

THE "WAR ON TERRORISM":  
FOR PEOPLE OR FOR PROPERTY?

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We hear much noble rhetoric about the “war on terrorism.” It is being fought to protect freedom, we are told. It is being fought to stop the terrorists, we are told. It is being fought to strengthen democracy, we are told. Noble motives, all of them, but is it really so? Indeed, has it been the case with any war in human history that it was fought for such noble motives? Well, perhaps, with copious amounts of research, we might be able to find one such, but, if there have ever been such noble wars, they have been rare in the extreme. Let us take a brief look at the wars in United States history.

All the Euro-American wars prior to the American Revolution were wars of conquest. The European powers were expanding their power to encompass the “New World.” Ah, how Eurocentric is that designation! The Western Hemisphere was hardly new – it had been inhabited for millennia by immigrants from Siberia – it was new only to the European superpowers of the day, who, in their magnificent isolation, had been unaware of either the “Native Americans” or the Scandinavian settlements which we now know to have existed in Newfoundland in the early eleventh century, almost half a millennium before Columbus. But those pre-Columbian migrations, too, were motivated by a desire for wealth, not by a consideration of what we now call “human rights.”

We in the United States hold up the American Revolution as an example of a battle for freedom. Was it so, indeed? Many of the leaders whom we consider the founders of American democracy were slave-owners, and all the leaders, without exception, were of the wealthiest class – landowners or wealthy merchants. The flashpoint of the American Revolution – the “Boston Tea Party” – had nothing to do with democracy; it was a violent protest against the taxes imposed by Britain upon the colonies, a wholly economic issue, an issue of property, not of people.

As is the American Revolution, the U.S. Civil War is seen by most in the United States (despite the waving of the Confederate flag by many Southerners) as a fight for freedom. It was the freeing of the slaves to which we look for inspiration. Yet Abraham Lincoln himself declared, “If I could preserve the Union and not free any slave, I would do it. If I could preserve the Union by freeing all the slaves, I would do it. If I could preserve the Union by freeing some slaves and keeping others in bondage, I would do it.” Even the Emancipation Proclamation itself did not free the slaves; not a single slave was freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, for it applied only to slaves in those states which were in a condition of rebellion (the Confederate States), and those states did not recognize its authority. The Emancipation Proclamation was (a) an attempt to foment

rebellions among the slaves in the Confederacy and (b) a propaganda ploy to discourage British intervention on the side of the Confederacy, for Her Majesty's Government, having long since abolished slavery in Britain, did not wish to be perceived as favoring it in the former colonies.

The "War to End All Wars," which we know today as "World War I," was, again, a power struggle among the European superpowers. American involvement established the United States' presence in the international power game and effectively marked the demise of the Monroe Doctrine. The desire for peace was great indeed, but a more telling effect of World War I was to compel the European powers to recognize the entry of the United States into their game. Not for democracy, not for freedom, but for economic and political power.

We come next to World War II. We like to think of Adolf Hitler's demise as having been brought about by the ever-so-righteous democracies determined to stop his racist genocide. The facts, sad to say, belie that claim. Not a single nation entered World War II against Hitler until it felt itself directly threatened by his expansionist policies. Not a single nation took a single step to save those against whom Hitler's genocide was directed. When news of the "Final Solution" to the "Jewish Question" was brought to the United States' President Franklin D. Roosevelt, he refused to listen, for the question of genocide would have distracted him from the war effort. When shiploads of Jews from Germany and the overrun countries attempted to land in Palestine, the British authorities turned them away. The plight of other targets of Nazi genocide – one thinks especially of the Gypsies – was not even noted by the world until the nightmare was ended.

There was a greater effort to save Jews within Hitler's empire than outside it! We are all familiar with the efforts of the Danes, led by King Christian X (who, incidentally, was born on Rosh Hashanah in 1870), to save the Jews of Denmark by ferrying them – in a period of just two weeks, mobilizing virtually every ship and boat in Denmark – to neutral Sweden. (Sweden accepted the Danish Jews only with the understanding that this was a temporary expedient and that, once it became safe again, they would return to Denmark.)

In Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church opposed the efforts of King Boris III to deport the Jews of Bulgaria, issuing certificates of baptism to almost every Jew in Bulgaria, with the understanding that those baptisms would be declared void after the

Hitlerian domination of Bulgaria ended. But the Bulgarian Church, much as we admire their efforts on behalf of the Bulgarian Jews – and let it be noted that not a single Jew from Bulgaria itself was deported to the death camps, despite the efforts of King Boris to make it so – did nothing on behalf of the Jews in Bulgarian-controlled territories such as Macedonia; over 11,000 Jews were sent to the gas chambers from Bulgarian-controlled territories outside Bulgaria itself; the saving of the Jews of Bulgaria was as much an act of Bulgarian nationalism as of humanitarianism.

Even the opposition to Hitler within Germany held a grain – or more than a grain – of economic rather than humanitarian motivation. Certainly, the involvement of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his family – his brother Klaus and his brothers-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi and Rüdiger Schleicher – in the attempt to assassinate Hitler was motivated by considerations of faith and humanitarianism, but the leader of the plot, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, had been the architect of Hitler's support of Francisco Franco in Spain and finally concluded that Hitler's international policies were threatening Germany's economic well-being and necessitated the elimination of the Führer.

Today we have the “War on Terrorism.” How can a war against terrorism be fought when the allies include (at least rhetorically) China? China has engaged in systematic genocide against the Tibetans ever since China – in an act eerily evocative of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait over half a century later – overran Tibet in 1951; by moving millions of ethnic Chinese into Tibet in the decades since, China has made Tibetans into a minority in their own native land. China remains unrepentant of the slaughter at Tiananmen Square, and China continues to terrorize the Uighur Muslims in Sichuan Province and the Falun Dafa (Falun Gong) for their religious practices. China, further, permits only such houses of worship as pledge loyalty to the Chinese government. We may read the Uighur Muslims as evocative of the Gypsies under Hitler, the Falun Dafa of the Catholics, and the requirement that houses of worship pledge loyalty to the government of Hitler's takeover of the established church and appointment of Ludwig Müller as *Reichsbischoff*. (And there are underground churches in China, just as there was the *Bekennende Kirche* in Nazi Germany.)

If not for humanitarian reasons, then why the war in Iraq? Prior to the United States' invasion, French petroleum companies controlled Iraqi oil production (and, let it be noted, circumvented the United Nations' embargo of Iraqi oil); today, Iraqi oil production is under the control of the United States. Coincidence? Or just another chapter of humanitarian rhetoric being put to the service of economic power politics?