

War Is Sometimes Necessary to Resolve International Conflicts

The Collapse of a World Order

Global politics in the late 19th century was a story of six empires: German, Austrian, Russian, Ottoman, French, and British. While this world spawned the Crimean War and the Franco-Prussian War, it was mostly peaceful and its players stable. None tried to deliver a deathblow to another. That all ended with World War I. A foolish Kaiser [Wilhelm II] and the Prussian military elite sought to achieve lasting dominance in the decades-old contest—up to that point primarily diplomatic—which historian A. J. P. Taylor termed "the struggle for the mastery of Europe."

The outcome of the war was nothing like what the Kaiser intended. Americans see it as the moment the United States stepped onto the global stage, as indeed it was. Equally consequential, though, was the collapse of four of the six major 19th-century powers. By the mid-1920s, the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires, the Russian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire were no more. In each, the old monarchy had been abolished. Germany had lost the provinces (seized from France after the Franco-Prussian War) of Alsace and Lorraine, the industrial Ruhr Valley, and its overseas possessions, while Austro-Hungary had lost everything outside of Austria. The Russian Empire had collapsed into revolution and civil war. The Ottoman Empire was permanently removed from the global scene, and in its place were seven countries and a League of Nations mandate.

Filling the Void

The history of global, and particularly European, affairs since then has been largely the record of democratic countries coping with the pathological successors to these collapsed regimes, and with the countries of the Great Game area between the Russian and Ottoman territories. Autocratic and totalitarian governments emerged from the upheavals that followed imperial implosion: Nazism in Germany and Austria; Communism in Russia; and, in the Middle East, after a period of monarchies, Nasser's and now Mubarak's Egypt, bin-Saud's Saudi Arabia, Baathist Syria and Iraq, and Khomeini's Iran. In the old Ottoman domain, only the core country, Turkey, and the post-World War II state of Israel established anything approaching popular sovereignty, with its attendant claim of governmental legitimacy.

In each of these emergent regimes, terror quickly became a prime instrument of power, as did anti-Semitism. All the imperial remnants used hatred of minorities, particularly Jews, to prop themselves up with the majority groups on which they had such an uncertain hold.

Oppression

In each region, cults of death became a grim norm. The Soviets and the Nazis had their concentration camps, purges, and holocausts—killing orgies that were mirrored in different forms in the Middle East from the 1970s to today. There also emerged a celebration of death similar to the "you love life, we love death" rantings of current terrorists. A particularly famous moment came in 1936, at a meeting at the University of Salamanca in Spain. In response to a speech by an adversary, Nazi ally and Francoist

General Milan-Astray shouted "Viva la Muerte!" The poet Miguel de Unamuno, the university's rector, was presiding. He replied: "This is the temple of intelligence and I am its high priest. You are profaning its sacred domain. You will succeed, because you have enough brute force. But you will not convince. To convince it is necessary to persuade, and to persuade you will need something you lack: reason and right in the struggle."

Expansionism with global ambitions became the challenge which each region eventually posed to the United States and its allies. The Germanic successor regimes brought us World War II; the Russians, the Cold War; and now, the successors to the Ottomans and the rulers of the Great Game region [Central Asia] have given us the war on terror. Iran's pretensions are overt, as were [Iraqi leader] Saddam Hussein's—ambitions that gave them a unifying cry with which to unite their peoples. In most countries of the region, promises to destroy Israel likewise offer ballast to unstable governments. Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups, though not states themselves, serve as surrogates for states afraid to take on the United States directly. Such groups are also state pretenders, like the Nazis or Soviets before their seizures of power, making the prospect of expansion, and with it expiation of past humiliations, part of their appeal.

A Shared Heritage

The links of the Nazis, Fascists, and Soviets with the Islamists, and others in the Middle East go beyond shared pathologies.

For example, as detailed on the website Palestine Facts, Haj Amin al-Husseini, the infamous Mufti of Jerusalem during much of the British mandate, allied himself with Nazi Germany in the 1930s and received financing from the SS [Schutzstaffel, the Nazi police unit] from 1936 through 1939. In 1937, after the exposure of his role in terrorism within Palestine, he fled to Syria and from there to Iraq. In 1941, he helped organize a pro-Nazi revolt in Baghdad [Iraq's capital], following which he fled to Berlin. There he became an advocate of and cheerleader for the Holocaust. After the war, he sought exile in Egypt, where he was received and celebrated as a hero of Arab nationalism. Fear of backlash from the Arab world kept the Allies from prosecuting him for war crimes. Upon his death, his leadership in the radical nationalist Palestinian Arab community passed to his nephew and protégé, Yasser Arafat.

[Nazi leader Adolf] Hitler also had an influence elsewhere in the formerly Ottoman world. In his recently published volume, *The Foreigner's Gift*, Lebanese-born scholar Fouad Ajami writes of the 1930s and 1940s: "[T]here was a Berlin-Baghdad corridor. It brought to Iraq the ways and culture and hysteria of the Third Reich and inspired, if that is the word, a generation or two of political men to ideologies of absolutism and violence." As a young man, Michel Aflaq, the founding ideologue of the Syrian and Iraqi Baath parties, was caught up in this stream of intellectual poison. The results can be seen to this day. The Baath party, according to columnist David Brooks, writing in *The Weekly Standard* in November 2002, while inspired at its origins by Leninism, "is not quite like the Communist parties." Instead, he says, "It bears stronger resemblance to the Nazi party," based as it is on a Nazi-like doctrine of racial superiority.

Terrorism

Meanwhile, in Egypt, a schoolteacher named Hassan al-Banna was founding the Society of Muslim Brothers, the radical group behind so much Islamist terrorism in recent years. Banna created a paramilitary arm to the brotherhood, modeling it after the Nazi SS. As University of London professor Efraim Karsh writes in his 2006 volume *Islamic Imperialism*, "Banna was an unabashed admirer of Hitler and [Italian fascist leader Benito] Mussolini, who 'guided their peoples to unity, order, regeneration, power and glory.'" Following the examples of the Nazis and fascists, he was perhaps the Middle East's first modern synthesizer of the tactic of terror, the cult of death, and the lust for conquest. Banna wished, Karsh notes, "to inculcate [Egypt's young people] with the virtues of death and martyrdom in the quest of Allah's universal empire. 'Death is an art,' he famously wrote, 'and the most exquisite of arts when practiced by the skillful artist.'"

After Hitler's defeat, many of these erstwhile Hitler allies and enthusiasts found a new supporter and model in the Soviet Union. Despite Russia's current dislike of Islamic terrorism, particularly in Chechnya, the old Soviet state was a prime financial backer and trainer of terrorists in the Middle East. Opposed to the U.S. by that time, as well as to the U.K [United Kingdom] and Israel, these groups passed the Cold War decades in alliance with the Soviets. Many of their leaders spent time in Moscow and all appear to have stayed in close touch with Soviet operatives.

Many of the regimes and groups we now see as adversaries in the Middle East were once Nazi and Soviet allies. Their hatred of the United States is not a new thing. Earlier generations of their leaders were equally intent on our humiliation and defeat.

Finishing the Conflict

So what does all this history tell us about going forward in Iraq?

First might be a lesson of skepticism about resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute as a key to stability in the region. Israel is the product of populations fleeing early 20th century Russian oppression and later German oppression, with no place willing to receive them after the mid-1920s. They moved into a post-Ottoman political vacuum under the supervision of British caretakers entirely incapable of reconciling the rising Jewish nationalism of the refugee newcomers with the rising Arab nationalism of many indigenous locals. Yet if this now eight-decades-old conflict were to go away tomorrow, the region's regimes of inadequate legitimacy would have to find a substitute. Opposition to Israel is useful, even necessary, for many of them and will remain so as long as they lack popular sovereignty.

Second, the conflict in Iraq is a life and death challenge to other regimes in the region, particularly Iran and Syria. Our success would be their catastrophic failure. They have responded accordingly. Our strategic planning should recognize their roles and give first priority to answering the question, How do we take them out of the Iraq war? Opening talks with them, as many have suggested, cannot in itself be enough. An American labor leader once said that, in high-stakes negotiations, to make the other side see

the light it is sometimes necessary to make them feel the heat. Where is the heat here? What will burn through generations of political pathologies? Would it be encouraging opposition groups within Iran? Or military incursions into Syria? Or working with the Saudis to drive down oil prices, as was done with the Soviets—if, indeed, the Saudis want us to prevail in Iraq?

Third, we should fix in our minds that the current conflict is the latest and, if successfully resolved, the final stage in a hundred years war, which, while often global, has focused on the fallen empires of World War I. In the context of a century of war, the present episode could possibly be ended within a decade and still be short. In the other phases of this extended conflagration, victory came when our leaders proceeded with a sense of urgency. That sense of urgency is needed now. On the battlefield, [Abraham] Lincoln should be our example. When a general didn't deliver, he was replaced. From September 1862 to March 1864, Lincoln went through five commanders of the Army of the Potomac until he found in Ulysses Grant a senior officer who delivered results. We need results. We may not get a perfect resolution to the war, but we must get an acceptable one. After a century of struggle, the stakes are too high to give up.

A 100-Year Conflict

Finally, while recognizing that we are in the last stage of a 100-year conflict, we should not beguile ourselves into believing this is the war to end all major wars. Maybe it is, but maybe not. There is North Korea, of course. Even more serious could be a rising China. The China of today bears an unsettling

resemblance to the rising Germany of the late 19th century. In both, a limited opening of the economic and political systems produced remarkable economic growth. In both, the enormous growth enabled military build-ups unimaginable in prior decades. In both, there was no increased openness in the making of foreign policy in keeping with their liberalization in the making of domestic policy. So each military establishment retained or retains largely unfettered sway. In Germany, the consequence was an assertiveness that blew apart the 19th-century international norms and produced the First World War. In China, who knows what will happen?

All of which underlines that a sense of urgency in Iraq and throughout the Middle East should be the order of the day. Challenges are following close behind Iraq and Iran. Among the many things that have broken our way during this hundred years war is that we could take on challenges one at a time. We should resolve to pass that gift to the next generation.