Churchill, Hitler, and The Unnecessary War: How Britain Lost Its Empire and the West Lost the World

Everything You Thought You Knew...

Were World Wars I and II—which can now be seen as a thirty-year paroxysm of slaughter and destruction—inevitable? Were they necessary wars? Were the bloodiest and most devastating conflicts ever suffered by mankind fated by forces beyond men’s control? Or were they products of calamitous failures of judgment? In this monumental and provocative history, Patrick Buchanan makes the case that, if not for the blunders of British statesmen—Winston Churchill first among them—the horrors of two world wars and the Holocaust might have been avoided and the British Empire might never have collapsed into ruins. Half a century of murderous oppression of scores of millions under the iron boot of Communist tyranny might never have happened, and Europe’s central role in world affairs might have been sustained for many generations.

Among the British and Churchillian blunders were:

- The secret decision of a tiny cabal in the inner Cabinet in 1906 to take Britain straight to war against Germany, should she invade France

- The vengeful Treaty of Versailles that mutilated Germany, leaving her bitter, betrayed, and receptive to the appeal of Adolf Hitler

- Britain’s capitulation, at Churchill’s urging, to American pressure to sever the Anglo-Japanese alliance, insulting and isolating Japan, pushing her onto the path of militarism and conquest
• The 1935 sanctions that drove Italy straight into the Axis with Hitler

• The greatest blunder in British history: the unsolicited war guarantee to Poland of March 1939—that guaranteed the Second World War

• Churchill’s astonishing blindness to Stalin’s true ambitions.

Certain to create controversy and spirited argument, Churchill, Hitler, and “The Unnecessary War” is a grand and bold insight into the historic failures of judgment that ended centuries of European rule and guaranteed a future no one who lived in that vanished world could ever have envisioned.

My Personal Review:
So while Adolph Hitler was gobbling up Europe, intent on world conquest, England thrust up its greatest son, Sir Winston Churchill, a statesman for the ages, to oppose the evil tyrant, crush him, and save the world.

It is a great story. Pathetic little Winnie grows up to become Man of the Century, the great guardian of civilization against the forces of darkness and depravity. It is the story as I learned it through numerous accounts, and that I accepted and even cherished. The story that gave rise, at least in part, to the notion of The Good War.

Mores the pity, therefore, that it turns out to be pure fable. Indeed, in Buchanans telling each and every detail is false. Let me briefly identify some of his main points, tracking with the elements of the myth as presented above.

Hitler was not gobbling up Europe. He was instead reversing the judgment of Versailles, both a colossal blunder and a grievous injustice that embarrassed men of good will everywhere.

Hitler was not intent on world conquest. He was intent on reversing Versailles and crushing Bolshevism in Russia. He tried repeatedly to avoid war with England, and failing that, to make peace with her, because he felt that England should continue as a great world power, and that England and Germany were natural allies.

Churchill cant be considered Englands greatest son. He was certainly a man of utterly singular gifts. Unfortunately, however, they were harnessed to singularly poor judgment. Churchills heroic exertions yielded nothing but carnage and ruin.

If the goal of statesmanship is peace that leaves the nation more secure, as Buchanan has it, and I think reasonably, then Churchill was anything
but a great statesman. He was certainly a great war chief, but one who lead his nation away from peace and into war and disaster.

Churchill did not oppose *the* evil tyrant -- he opposed *an* evil tyrant. But there were two great tyrannies afoot, German Nazism and Russian Bolshevism, and they were irreconcilably natural enemies. Ethical dilemmas presented to nations and individuals alike sometimes compel us to choose the lesser of two evils. Churchill chose the greater evil. He nurtured Stalin with revolting solicitude, thereby ensuring that his incomparable terror would ultimately have a vastly greater scope. And in fact there was no need to choose at all. Had Churchill just stood aside, the world could have dealt with whichever mutilated beast survived their inevitable clash with much less difficulty.

As for crushing Hitler, Churchill was certainly instrumental to the cause. But he was equally instrumental in perpetrating some of the greatest war crimes of both World Wars, including the starvation blockade of Germany after the armistice of WWI, and the carpet bombing of her cities in WWII. Both had the conscious objective of annihilating non-combatants.

Churchill did not save the world. Instead huge chunks of it disappeared into slavery and death behind what he subsequently termed the iron curtain. And the casus belli which had been sufficient to drive England to war against Germany applied more to Stalin at the end of the war than it had to Hitler at the start. The deaths of millions had bought less than nothing.

Finally, Englands share of responsibility for the catastrophe is not less than Germanys, and it may well be greater.

Churchill, Hitler... is a terrific read. The scholarship is deep, the material is exceptionally well organized, the writing is lively and clear, and the thesis is convincingly argued. This is the very best of contrarian history -- new (at least to me), shocking, and compelling. One hopes our leaders are thoroughly conversant with its thesis, that we may avoid other such Good Wars down the road.