states: in South Africa during the time of apartheid and in Germany, where the US were admired by Hitler and Rosenberg.

When speaking of true democratic revolutions we may consider the case of France, but the beheading of the Bourbon king Louis XVI did not prevent the accession to the throne of Napoleon I, described by Lenin as a kind of Hohenzollern. Nor did it prevent the country from producing an antidemocratic and anti-Semitic movement at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most importantly, it did not stop the foundation of the republic of Vichy, which collaborated with Hitler up until the last moment. The Italian *Risorgimento* presents us with a more or less 'passive' democratic revolution, but it did not stop Mussolini and fascism from seizing power. Mussolini, a figure who was then Hitler's role model, later became, with the passage of the racial laws and with the Republic of Salò, his pupil and servant. As you can see, a bourgeois-democratic revolution is not in itself immune to fascism. The theory of the German *Sonderweg* therefore is flawed on two counts: when one portrays the history of Germany solely in a negative light, and when one simply glorifies the history of other countries and their civil-democratic revolutions.

Of course, the particularly barbaric form that imperialism and racism took on in the Third Reich should never be forgotten. But we should remember it whilst also detaching ourselves from the distorted representation which has been widely spread. No one accuses the French people of the terrible repression that was carried out against the activists and sympathisers of the Paris Commune. The horror of this event in France's history represents both the severity of class conflict and the particularly grave danger that the revolutionary movement presented to the French bourgeoisie. So why should we analyse the regimes of Hitler or Mussolini any differently?

We could even go so far as to say that the fight against Nazism is an integral component of the German revolutionary tradition. A comparative approach is useful in this case. As late as January 1938 the British ambassador to Berlin, Sir Nevil Henderson, spoke out in favour of the common goal held by the German-English alliance at that time of promoting the civilising of the 'lesser breeds'. At that time thousands of communists, social democrats and German Christians were wasting away in Nazi concentration camps. Especially affected were communists and those who sympathised with the Soviet Union, which had already been branded as an integral part of the inferior population by Spengler. Sir Henderson did not stop at promoting the subjection of the 'lesser breeds'. In the reports that he sent to London and in conversations with Hitler he raged repeatedly against the Jews who were, in his opinion, 'warmongers'<sup>9</sup>. Let us now take a look at what was happening at the same time in Germany. Viktor Klemperer, a Jewish philologist, noted in his diary the suffering and humiliation involved in wearing the Star of David. Nevertheless, he wrote of the following episode:

'A furniture remover who was quite friendly to me after two removals suddenly stands in front of me on Freiburger Straße, takes my hand with both of his paws and whispers so loudly that you could have heard him on the other side of the canal: 'Well, Mr Professor, don't lose heart! Soon they will be finished, those cursed party comrades!'

The Jewish philologist added with wonderful irony: 'All the good people smell strongly of the KPD [The Communist Party of Germany]' as it was the communists who challenged

the regime in that way<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, we could also go onto say that this great statement refers not just to the German Communist Party but also the German nation in general.

Most notably, the Third Reich set itself up on emergency grounds in order to lead a pre-emptive and ruthless civil war against the revolutionary and pacifist movement. And in readiness for the looming war, they aimed to pre-empt a collapse on the home front such as happened in the First World War in Russia and Germany and nearly in Italy while France and England remained unaffected. Despite the large expenditure of bloodthirsty rage, the Nazi reckoning was not completely realised. Just as the First World War ended with the November revolution, the Second World War ended thanks to the decisive contribution of the Red Army, and the construction of a socialist state on German soil.

### 3. A misrepresented revolution: the revolt against Napoleon

Up until now I have not discussed the German Wars of Liberation of 1812 to 1815. Not a few on the Left doubt their progressive quality because the ideology of the anti-Napoleonic uprising was often primitive. But this trivialisation of an important chapter in German history is completely unjustified. Its progressive character was underlined by Engels who assigned the beginning of the 'civil revolution' in Germany to the years 1808 to 1813 (MEW, 7, 539), meaning from the implementation of the anti-feudal reforms in the course of the national struggle for liberation against the regime of occupation and oppression imposed by Napoleonic France. The War of Liberation, generally dismissed by the Left as of no importance, in fact forms an essential point of reference for Lenin. He compared the fight of the young Soviet Russia against the aggression of Hohenzollern imperialism with the 'war of liberation' and the 'war of the people'—even though they were led by the Hohenzollern, and described Napoleon as 'just as much a brigand as the Hohenzollerns'. The great Russian revolutionary, who legitimised the resistance of the Afghan *emirs* against English imperialism, did not allow himself to be side tracked by the ideological immaturities that sometimes characterised the national liberation movements, as is still the case today.

The greatness of German classical philosophy lies in the fact that it theoretically reflects the great events that characterise the history of Europe at that time. This applies to the French Revolution, which finds its most mature theoretical expression in the philosophy of Hegel and in some of the central categories of his *Science of Logic*: objective contradiction, absolute negation, qualitative leaps etc. But this also applies to the War of Liberation and the thinking that was for the longest time concerned with it. For a long time, Fichte hoped that French bayonets would effect a renewal in Germany and, late in comparison with Hegel, he finally reached an understanding of the national question. But the late Fichte did fully recognise the legitimacy and the historical necessity of the anti-Napoleonic uprising. He did so without letting himself be misled into believing that the speeches coming from the French revolution could establish the legitimacy of expansionism. Instead he grasped a much fuller understanding of the objectively liberating and progressive quality of the German movement of national resistance.

It is Hegel who, building on the foundation of the analysis of the revolutions beyond the Rhine, had more deeply thought through the categories of the Revolution and in more detail than the protagonists of the Revolution themselves. And it is Fichte

9 Leibovitz, Finkel 2005, p.96

10 Klemperer 1975, p.214

who grasped the categories of the national Wars of Liberation and Wars of Independence more deeply— notwithstanding the fact that France had already had a similar experience several years before the Wars of Liberation had broken out, in their defence of the Revolution against the intervention of feudal powers. Fichte's theories reflect the anti-Napoleonic revolt of the oppressed nations—albeit only in relation to Europe—and compose a kind of uninterrupted revolutionary process which progress from the national liberation to political-social liberation. In his later work we are in the presence of one of the peaks of classical German philosophy. This means that, together with the work of this philosopher who has thought deeply on the subject, the Wars of Liberation help us enormously to understand the national movements of liberation where the protagonists are peoples in a colonial or semi-colonial situation. The eventual backwardness of their ideology (one thinks of the situation in Palestine and especially in Gaza after the crisis of Marxism) is no reason to deny their historical legitimacy and their progressive character.

#### 4. The socialist movement and the theory of *Sonderweg*

We will now question the role that the theory of *Sonderweg* has played for the classical writers of the socialist-communist movement. In 1890 Engels published 'The Foreign Policy of Russian Tsardom', an essay that concentrated wholly on the stigmatisation of the danger that Russia presented for democracy and peace in Europe. A year later, he wrote a letter to August Bebel, proposing an unusual hypothesis. If Russia attacked, supported by her allies in the West, could Germany be forced into launching a war of defence and national independence? 'And it could come about that compared to the cowardice of the bourgeois and Junkers who wanted to save their property, the workers movement would emerge as the only really energetic party in the war.' (MEW, 38, 176). Here Engels indirectly compared Germany with revolutionary and Jacobine France, which repelled the invasion of the counterrevolutionary powers. Germany had a strong workers movement but the Hohenzollern still ruled and the country had just seen Wilhelm II, a declared defender of imperialism, ascend the throne. Nevertheless, if a country was at that time characterised by a reactionary and warmongering *Sonderweg*, this would perhaps be Russia but certainly not Germany.

Let us skip forward a few centuries. When, after the outbreak of the First World War, Lenin rejected the theory of the Entente, which claimed Wilhelmine Germany alone caused the carnage, he was effectively distancing himself from the theory of German *Sonderweg*. It was much more the German social democrats with their opposition to the Russian revolution and with their theories of imperialism which placed the Anglo-Saxon world and Germany on the same level. This crucial thesis of Lenin's we see disputed by Karl Kautsky, Rudolf Hilferding, and most thoroughly by Joseph Schumpeter, who went on to dispute in 1919 the thesis that the war policies of imperialism had their roots in capitalism. In contrast to Germany and other countries where the heritage of the old regime still reigned, in the United States the ideal of peace in culture and political practice was undisputed. It is not necessary to point out that these arguments completely disregard a number of cases including the deportation and extermination campaigns that destroyed the Indian populations; the war that led to the dismembering of Mexico; the repeated military interventions in Latin America; and the quasi genocidal repression with which Washington fought the movement of independence in the Philippines.

With Theodor Roosevelt, the colonial expansionism of the USA coincided clearly with the glorification of the extermination of the Indians, the theoretical justification of the 'big stick' policy against the nations which rebelled against the protectorate of Washington, the confirmation of war's cathartic role. There is no trace of this to be found in Schumpeter who was not clear that American repressive actions blatantly confirmed one of Lenin's central theses: that colonial powers do not consider armed conflict with those from the dehumanised peoples as war. In this way, the important scientist and sociologist came to the conclusion that one could not speak of England and the United States as having imperialist and warmongering tendencies. Once again here we see a renewed indirect confirmation of the theory of German *Sonderweg*, presented as a riposte to Lenin's theory of imperialism<sup>11</sup>.

When Lenin wrote the preface to the French and German editions of his work on *Imperialism* in 1920, he referred to the 'two or three world-dominating plunderers (America, England and Japan), armed to the teeth, and drawing the whole world into their war over the division of their booty'. He also spoke about Germany, which had a 'far more brutal and rotten' peace treaty in Versailles than that which German imperialism forced onto Soviet Russia at Brest-Litovsk (Lenin Werke, 22, 195). The great Russian revolutionary exposed the actions of France as well as Anglo-Saxon countries, countries glorified by social democracy and Schumpeter.

Later, Nazism and Operation Barbarossa made sure that the circumstances radically changed. In this context it is easy to understand the communist movement's efforts substantially to rethink the history of the country that produced the outrages of the Third Reich. But with the outbreak of the Cold War the picture changed again, as is made apparent in the programme formulated by Lukács in *The Destruction of Reason*:

'For in the period after the end of the Second World War, the United States gained increasing prominence as the leading power of imperialist reaction, taking Germany's place in this respect. In substance, then, we would have to write a history of that nation's philosophy as precise as that we have produced for Germany in order to show the derivation and roots, both social and intellectual, of the present ideologies of the 'American Age'. It goes without saying that this would take a whole book.'<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, I do not believe that a war of quotations can be decisive in political cultural debates. One can doubtless find explanations in favour of the theory of the German *Sonderweg* in the classics and in relevant authors of the communist movement. But this is not the crux of the matter. In the first place, these explanations are in no way to be thought of as a uniform and consistent whole. It would be a grave mistake dogmatically to refer to them.

Unfortunately, the history of the communist movement is full of misconceptions of this kind. Here I would like to mention an especially glaring one. In the summer of 1934, a special issue of the theoretical journal of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, '*The Bolshevik*', was prepared for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the imperialist war. In this context the editors were proposing to re-issue an essay by Engels about the foreign policy of the Tsardom of Russia, which denounced the especially dangerous and reactionary expansionist *Sonderweg* of Tsarist Russia. This proposal, which was wisely rejected by Stalin<sup>13</sup>, had something unbelievable about it and not least because since the original essay's publication, the October revolution had taken place. On the opposite side, Hitler had seized power since then. He had already formulated a clear programme in *Mein Kampf* that outlined the foundation of a

11 See Losurdo 2007, chapter 4, p.3

12 Lukács 1980, p.766

13 Stalin 1971-76, vol. 14, p.1 (editor's note)



giant continental empire in Eastern Europe and the decimation and enslavement of the 'native' people. A dogmatic approach to the classics made it difficult in this case, even impossible, to become conscious of the very special danger of German imperialism at that time.

And what about today? Instead of the 'American century' ideology stigmatised by Lukács, we now have the ideology of the 'new American century' which has been propagated by leading circles and groups. It is openly stated that the USA, the nation 'chosen' by God, have the right to force their world empire upon all others, at the expense of international law, and intervening the world over. They have no hesitation in using the threat of atomic weapons and even in actually using them if necessary, all under the excuse of preventing war. And this ideology is still current despite the ever more obvious public crises of American imperialism and the election of a coloured man to the White House. In this situation, the proposition formulated in *The Destruction of Reason* is more urgent than ever. The history of the United States must be fundamentally reconsidered and rewritten. On a theoretical level, the relentless and tenacious evocation of the terrible vision that is the German *Sonderweg* is without historical grounding; it is both weak and dangerous (considering the tendency that exists to slip from the area of objective contradictions to the supposed psychology of the nation); and on a political level, the idea of a German *Sonderweg* is catastrophic.

## 5. Self-flagellation and the danger of the indirect encouragement of chauvinism

In spite of the rich democratic and revolutionary tradition of Germany, there are still those who spread the myth of an eternally condemned German nation and thus wish to blackmail Germany in order to render impossible any independence from the foreign policy of America and Israel. This explains the ugly agitation of the anti-Germans and the international success of the book of the American historian Daniel J. Goldhagen. In this book he described anti-Semitism and even 'eliminationist anti-Semitism' as a 'general characteristic of the German people.' He completely ignored the terrible repression and gruesome civil war that the Nazi groups unleashed on the German antifascists. In this respect Hitler becomes the protagonist 'of a peaceful revolution that the German population were willingly in agreement with.' Paradoxically, a theme is used here that is often seen in the propaganda of the Third Reich. Goldhagen's thesis relies on massive suppression of evidence. In his index of persons, neither Hermann Cohen nor Henry Ford are listed, nor are the names of the most eminent US-American anti-Semites, who had demanded the 'extermination' of Jews for the 'disinfection' of society before Hitler<sup>14</sup>.

The American historian continually stresses the mass consensus for the persecution of Jews in Germany that would result in the 'final solution'<sup>15</sup>. One could also ask the question, on what consensus in the United States was based the confinement of citizens of Japanese origin in concentration camps and the atom bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Above all: what consensus did the racism have, that justified the deportation, decimation or extermination of Indians in America, and the enslavement and oppression of Blacks in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century even after the formal abolishment of slavery? If we were to argue in Goldhagen's terms then we could say that the 'enslavement-racism' that affected the Blacks and the 'eliminationist-racism' that affected the Indians were both part of a 'general characteristic' of American people.

Goldhagen's book was also hugely successful in Germany. It is difficult, however, to regard the shame that German people still feel for the crimes of the Third Reich as a positive thing. The prolonged penance for the 'sins' of the reactionary and criminal *Sonderweg* takes on an entirely different meaning here. This indiscriminate self-flagellation is only the other side of the implicit justification of the social system, which the two world wars brought about and which imperialism in its different forms, including the most barbaric, promoted. It also acts implicitly to glorify the history of the other countries in the West. Paradoxically, what the indiscriminate self-flagellation of the German nation comes down to is that it strengthens the good conscience and chauvinism—not only of the United States—but also of the most reactionary circles in Germany, who promote the participation in the wars led by the USA with the argument that they must break the curse of the German *Sonderweg* once and for all!

If the theory of the German *Sonderweg* is less than convincing as an explanation for the Third Reich, even less does it explain the present situation. For 60 years the Federal Republic of Germany had a political-social system that resembled that of other western countries and it was beginning to establish itself on the world stage. One could see a sort of connection between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. But this could only exist thanks to the support of Washington, and once they liquidised and demonised the experience of the construction of a socialist society on German soil, the government in Bonn surely did not diverge from the western models and 'values'. It is hard to comprehend why the foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany should be even more interventionist and militaristic than that of the United States and also more so than that of England, France and Australia. We could, and should, accuse the German leading circles of their near complete indifference to the unending martyrdom of the Palestinian people and the political, economic and material support that they give Israel, but there is no reason why the Berlin government should be held more accountable for this than Tel Aviv and Washington.

Yet still today the argument is used as proof for the theory of the cursed and enduring German *Sonderweg* that Germany has remained backward because they have, in symbolic terms, 'never beheaded a Hohenzollern'<sup>16</sup>, as quoted by the left-wing Lukács who was citing Max Weber. The author of this pamphlet has a right to complain: Italy has never beheaded a member of the House of Savoy and did not rid themselves of this dynasty until—not the end of the First—but the end of the Second World War, and even then, only through a referendum with a close and controversial result. So this was not even with a revolution like that of November 1918, which forced Wilhelm II out of his headquarters in the Belgian spa town and straight into exile in Holland, without going through Germany where unpleasant confrontations were threatening. What sort of countries are there which have beheaded their sovereign? England condemned Charles I to death with the Puritan Revolution and then the next in line in the Stuart dynasty was called to power. And there is still a monarchy existent in that country today, even if its parasitical nature is plain to see. In more exact terms, the history of France is the exception and not the rule. Furthermore, this 'exception' did not prevent the regime of Vichy from collaborating with the crimes of the Third Reich and even with the 'final solution' as we well know.

Because he does not take into account the international origins of the ideology of the Third Reich, Thomas Wagner, a sharp critic of my position regarding the *Sonderweg* theory and the national question generally, presents his arguments in two ways. On the one hand he dismisses the concept of a nation

14 Singermann 1987, p.112

15 See Goldhagen 1996, pp.454-56, p.49 foll. and passim

16 Landefeld 2008, p.102

as ‘a collective hallucination’, and on the other hand, he coins the slogan of ‘German guilt for Nazi fascism’; he accuses ‘the Germans’, the ‘ordinary Germans’, who become branded as criminal accomplices of fascist crimes. Instead of a particular political system it is the Germans who are put in the dock. But who are the Germans? A strand on the Left only discovers the concept ‘nation’ when it comes to global condemnation of the Germans. It discovers the idea of nation but it interprets it just as crudely as it reproaches other commentators for doing, as a synonym for an undifferentiated cursed mass. The Germans who sacrificed their lives for the prevention of the Nazis’ seizure of power and later in the resistance against the Third Reich are forgotten. Forgotten, too, are the German victims of German fascism.

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## Interview with Vladimir Putin on Bloomberg News

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### Bloomberg News, 8 September 2016

[Bloomberg is a substantial US news organisation, with TV channel and website, which can be viewed all over the world. It started out as a business channel founded by billionaire (and former Mayor of New York) Michael Bloomberg but it now seems to cover the whole spectrum of news.]

**Q: There seems to be the beginnings of a political deal with Japan where you might give up one of the Kuril Islands in exchange for greater economic cooperation. Are you open to a deal of that sort?**

We don’t trade in territories, although the problem of a peace treaty with Japan is, of course, a key one. And we would very much like to find a solution to this problem with our Japanese friends. We had a treaty signed in 1956, and, surprisingly, it was ratified both by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and by the Japanese Parliament, but then the Japanese side refused to adhere to it, and then the Soviet Union basically nullified all the agreements within this treaty.

Several years ago, our Japanese colleagues asked us to return to a discussion of this topic. And we did, we met them partway... We’re not talking about some swap or sale, we’re talking about finding a solution where neither party would feel defeated or a loser.

### **Q: Do you expect the euro to survive?**

I hope so. I hope so because, first of all, we believe in the foundations of the European economy. We see that west European leaders in general—there are disagreements, of course, which is understandable, that we see, observe, analyze—but they stick to very pragmatic approaches to resolving economic issues. We can’t say whether they’re right or wrong. It depends on your perspective. They don’t misuse financial instruments or liquidity. They primarily strive for structural changes. In fact, the same problems are no less acute in our economy, perhaps even more so. I’m referring to a problem that we can’t overcome, specifically the dominant role of the oil and gas sector in Russia and, as a result, our dependence on oil and gas revenue. But in Europe, without dependence on oil and gas, they’ve also needed structural reforms for a long time. I think that the leading economies have taken a very pragmatic and intelligent approach to resolving the economic problems facing Europe. That’s why we hold about 40 percent of our reserves in euros.

### **Q: You expect Europe to keep the existing membership? They’re not going to lose another country like they lost Britain?**

You know, I don’t want to respond to your provocative question, even though I understand that it could be interesting.

### **Come on—many, many times you’ve criticized Europe.**

I’ve been critical, but I’ll repeat: We hold 40 percent of our reserves in euros, and it’s not in our interest for the euro zone to collapse. Although I don’t rule out that there could be some decisions made that would consolidate a group of countries with equal levels of development and thereby, in my opinion, strengthening the euro. But there might be some other interim decisions in order to preserve the current number of euro zone members.

We have criticized many things and believe that our partners have made more than a few mistakes, as probably we have, too. Nobody is safe from these mistakes, but in regards to the economy, I’ll say it again: In my opinion, the European Commission and the leading economies of Europe are acting pragmatically and are on the right track.

**Q: Almost two years ago you said that if crude oil fell below \$80 a barrel, there would be a collapse in oil production. Well, the price is still below \$50, and production hasn’t stopped. Has your thinking changed on that at all?**

Well, if I said that oil output would cease, then I was mistaken.... I said that new deposits probably wouldn't be commissioned at a certain oil price. Strictly speaking, that is what happened.

But perhaps even surprisingly, our oil and gas companies, mainly the oil companies, are continuing to invest. In the past year, the oil companies have invested 1.5 trillion rubles [\$23.3 billion], and if you take the state's investment in the pipeline network and electricity sector, then the overall investment in energy is 3.5 trillion rubles in the past year. That's quite significant.

By the way, we are the world's leader in terms of natural gas exports, with a global share of about 20 percent. In the export of liquid hydrocarbons, we're also among the leaders. We've been first in liquid hydrocarbon exports.... On the whole, Gazprom is in great shape and is increasing exports to its traditional partner countries.

**Q: Would you still be in favor of a production freeze if the Saudis and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman want that?**

He is a very energetic statesman, and we really have struck up a friendly relationship. This is a man who knows what he wants and knows how to achieve his goals. But at the same time, I consider him a very reliable partner with whom you can reach agreements and can be certain that those agreements will be honored.

But still, we weren't the ones who rejected the idea of freezing output levels. It was our Saudi partners who, at the last moment, changed their view and decided to take a pause in taking this decision. But I want to repeat: Our position hasn't changed, and if Prince Salman and I speak about this, then I shall, of course, put forward our position again. We believe that this is the right decision for world energy. That's the first thing. The second thing is that everyone knows what the dispute was about. The dispute was that if production were to be frozen, then everyone should do it, including Iran. But we understand that Iran is starting from a very low level, related to the well-known sanctions against this country. It would be unfair to leave it at this sanctioned level. I think that from the viewpoint of economic sense and logic, then it would be correct to find some sort of compromise. I am confident that everyone understands that. The issue isn't economic, it's political.

**Q: Gazprom is worth less than a fifth of what it was 10 years ago, and it's fallen from being among the top 10 companies in the world to 198th. And you've had the same manager running it for 15 years, Alexei Miller. You've now given him another five-year contract. What I'm saying is, you're not as tough on businesspeople who are running the oil side as you might be on other people.**

Listen, Gazprom is clearly undervalued. This is an absolutely obvious fact. We have no plan to sell it yet. And this is because of the peculiarities of the Russian economy, the social sphere, and Russian energy. Gazprom is part of Russia's power system. One of Gazprom's functions is to ensure the country gets through the peak periods of autumn and winter, to supply Russia's big power companies. And it fulfills this function.

Of course, there are issues and there are problems. We see them. I know that Gazprom's management is taking the necessary steps in order to resolve these issues and that it fights for its interests on world markets. Does it do it well? Poorly? That's another question.

**Q: There is an American election on the way, and as you well know there's a choice between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Who would you rather have at the other end of the telephone if there is a geopolitical situation—Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton?**

I would like to work with a person who can be accountable for decisions made and implement any agreements that we reach. Surnames don't matter at all. Of course, that person must enjoy the trust of the American people, so that they won't just have the desire but also the reinforced political will to fulfill all those agreements. That's why we never interfered, aren't interfering, and don't plan to interfere in domestic political processes.

**Q: Can I just push you on that? You're really telling me that if you have a choice between a woman, whom you think may have been trying to get rid of you, and a man, who seems to have this great sort of affection for you, almost bordering on the homoerotic, you're not going to make a decision between those two?**

You know, I essentially already answered your question. I'll reformulate it again, say it in different words. We are ready to work with any president, but, of course—I also said this—to the extent that the future administration is ready. If someone says that they want to work with Russia, we'll welcome it. And if someone, as you said—although it may be an inaccurate translation—wants to get rid of us, that will be a completely different approach. But we will survive it, and it's not clear who has more to lose with that approach.

But the thing is, I've repeatedly seen the anti-Russian card played during domestic political campaigns in the States. I think that it's a very shortsighted approach. At the same time, they send us all sorts of signals from all sides that actually things are just fine.... It seems to me that it doesn't fully meet the level of responsibility that lies on the shoulders of the U.S. I think that all this should be more dignified, calm, and more balanced.

As for the fact that someone is criticizing us, you know, criticism is leveled at us by Mr. Trump's team as well. For example, one of the members of his team said that we paid, that Russia allegedly paid money to the Clinton family via some foundations. What's that? Does that mean that we control the Clinton family? It's complete nonsense. I don't even know where Bill spoke and through which funds. So both one side and the other are using it as a tool, using it as a tool in a domestic political struggle, and that's bad, in my opinion.

**Q: The other accusation you've faced, or heard a lot, is people connected with Russia or backed by Russia were the people who hacked into the Democratic Party database.**

No, I don't know anything about that. You know how many hackers there are today, and they act so delicately and precisely that they can leave their mark at the necessary time and place or even not their own mark, camouflaging their activity as that of some other hackers from other territories or countries? It's an extremely difficult thing to check, if it's even possible to check. At any rate, we definitely don't do this at the state level.

And then, listen, does it even matter who hacked this data from the campaign headquarters of Mrs. Clinton? Is that really important? The important thing is the content that was given to the public. There should be a discussion about this, and there's no need to distract the public's attention from the essence of the



problem by raising some side issues connected with the search for who did it.

**Q: Turkey recently sent troops into Syria, and you did not protest too loudly. Do you think Turkey has now moved closer to your idea that the future of Syria has to involve President Assad staying in some way, or have you changed your mind about President Erdogan? A little bit ago, you were complaining that you were stabbed in the back and about the problems to do with the jet being shot down.**

First off, we're operating on the basis that Turkey apologized for the incident that took place and for the death of our people. It did it directly, without any reservations, and we value that. President Erdogan took this step. We see a clear interest on the part of Turkey's president in restoring full-scale relations with Russia.

We have many common interests in the Black Sea region, and more globally and in the Middle East. We very much expect that we'll be able to establish a constructive dialogue. We have many big projects, including Turkish Stream [a proposed gas pipeline from southern Russia across the Black Sea to Turkey] in the energy sector.

We have a large project to build a nuclear power station on unique terms. They consist of several elements: We will finance, own, and operate it. . . . This will be an economically beneficial project for both sides.

In addition to everything else, as I already said, we have a mutual desire to come to an agreement about the region's problems, including the Syrian one. I continue to believe that nothing can be decided externally about the political regime or a change of power. When I hear someone saying that some president must go, not domestically but externally, it raises major questions for me. . . . I get this confidence from the events of the last decade, specifically the attempts at democratizing Iraq and attempts at democratizing Libya. We see that in fact it led to the collapse of the state and the growth of terrorism.

It's the same with Syria. When we hear that Assad should go for some reason someone peripheral thinks so, I have a big question: What will it lead to? Will it be in line with international legal standards, and what will it lead to? Wouldn't it be better to be patient and facilitate changes to the structure of the society itself, to muster this patience, allowing changes to the structure of the society, waiting for when these changes happen naturally within the country?

**Q: I think the root of Western distrust is the idea that you want to expand Russian influence, in some cases geographically.**

I think all sober-minded people who really are involved in politics understand that the idea of a Russian threat to, for example, the Baltics is complete madness. Are we really about to fight NATO? How many people live in NATO? About 600 million, correct? There are 146 million in Russia. Yes, we're the biggest nuclear power. But do you really think that we're about to conquer the Baltics using nuclear weapons? What is this madness? That's the first point, but by no means the main point.

The main point is something completely different. We have a very rich political experience, which consists of our being deeply convinced that you cannot do anything against the will of the people. Nothing against the will of the people can be done. And some of our partners don't appear to understand this. When they remember Crimea, they try not to notice that the will

of the people living in Crimea—where 70 percent of them are ethnic Russians and the rest speak Russian as if it's their native language—was to join Russia. They simply try not to see this.

In one place, Kosovo, you can use the will of the people, but not here. This is all a political game. So, to give reassurances, I can say that Russia has pursued and plans to pursue an absolutely peaceful foreign policy directed toward cooperation.

As far as expanding our zone of influence is concerned, it took me nine hours to fly to Vladivostok from Moscow. This is a little less than from Moscow to New York, through all of Western Europe and the Atlantic Ocean. Do you think we need to expand something?

**Q: Do you think Russia is getting easier to run or harder?**

I think it's more complicated because, despite all the criticism of our Western partners, our domestic democratic process is developing. Significantly more parties are going to take part in these elections than in previous years, and this will obviously leave its mark on the course and result of the campaign. There is a practical dimension. We now see that the polling of our leading political force—the United Russia party—slid a little. . . . Clearly, it's the start of a proactive election campaign. And the large number of parties that are now taking part in the election process, they are all on the television screens, in the media and the papers. . . . They look great on the television, they criticize and pour scorn on the representatives of the ruling party. But they don't say if they are ready to take responsibility for taking some not very popular, but ultimately necessary, decisions.

**Q: Are you envious of the Chinese, who don't have to go through these elections?**

There is a different political system in China, and it's a different country. I don't think you'd like to see 1.5 billion people sense some sort of a disorder in their society and in their government. So let's give the Chinese the right and the possibility to decide how to organize their country and their society. Russia is a different country. We have different processes, a political system that's at a different level of development. . . . It's becoming more complex. In fact, that only makes me happy, and I'd like for the system to become stronger so that we have a balance in our political system that would allow it to be always in an effective state and aimed at development.

**Q: You look around the world at the moment. There are so many countries that become dynasties—the Clintons, the Bushes in America. You have children you've successfully kept out of the public eye. Would you ever want your daughters to go into politics?**

I don't think I have the right to wish something for them. They're young but already adults. They should determine their futures themselves. On the whole, to the extent I see it, they've already made those choices. They're doing science and some other things that are absolutely noble and needed by people. They feel needed, they get joy from their work, and that makes me very happy.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2016-vladimir-putin-interview/>

Full text: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52830>

# THE NATION

*The Nation*

[*The Nation*, mentioned in the editorial, was a newspaper founded in 1842 by a Protestant, Thomas Davis, and a Catholic, Gavan Duffy. The group involved in its production came to be known as 'Young Ireland'.

The Irish Newspapers Archives tell us that

"...its mixture of news, literary criticism, poetry, political and social comment appealed greatly to the reading public. It was selling 10,000 copies an issue even though it cost an expensive sixpence meaning that most readers had to borrow it from news vendors at a penny an hour."

If that is true about borrowing the paper by the hour, Irishmen of the time must have been fast readers. The article below fills one column in a 16 page magazine closely printed on four columns per page. (The reproduction p. 6 shows the front page, which carried notices and short items.)

The article reproduced below discusses what to do when Ireland regained her own Parliament, lost in 1800 by the Union with England; the question was, when the Act of Union was repealed, should the new Irish Parliament deal only with Irish affairs, or should there be a link with England, so that Ireland had a say in Imperial affairs? The Federalists favoured the second option, and *The Nation* favoured the first.

This article is number 74 in "*The Nation—Selections 1842-1844*. Reprints from the paper that created Modern Ireland" published by the Aubane Historical Society.]

## Federalism and Repeal.

There is a Federalist party within the Repeal Association. It always existed there, in fact; but its existence was first avowed when Mr. *O'Hagan* and several other Barristers joined it. But there is another and rapidly increasing body of Federalists, who refuse or delay to join the Association. Elsewhere in this paper will be found a letter addressed by one of the latter, Mr. Sharman Crawford, to the Reverend Thaddeus O'Malley, on the subject of a Federal speech made by the latter in the Association.

Nothing proves the progress of Repeal more than this Federal discussion. It interests, and is engaged in by the Whigs of Ulster, and by not a few of the Tories of the other provinces. The Federalist, like the advocate for independent legislation, condemns the Union, as conceived in crime, accomplished by villainy, and productive of ruin to Ireland, and he would utterly abolish and wipe it away.

Having repealed the Union, how shall Ireland be governed? A simple repeal of the Union Act would restore the nomination boroughs, and all the vices which enabled Pitt to defeat the nation's will in 1800. Here the severance of parties begins.

The Federalist would constitute our Government in an entirely new way. He would preserve the Imperial Parliament,

but he would limit its powers to a few great subjects which concern the empire, such as defence..., war and its taxes, foreign treaties, and the succession to the throne or regency. Irish local affairs, our criminal and civil codes, our taxes for internal purposes, harbours, roads, buildings, public offices, poorhouses, &., &., he would leave to a local legislature....

Mr. Crawford in stating to Mr. O'Malley his reasons for not joining the Association, takes objection to Mr. O'Connell's plan of Repeal. Mr. Crawford objects upon grounds honourable to his pride and principles. He conceives that the abandonment of imperial affairs to an English Parliament, as proposed by Mr O'Connell, would be an admission by Ireland of British superiority which Federalism would not be. So far he seems right.

But, practically, Mr. O'Connell's plan is to give to Ireland all the power possible over her own affairs, all the power she possessed in 1783—save as to the Regency—all the power consistent with the connexion. Mr. Crawford, in adding an Imperial representation to our Local Parliament, would give us a shadowy prerogative, an equivocal gain. We, we and the People of Ireland, do not love the Empire. Its foundations were pited in the blood and property of our fathers. Its unholy shadow dwarfs the mind and spirit of every land on which it falls—Ireland, India, and Canada.

Empire is a word of reproach to its achievers, of terror to its subjects, of abhorrence to the profound and good.... Empire has been something to murder one generation and rob the next...

...British empire is thing with skulls and plunder in its walls, and clammy with righteous blood. Death and dishonour, and a legion of wicked spirits share it with England. It cumpers the earth. Its ruin would be a blessing to humanity. The People of England are nothing but the overworked menials in it. To the Aristocracy it brings gold, and rank, and blood-letting, and all else that they love. Why should Ireland desire to share the guilt and administration of this foul empire?

Our duty and destiny are otherwise.

We are a large and growing People, possessed of great resources for commerce, agriculture, and defensive war. We are unlike the English in habits and feelings, and still more unlike in tendencies. Any existing resemblance has been forced, and a year's freedom would make us as unlike as France and Russia. 'Tis desirable we should be so. Uniformity is not a law nor desire of nature. It is the attempt of narrow and monotonous spirits...

[9.12.1843]

# Only China can restrain the US

Lecture by American academic John Mearsheimer in Chatham House on 16 June 2016.

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(John Mearsheimer is probably best known as the author in 2007 with Stephen Walt of *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*)

The way I'd like to proceed is just very briefly to describe what the US has done in the Middle East in the 21<sup>st</sup> century just to remind you of how bad it's been. Then to talk about the causes of the problem because if you're going to talk about the remedies, which is the third part of my talk, you have to understand what the causes are.

But, just to say a few words about the giant mess that we mainly – the US – have created in the Middle East. You've got to remember that the centrepiece for our strategy is regime change. We've tried regime change in five different places – Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and Egypt. All disasters, not one worked.

Afghanistan is the longest war in American history: there's no end in sight. We spent \$113 billion trying to rebuild the country. The Taliban is on the march. Not only is the Taliban on the march, al-Qaida is back. And not only is al-Qaida back but ISIS is there too. We're going to lose that war.

We lost the war in Iraq. Libya, we made a giant mess. Syria, we did a half-baked job and made a giant mess. And even if we had tried full-force to fix the problem, we would have made a giant mess. It's amazing the amount of death and destruction the US has caused in the Middle East and on top of that the terrorism problem is worse.

The US had no success whatsoever in getting the Israelis to move towards a two-state solution, even though we consider that to be in the national interest. Another failure.

And by the way the refugee problem that's rocking Europe, that's mainly compliments of the US. That's one of the principal consequences of all this death and destruction.

So, it's really one giant mess. And the only success we've had is the Iran nuclear deal. ... But there are good reasons to think that that won't last that long. All you have to do is listen to Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump talk about that deal. You just sort of scratch your head and think wow it's hard to believe this is going to last very long.

That's the mess we're faced with. So, the question you want to ask yourself is: how did this happen? The US has all this human capital: all these people with PhDs from Harvard and law degrees from Yale running around in DC. How is it that the foreign policy establishment seems to have what we call in the US the Midas touch in reverse?

The first thing you have got to understand is what American grand strategy is. American grand strategy has two key elements. Number one, we are bent on dominating the world

militarily. This means that there is no square footage on the planet that we don't think is in our interest to monitor, police and reform as we see fit. There are no priorities in US foreign policy: every place matters. Global dominance, that's the first element of the strategy.

The second element of the strategy is that we're deeply committed to liberal democracy and spreading liberal democracy all over the planet. We believe that liberal democracies don't fight other democracies and therefore if you create a planet that's populated with liberal democracies you don't have a war. And, furthermore, we believe you don't have human rights violations of any significance in liberal democracies and that's another added benefit of spreading liberal democracy. So, when I start talking about what a mess the Middle East is, or the greater Middle East, as a result of American policy, what I go to right away is regime change. Regime change is inextricably mixed up to the fact that the US is committed to promoting liberal democracy, here there and everywhere, but we've been focussing mainly on the Middle East since 2001.

Now, underlying this grand strategy is the assumption that the US is the 'indispensable nation' – you all know this is Madeleine Albright's famous saying. The idea is that we are superior to everybody else, as she said we stand taller and we see further. We have a right, we have the responsibility and we have the wisdom to dominate a region like the greater Middle East and do social engineering at the end of a rifle barrel, not only for the good of the people of the region but for the people of the planet because it all leads to a state of nothing but liberal democracy.

So that's what's driving American foreign policy. But obviously, it doesn't work. The idea that the US or any other country can promote regime change and create liberal democracies, especially at the end of a rifle barrel, is fool's errand. We have a rich academic literature that tells you that promoting liberal democracies in countries around the world is remarkably difficult to do and you fail almost every time. And look at the record: it's one abysmal failure after another: Egypt, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya. If anything, the terrorism problem is worse than ever. Countries like Iraq and Syria are broken up into different parts. It's all a result of this harebrained scheme. What is interesting is that we continue to pursue these policies.

I like to say: people like to say what's the difference between Barack Obama and George Bush? Hardly anything at all. Tweedledee and Tweedledum. George W Bush didn't do Syria; George W Bush didn't do Libya; George W Bush didn't do a surge in Afghanistan. Barack Obama did all those things. Barack Obama was the principal in Egypt, the principal American policy maker intervening in Egypt.

So, why do we continue to do these things? It is obviously in part due to the fact that inside Washington, you have group think. Whether you're talking about Republicans or Democrats,  
(Continued p. 12)