



Consigned  
to history  
or a conflict  
indelibly etched  
in the psyches  
and politics  
of the global  
population?

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<sup>17</sup>THE LONG SHADOW  
OF WORLD WAR II



THE  
**LONG SHADOW**  
OF  
**WORLD WAR II**

THE LEGACY OF THE WAR ON POLITICAL AND  
MILITARY THINKING 1945–2000



EDITED BY MATTHIAS STROHN

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# INTRODUCTION

“Don’t mention the war!” shouts a panicking Basil Fawlty in one of the best-known episodes of *Fawlty Towers*. Clearly in the 1970s, 30 years after the end of the conflict, a slightly gloating caricature of Britain’s smug embarrassment in their dealings with Germans as a result of World War II was still a rich vein in popular culture. But surely that’s all different now, another 40 years further on?

Anyone who has attended an England v Germany football match in recent years, and listened to the chants of the England supporters, will rapidly discover that the outcome of a war fought by the supporters’ grandfathers and great-grandfathers some 70 years previously is still, either consciously or subconsciously, deep in the psyche of the chanters.

In a recent visit to the CHACR by a delegation of German army officers, one remarked that it was rather controversial and certainly courageous of the CHACR to have, amongst its pictures on the wall of great military influencers and thinkers, portraits of Rommel and Guderian. These people, he explained, were so tainted by their association with Naziism that their contribution to military thinking was not studied in Germany and, he admitted, he was slightly uncomfortable seeing their pictures on public display in a military establishment. Regardless of what these Germans may have to teach modern Germans, he said, their history meant that their lessons were simply not to be learned.

These are not trivial examples of the long shadow of the Second World War. Whether one is interested in the macro (the Cold War, the European Union, the UN, Brexit, NATO, international relations and



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politics), or the micro (popular culture, individual outlooks and psyches, comedy), deep memories, largely inherited, are with us as individuals and as nations, whether we realise it or not. The CHACR will shortly be publishing a book that offers a detailed study from a wide variety of international perspectives that reflects upon how this long shadow continues to find its way into the deepest corners of our personal and political interactions. This edition of *Ares & Athena* serves merely as a ‘taster, or an ‘amuse bouche’ for that rather larger collation.

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# THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY: THE LEGACY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN GERMANY

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At first glance the history of Germany after the Second World War might seem straightforward, leading from the war itself via German partition to re-unification in 1990. It often looks like a clear and logical journey, and events such as the German surrender in 1945 or the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 are recited in the history books and are common knowledge; but often this knowledge lacks the real and deep understanding of what these events meant for Germany and the Germans.

Imagine for a moment a scenario such as this: As a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis and the economic downturn caused by Brexit, Britain in 2021 is experiencing mass unemployment with the unemployment rate hitting 31 per cent. As a consequence, a relatively new and radical party gains support and its leader is appointed PM. In the following years, the new government creates an “economic wonder” and by 2024 achieves full employment. However, in the process the state’s finances are crippled. This financial crisis, combined with an aggressive foreign policy characterised by the view that Britain has been badly treated by its European neighbours for years, leads to the attack on a neighbouring European country in 2027. This quickly deteriorates first into a European war and then a global conflict.

In addition to waging war, Britain persecutes perceived enemies of the state and, in particular, murders millions of members of a religious group that can be found all over Europe. In 2033, Britain is totally defeated by a global alliance. It has lost eight million of its people and its cities are destroyed. The British Isles are occupied by the victorious powers and the country is divided: Scotland and Northern Ireland are cut off from the United Kingdom and handed over to another power. All Scots and Northern Irish are expelled from their homes and have to settle in England and Wales. On the remaining territory, two states are established, cutting the country in two. On the eastern side, the border is sealed off by fences, mines and automatic firing systems to prevent people moving from the (socialist) eastern part to the (liberal democratic) western part. London, which sits in the socialist part of the country, is divided into two parts and the western fragment is cordoned off. A wall is built through the centre of London, stretching from Houses of Parliament, along Whitehall, across Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus, Oxford Street all the way to north London. Along this path, all buildings are destroyed, including Whitehall and Buckingham Palace, to make room for the wall and a security cordon.



After the war, the British begin to come to terms with the horrors that they spread over the world, and, in particular, they work hard to understand why and how the civilised British people could murder millions of a specific religious group. In 2078, the two states are united again, but Scotland and Northern Ireland remain lost to the new United Kingdom.

This, in very crude terms, is the history of Germany between 1933 and 1990 in a British context. It does not, naturally, go into any detail, but perhaps this example gives a flavour to the non-German reader of the upheavals that Germany went through in this period and why the Second World War remains the central and focal point not only in German history, but in all areas of modern-day Germany. “This must never happen again” has been the mantra since 1945 and it still defines German politics, shapes society and also impacts on the military. Germany has faced up to the dark aspects of its history like no other country in the world, and the majority of Germans see it as an imperative task to prevent another Shoa or the rise of extremism in the world. It was a painful process. In the years immediately after the war, the interest to engage with the Shoa and other atrocities was very limited. Germany had to be re-built and a lot of the former perpetrators could be seen in leading positions across Germany. “NATO will not believe me if I send them 20-year-old generals” was the slogan that Konrad Adenauer, the first chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, used in the 1950s when rearmament took place.

All this changed in the 1960s when a number of factors came together. The war generation retired and a new generation came to the fore. The youth was influenced by the student revolutions of 1968 and they began to ask inconvenient questions. Also, a number of court cases, in particular the Auschwitz cases between 1963-68, ensured that even those who did not want to know about the dark past could no longer shy away from the naked truth.

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As a consequence of the dark years between 1933 and 1945, Germans have had troubles accepting their country and feeling a sense of pride towards it. The Germans (first in the west) developed a very specific and German type of patriotism, the “constitutional pride” (Verfassungspatriotismus), which places the constitution (Grundgesetz) in the centre of patriotic feelings. It is not the people, the country, its history or the peoples’ achievements in science, the arts, etc that people are proud of, but the fact that Germany has got a liberal and democratic constitution which protects the liberty and freedom of German society. On paper, the situation was easier in East Germany. “Reborn from the ruins and facing the future” were the opening words of the East German national anthem. And this was represented in the government’s approach: The GDR was a “new” Germany and it did not have to feel ashamed about the war and the Shoa, because it was a socialist state in which no





Credit: Arne Miesler / arne-muesler.com / CC-BY-SA-3.0

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The event that evoked a certain sense of pride within the entire nation was not a military achievement à la the Falklands, but the football World Cup that was held in Germany in 2006

former Nazis could be found. Naturally, propaganda did not match reality.

Interestingly, the event that evoked a certain sense of pride within the entire nation was not a military achievement à la the Falklands, but the football World Cup that was held in Germany in 2006. For the first time since 1945, German flags could be seen everywhere in the country and it was acceptable to express pride in the nation – with the achievements of the national football team as the catalyst.

German history and the difficulty in dealing with the past have not stopped at the gates of the military barracks. The East German Army, the *Volksarmee*, was integrated into the Warsaw Pact and was in the tight grip of socialist ideology. And yet, at least in appearance, it was in some ways the more “German” army of the two states. The uniforms and drill resembled German or Prussian tradition more than the equivalents in the “Americanised” *Bundeswehr* of West Germany. The integration of the *Bundeswehr* into NATO was a declared aim of the West German politicians and a prerequisite to gain partial independence in the 1950s. As it was expressed at the time, the aim of NATO was to “keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down”. The West German *Bundeswehr* has broken with many of the German military traditions in order to integrate the military personnel into society and to ensure that the people, expressed through parliament, can exercise a tight control over the armed forces. The concept of leadership (called *Innere Führung*) is based on the assumption that the perceived blind obedience of the Third Reich resulted in the military being entangled in the atrocities committed during the war. The new concept has placed the emphasis on the idea that only an enlightened soldier, who understands and agrees with the orders that he is given, can be an effective defender of the democratic Germany. The German military is also probably the only military in the world that has a clear directive regarding its customs and traditions. The three official pillars of the *Bundeswehr* tradition are the Prussian Reforms of the early 19th century (including the introduction of conscription, which seems somewhat anachronistic today when the *Bundeswehr* is a fully professional force), the plot

to kill Hitler on 20 July 1944, and, becoming increasingly important, the history of the *Bundeswehr* itself. With the exception of the 20 July 1944 plot, the two world wars are markedly absent from this list, because, so the official argument goes, the *Wehrmacht* was involved in atrocities and the military fought both wars for undemocratic political systems.

The experience of German history also had an impact on the deployment of German troops. When the two German armies were founded in 1955 (*Bundeswehr*) and 1956 (*Volksarmee*), respectively, the parameters were clear. German troops would only be used on German soil. The fact that a possible major conflict between the Warsaw Pact and NATO would have been fought in Germany meant that a discussion of so-called out of area operations (i.e. outside of their blocs’ territories) was not high on the agenda. It was only after re-unification in 1990 that Germany has started to engage outside of NATO territory with combat troops. The first instance was the deployment to the Balkans in the 1990. The foreign minister and former radical member of the 1968 movement (although he was never a student himself), Joschka Fischer, used history to convince the members of his general anti-war Green Party that this deployment was necessary. The *Bundeswehr* had to deploy, he argued, in order to avoid “a second Auschwitz” in the Balkans. Bringing up the Shoa is the strongest weapon any politician or speaker can deploy in Germany, and every discussion is usually ended at this point. And yet, the deployment of German troops and the use of military force has remained highly unpopular in Germany and will remain so for the foreseeable future. The lack of military engagement has been criticised repeatedly and increasingly by Germany’s allies; and yet this restraint is a clear expression of the German uneasiness with military matters as a consequence of the Second World War. In a way, one might argue that some of the “5 Ds” (demilitarisation, denazification, democratisation, decentralisation, and deindustrialisation) agreed upon by the victorious powers after the war in the Potsdam conference of 1945 proved perhaps too successful in the eyes of international observers in 2020. The weight of history on the shoulders of the German people means that these critics should not expect a radical shift in Germany’s general policies now or in the future.

# LASTING AND CHANGING IMPACT ON THE RUSSIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE

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The 75th anniversary of victory in the Great Patriotic War (as the stage of WWII that started with the German attack on 22 June 1941 is known) was celebrated in Russia with great fanfare – and with fierce political campaign against “distortions of history”. What was unusual about this traditional boost to patriotic feelings was the direct instrumentalisation for a particular political project initiated by President Vladimir Putin. Addressing the Federal Assembly at the start of the year, he proposed a package of amendments to Russia’s constitution, and in the course of ensuing debate it transpired that the main goal was to grant him an opportunity to stand again in the presidential elections of 2024 by “annulling” the previous terms.

Both the Victory parade and the plebiscite on the amendments had to be postponed because of the severe COVID-19 epidemic, but the tanks did roll on the Red Square on 24 June (pictured below and overleaf), and the voting was concluded on 1 July, so that the project was successfully executed. Putin’s grasp on power is assured, and the constitution now prescribes the “defence of historical truth” and forbids “belittling of importance of people’s heroism in defending the Fatherland”. Heavy emphasis on celebrating and “defending” the old victory does not necessarily signify its high significance in Russian political and strategic thinking. The Kremlin finds it necessary to resort to exploiting the collective memory because its support base is eroding, but the attempt to take ownership of the past moment of national unity inevitably corrupts it. As disapproval of and mistrust in the policy that delivers a sustained and now accelerating decline of incomes and social benefits deepen, the falsity of official triumphalism becomes more apparent.

In a similar way, in foreign policy-making, the attempts to play up the importance of Russia’s contribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany are driven by the shallowing of most reliable sources of

strength and prestige. The profound shifts in the global energy market, where the key issue now is about the distribution of oil production cuts, undercut Russia’s status as a “great energy power”, and the setbacks in the badly mismanaged space program also diminish the global profile. The international reputation is so badly compromised that Putin’s initiative on organising summit of victorious powers (who happen to be the permanent members of the UN Security Council) in order to restore their responsibility for upholding the world order can hardly fly.

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Noisy propaganda and political posturing add distortions to the important question about the real impact of the experiences in mobilising massive effort for surviving and prevailing in a total war on the contemporary Russian strategic culture, which is evolving fast in the course of the new confrontation with the West. Stylistically, presentations produced by the General Staff and publications in military journals betray irreducible Soviet influence, rooted in the traditions established in the Great War, even if the former incorporate computer-generated visuals and the latter feature references to Western literature. Substance, however, may depart from these traditions rather far.

For once, preparations for a protracted conventional war in the Western theatre are discontinued, and the infrastructure supporting mass mobilisation was effectively dismantled in the course of reforms launched after the August 2008 war with Georgia. Discarding the main experiences of WWII, Russia is planning for only a short



period of conventional warfare against NATO, which would be concluded by a controlled use of nuclear weapons in the “escalate-to-deescalate” mode. A corollary from this shift is that Russia cannot “stabilise” Belarus in the same way as the USSR asserted control over Czechoslovakia in 1968, if only because that unresisted operation involved some 300,000 troops – and such numbers are presently far beyond available strength.

Russian military thinking focuses in the recent years on the set of propositions often described as “hybrid warfare”, even if this notion is used in Russian discourse only for describing hostile activities of the West. These intentions in combining indirect use of military force with various cyber-attacks,

propaganda offensives and export of corruption may appear innovatively post-modern, but in fact they involve re-learning some old lessons, leaving the joy of directing tank battles to computer games.

The script of using quasi-states as proxies for staging well-prepared military provocations goes back to the 1939 clash with Japan in the Mongolian steppes along the Khalkhin-Gol river, and the 2008 Georgian war was a successful remake.

The annexation of Crimea bears an unmistakable resemblance to the annexation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1940, so Putin feels obliged to describe that old crime as perfectly legitimate in his musings on the causes of WWII,



knowing full well that this indefensible point would destroy the credibility of all his other arguments about the flaws and faults of the European security system of old.

Despite Josef Stalin's mistrust in and purges of the military elite, the centrality of military force was the premise of his geopolitics and various "hybrid" means – from propaganda to the Comintern networks – were employed in support of the big battalions. Soviet economy was turned into a war machine in anticipation of WWII and remained in that shape for decades after, but the Russian economy of Putin's "era", with its predatory profit-maximisation and evacuation of ill-gained fortunes to "safe havens" abroad, is not geared toward military

build-up. The role of military force is seen, accordingly, as a core asset providing for deployment and supporting the use of other instruments of projecting power and influence.

The problem with this neo-Clausewitzian strategising is that most other instruments have proven to be of limited efficiency. Russia's "soft power" is seriously compromised, the ability to "weaponise" the energy export is sadly diminished, and the notorious "troll factories" cannot possibly help it to qualify as a "Great Cyber-Power". Putin may much prefer to execute multi-prong "special operations", but after many embarrassing failures – from the Salisbury poisoning to the arrest of "Wagner" mercenaries in Minsk – he may recognise the need to fall back on the old pattern of reliance primarily on military power. Trumpeting of past victories might appear as innocent self-glorification, but it generates urge to score a new one, and the top brass is eager to reassure that convoluted political problems always have a straightforward – and badly wrong – military solution.



# THE UNITED STATES

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The Second World War confirms the biases inherent in America's own self-image about its place in the world. It has remained popular as an historical reference point ever since because of its omnipresence in American politics and culture. All American presidents from the 1952 election of Dwight Eisenhower to the 1992 election of Bill Clinton were Second World War veterans, with the veteran experience being especially important to the political careers of John F. Kennedy and George H. W. Bush. The first 12 chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were Second World War veterans, the last one not retiring from his post until 1989. The office of chief of staff of the Army was held by a Second World War veteran until 1979. The last chief of naval operations with Second World War service retired in 1982. Memory of the war has been especially important for the United States because it has so few modern reference points shared across the country's vast ideological and regional diversity.

Imperfect memories of the Second World War experience have been so fundamental to American identity at the individual and national levels that it has become the nation's reflexive historical analogy when it faces a new crisis of almost any kind. Americans have "learned" facile lessons about the war that weave a narrative seemingly suited to a wide variety of issues from facing global terrorism



to dealing with pandemics like COVID-19. In the American collective memory, the Second World War began when innocent Americans were victims of a sneak attack on what President Roosevelt famously called a "date that will live in infamy". The country then united and rallied to fight a war on several continents against an enemy driven by unspeakable evil. The final result was the well-photographed moment on the USS Missouri (below) when the enemy surrendered in full, paving the way for the implementation of a lasting peace.

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In the American collective memory, the Second World War began when innocent Americans were victims of a sneak attack on what President Roosevelt famously called a 'date that will live in infamy'

Moreover, this war ended an age of economic depression and ushered in a period of sustained growth perhaps unprecedented in human history, lifting millions of Americans out of poverty and into the middle class. Certainly, this version of the memory of the war has some basis in fact given the depravity of the wartime regimes in Germany and Japan. Such a war could only inspire pride in the American people. Little wonder then that even an imperfect memory of it fits the American mindset so well.

This overly positive memory of the Second World War has proven remarkably durable. Perhaps the most important intellectual legacy of the Second World War was the association of any kind of conciliation with the discredited appeasement spirit of Munich. The Munich analogy informed Truman's thinking in deciding to resist the North Korean invasion of South Korea in June 1950, just weeks after National Security Council Memorandum 68 provided the blueprint for building a powerful American military on the Second World War model.

The war in Korea was a conventional limited war that was both familiar to American strategists and frustratingly new. As in the Second World War the two opposing forces were symmetrical, and the war had the familiar metric of ground gained





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The bias remains, as evidenced by the United States Army’s new uniform [above centre] based on the Second World War model. As the *New York Times* observed, ‘Probably not by coincidence, that’s what the Army was wearing the last time the nation celebrated total victory in a major war’

as a way to measure success. Unlike the Second World War, however, the war in Korea represented something new on the strategic level. President Truman understood that the war in Korea had to be prosecuted within strict limits. However important Korea was in the grand strategic picture, the United States could not return to a full wartime mobilisation. The new intellectual ground of limited war proved difficult to navigate, especially for the Second World War veterans like General Douglas MacArthur who retained the total war mindset of 1941-1945.



**Caught on camera: Archive photos of US military personnel captured during the Second World War and, above centre, a prototype of the US Army’s new, old-look uniform**



One clear consequence was the concomitant unwillingness of the American military to return to its roots in irregular war and its history of war making on the frontier. In relying on the memory of the Second World War, Americans found a new and far more appealing model for war, one that leveraged the industrial overmatch and phenomenal logistical capabilities of the new American superpower. Even after Vietnam proved its limits, this legacy endured. The desire to move past the negative model of Vietnam and back to a more familiar one proved similarly strong. Betting that Vietnam was an aberration, the AirLand doctrine of the 1970s looked to a future conventional war fought with tanks, close air support, and heavy infantry on large battlefields that resembled a modern version of the Second World War. On the battlefield, tanks and heavy infantry dominated Iraqi forces, once again creating a war that could be measured by ground gained.

The success of American-led forces in the First Persian Gulf War led the United States to return to the Second World War model. Not coincidentally, the importance of the Second World War in American culture grew exponentially in the decade between the First Persian Gulf War and the attacks of September 11. Included in this cultural renaissance were

the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial, the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, and the World War II Memorial in Washington; the release of movies like Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* and *Saving Private Ryan*; television shows like *Band of Brothers*; and books like Tom Brokaw’s *The Greatest Generation*.

The Second World War became the natural, almost automatic, analogy for President George W. Bush when he delivered an address to Congress after the attacks of September 11, 2001. The Second World War had by then firmly established itself as nothing less than the founding myth of a modern America dedicated to quickly solving large international problems with the mass application of resources. The bias remains, as evidenced by the United States Army’s new uniform based on the Second World War model. As the *New York Times* observed, “Probably not by coincidence, that’s what the Army was wearing the last time the nation celebrated total victory in a major war.”

# IRAN UNDER THE LONG SHADOW OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

*Dr Ali Parchami  
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On 25 August 1941, Great Britain and the Soviet Union jointly launched a surprise invasion of neutral Iran. Justified under the pretext that Tehran had ignored an ultimatum to expel German nationals from its soil, the invasion was motivated by British concerns over the prospect of Iranian oil refineries falling into German hands; and a desire by the Allies to use the 'Persian Corridor' to supply war materials to the beleaguered USSR. The occupation that followed was nothing short of catastrophic for the Iranian people. With distribution facilities and transportation networks diverted to aid the war effort, scarcity of goods led to widespread inflation and famine. Over the next few years, tens of thousands of Iranians succumbed to the typhus that was brought into the country by foreign troops – with the death toll estimated as high as 4,000,000 or a quarter of the population.

The Allied occupation cast an indelible shadow over a country that emerged from the war significantly impoverished and beset by social turmoil. In the immediate post-war years, having been nurtured in the northern provinces occupied by the Red Army, the Marxist Tudeh ('the Masses') spread its network across Iran. As Stalin reneged on a tripartite agreement requiring Soviet withdrawal from Iranian territory, Tudeh Marxists became his willing collaborators. In November 1945 Tudeh leaders declared a People's Republic in the Iranian province of Azerbaijan. Two months later, in January 1946, dissident Kurds proclaimed the Mahabad Republic with Soviet support. Moscow immediately accorded both entities diplomatic recognition and deployed the Red Army to 'assist' them.

The 'Iran Crisis' of 1946 was one of the earliest cases to be referred to the newly-established United Nations. It is also regarded as an opening salvo in the brewing Cold War between East and West. A combination of American pressure, and Iranian oil concessions to Moscow, eventually diffused the situation as Stalin abandoned the two puppet Soviet republics and in December 1946 withdrew the Red Army. The political fallout from the crisis sealed the fate of the Tudeh: the party was increasingly pushed to the periphery of Iranian politics and, within a decade, was forced underground.

As the fortunes of the Marxists diminished, nationalist parties became the biggest bloc in parliament. Iranian nationalism, already energised by the shock of wartime defeat and occupation, found in Dr Mohammad Mossadegh an ideal leader. A princely scion of Iran's previous ruling dynasty, Mossadegh was a liberal intellectual and a moderniser with a reputation for incorruptibility and an immaculate political record as a patriot. He was also prone to fits of melodrama and was vehemently anti-British in outlook

– a sentiment that had been intensified by the experience of British wartime occupation.

Propelled to the premiership, Mossadegh's government set out to tackle the social-economic malaise of the war years. Unemployment and sickness benefits, protection for workers, and laws to consolidate civil liberties and freedom of the press, were some of the measures that made him popular with the masses. To finance his reforms, Mossadegh made oil the centrepiece of the government's agenda. With the Treasury receiving less than 18 per cent of the profits from the sale of Iranian oil, Mossadegh moved against the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) by demanding an end to its monopoly. When AIOC executives dismissed negotiations out-of-hand, Mossadegh seized the company's assets and took over the facilities in Abadan – at the time the world's biggest oil refineries.

Mossadegh's actions scandalised a Britain worried about its post-war prestige. London reacted by first lodging a complaint with the International Court of Justice and the UN Security

Council. It then proceeded to enforce a naval blockade of Iranian shipping in the Persian Gulf and organising a wide-ranging international embargo against Iranian financial transactions and oil sales. These measures caused severe disruption to the Iranian economy but neither the intransigent Mossadegh – nor Britain – showed any willingness to compromise. Matters came to a head when the pro-Western Shah (King) sought Mossadegh's resignation. The Prime Minister obliged but was returned to power on the wave of mass popular protests. The monarch and his family fled into exile and a triumphant Mossadegh doubled-down on his policies. His victory was short-lived. On 19 August 1953 his government was toppled by an Anglo-American engineered coup. Mossadegh's

fall and arrest ended Iran's short experiment with democracy. America's participation in the putsch, however, was to leave deep scars in the Iranian national psyche.

Returning from exile, and with the tacit support of his British and American patrons, the Shah established a dictatorship. His secret service, the SAVAK, systemically purged Mossadegh's nationalists from the political arena and ruthlessly pursued and persecuted individuals with leftist leanings. The Shah's reactionary proclivities were, at least in part, a product of his wartime experience. He had come to the throne in 1941 under inauspicious circumstances. The father he had idolised had been pressured by the Allies to abdicate and was subsequently banished by the British to South Africa. The young Shah had felt humiliated in his own kingdom during the occupation years: often ignored by the Allies and, when consulted, made to understand that he was a mere afterthought.

The man that returned to power in 1953 came to view Iran

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*The Shah's reactionary proclivities were, at least in part, a product of his wartime experience. He had come to the throne in 1941 under inauspicious circumstances*



as an extension of himself. Neither he, nor his country, should ever again be seen as weak or humiliated. Dreaming of restoring the glories of the Persian Empire, the Shah set out to strengthen Iran's geopolitical status by diverting most of the proceeds from oil sales to building a powerful military. His aspiration was not to merely outdo Third World rivals but to put Iran on par with the United States so that Iran's Armed Forces would be strong enough one day to ward off a Soviet attack unaided. The Shah's obsession with the latest military technology translated into an extravagant procurement programme that, by the mid-1970s, was in direct competition with the US Armed Services – setting off alarm bells in the US Congress.

Undeterred by criticisms of his human rights record and his preoccupation with armaments, the Shah achieved his objective of turning Iran into a leading military power in Asia. Ironically, as the country's geostrategic position appeared fortified, the real danger to the Shah's regime did not come from overseas but from within his own realm. With his Marxist and nationalist opponents purged, and liberal groups intimidated into silence, opposition to the Shah manifested itself in the country's one remaining organised social movement: the devout followers of Shia clerics. Even as the Shah demonstrated his military prowess through expeditionary operations and an aggressive interventionist foreign policy, the Islamist followers of Ayatollah Khomeini set about bringing an end to Iran's 2,500 years of imperial rule.

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**Gateway to Tehran: The Azadi Tower was commissioned by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last Shah of Iran, to mark the 2,500th year of the foundation of the Imperial State of Iran**

**Credit: Hasan Almasi on Unsplash**

# THE LEGACY OF 1945: THE CASE OF AUSTRIA AND HER CENTRAL EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURS

*Professor Dr Lothar Höbelt  
Vienna University*

There is a certain ambivalence about the results of 1945 over large parts of Central Europe. Few lamented the downfall of Hitler, or his acolytes. It was easy to agree that the end of the most destructive war the world had ever experienced was “a good thing”. However, it was far from clear whether what came next was a good thing, too. 1945 – and the two or three years after – were a great watershed in Central European history, far more so than in the history of Western Europe (where 1945 simply corrected the fluke of 1940).

Geography, not history, dictated the post-war fate of Central Europe. That is why the crossroads of 1945 lead to slightly paradoxical results. More than a million Austrians had fought with the German ‘Wehrmacht’, only a few thousand émigrés had joined one of the allied armies. To all intents and purposes Austria had lost the war as part of the “Third Reich”, but it still managed to dissociate itself from the losers and to become the “darling of the Cold War”.

In terms of national identity, tradition and ethnicity, the post-1918 Republic of Austria had hovered uneasily between the pull of pan-German ties and Habsburg traditions. After 1945, both options were no longer valid. The Iron Curtain now cut the territory of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire in two. The idea of union with Germany had been fatally contaminated by Hitler’s policies. As a result, Pan-Germanism was frowned upon, even if economic integration with West Germany boomed, as there were few viable alternatives. The Western powers were far from being firm believers in the Rip van Winkle-like character of the Austrian Republic that claimed to have been dormant through six years of warfare. But as a thoughtful US official once minuted: “Since, as a matter of national policy, we encourage a separate Austrian nationalism, we cannot be surprised, and should in fact find comfort in the fact that most Austrians deny ever having had anything to do with Germany.”

For the ex-German Austrians 1945 thus was the unequivocal beginning of a success story that propelled them into an “economic miracle” on a par with West Germany. The 1951 book *The Mouse that Roared* – later turned into a film by Peter Sellers – summed it up in a nut-shell: “The perfect way to prosperity consists in losing a war against the Americans.” But Austria’s Central European neighbours were painfully aware that the Western powers had not fought the war on their own. For them, the legacy of 1945 more often than not consisted in a liberation by the wrong sort of liberators. The Austrians got rid of the Red Army because a neutral Austria – following the example of Switzerland – cut NATO in two but did not materially affect the strategic position of the emerging Warsaw

Pact. Her neighbours were less fortunate. Hungary had been the last ally of Germany (except for Japan). In 1944, Admiral Miklos Horthy had not succeeded in following the Italian example and opting out of the war. In contrast to the Austrian experience, the Cold War now cut off Hungary from all hopes of Western support. The Czech lands had been occupied by Nazi Germany in 1939 before the war had even started, and they were only occupied by the Soviets after the war had all but ended. Before World War II, Hungary and Czechoslovakia had followed quite different and often antagonistic paths in more than one way. Hungary had been a monarchy without a king, run by a semi-authoritarian conservative regime, Czechoslovakia a multi-ethnic democracy, governed by centrist coalitions. Czechoslovakia included the most heavily industrialised part of the old Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Hungary was still dominated by aristocratic great land-owners. Nevertheless, both countries were subjected to a very similar dose of orthodox Communism after 1947-48.

Immediately after 1945, in both countries a regime was established that – following Peter Kenez’s formula – can best be characterised as “a system of impaired pluralism” (with right-wing parties not being allowed to compete). In Hungary, in 1945 the Communist Party won only 17 per cent of the vote, compared to 38 per cent in Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, Hungary actually succumbed to Communism much earlier than Czechoslovakia. Matyas Rakosi and his Communist-led Bloc relied on “salami tactics” by slicing the majority of the Smallholders Party apart in the course of 1946 and 1947, frightening some of their leaders into exile, winning over others and coercing the rest. In Czechoslovakia, the leading Communists decided to monopolise power in the so-called “Victorious February” of 1948 once their coalition partners showed signs of growing restive. In a repeat performance of Prague “defenestrations”, Foreign Secretary Jan Masaryk, son of the founder of the First Republic, was found dead beneath his windows a few weeks later.

Three million Sudeten Germans had already been expelled from Czechoslovakia in 1945-46. The Western powers agreed to the population transfer with some misgivings mostly because they hoped that a more homogenous Czechoslovakia would be better able to stand up to bullying by either the Germans or the Russians. With hindsight, the unintended consequences of that sort of ethnic cleansing was that Sudeten Germans were (most of them) deported into the West German “economic miracle” while Czechs were condemned to languish behind the Iron Curtain. What had been imposed on Hungary as a penalty, was awarded to Czechoslovakia as a prize. During World War II, Slovakia had for the first time in her history enjoyed a limited form of independence as a German satellite, with a Catholic priest at the helm,

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Jozef Tiso. In 1945, the country was reintegrated into Czechoslovakia.

If Austrians lost the war, Czechs lost the peace and Hungarians both, Yugoslavia's Marshal Tito (nee Josip Broz) undoubtedly won his war. Yugoslavia had disintegrated after the Axis attack in the spring of 1941 and experienced years of bloody civil wars among a multitude of warlords, selectively supported by the great powers. Tito's Communist-dominated resistance movement emerged victorious from the chaos. Tito's trump card was that he represented not just a makeshift government in exile that the Allies had deigned to recognise but he was the one who was actually in possession once the Germans vanished from the scene. This is what gave him a unique position among the resistance movements of Europe. Like Mao on the other side of Eurasia, for Tito the Soviets were allies, not liberators. Stalin and Churchill might engage in a tug-of-war over who was going to run Poland or Hungary, but Randolph Churchill already told his father in mid-1944: "Whether we help Tito or not, after the war, he will be the master of Yugoslavia."

However, in early 1948, at almost exactly the time when "Western-style", half-way democratic Czechoslovakia vanished behind the Iron Curtain, Tito made the most of his geographical position and managed to cut his ties with the Eastern Bloc. Yugoslavia looked to an international role as a leader of the non-aligned countries, with special emphasis on relations with India. Tito's Frank Sinatra-style ("I'll do it my way") version of "Socialism in One Country" was a Socialism in six republics (and two autonomous regions, one of them Kosovo). Tito was a Croat (with a Slovene mother) who had even briefly fought against the Serbs during World War I as a NCO under Habsburg colours. Most of his support during the years from 1941 to 1944 came from the Serb diaspora living in the ex-Habsburg lands in the Western half of Yugoslavia. Tito's emphasis on local autonomy widened the gap in income between the republics but probably did help to reduce ethnic tensions. Like Habsburg

Prime Minister Count Edward Taaffe, Tito succeeded in keeping most of his subject – or constituent – nations in a state of "well-tempered discontent".

It is a truism that the totalitarian movements of the 20th century had a great number of followers in Central Europe, of both the enthusiastic and the opportunistic variety. The electoral statistics from both the pre- and the post-war years point to the conclusion that Fascism – under different labels – was more popular with Austrians and Hungarians, Communism in its different varieties with Czechs and Yugoslavs. That finding in itself begs the question whether these sympathies had that much to do with ideological conviction or were not more influenced by geopolitics and traditional notions about "auld alliances", i.e. the popularity of a German versus a Russian "great brother". Since 1989, the geopolitical context has changed dramatically, but the ideological debates of yesteryear have to some extent been given a new lease of life under the heading "politics of memory".

The 20th century provided a perfect example of the difficulty of predicting the past. It will not come as a surprise that the incentive behind the "politics of memory" usually has less to do with popularising scholarly findings than with "scoring points" against your present-day political rivals. In Austria, the collapse of the Iron Curtain surrounding half the country had removed a potent argument that had kept anti-communism alive. In Hungary and Czechoslovakia, it was the other way round: Anti-Fascism had been the stale diet of an unloved regime. 1989 provided a chance to catch up on anti-Communism that had for so long been a taboo. One way of conducting such campaigns is by way of iconoclastic pin-pricks about street names. Examples can easily be spotted everywhere in Central Europe (and not only in Central Europe). It could also lead to a re-shuffling of national holidays – even if only by 24 hours as in the Czech case, 8 May (VE Day) instead of 9 May (VE Day Moscow time).



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# FRENCH DEFENCE POLICY AND THE MEMORIES OF WORLD WAR II

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The fall of France in 1940 is one of the most surprising events in military history: it was so unexpected that it prompted Heinz Guderian to talk about a “miracle”. France was considered a major military power in Europe, one which friends and enemies alike would not imagine seeing defeated in a six-week long military campaign. Because it was so unexpected, the event called for interpretative frames, which Pétain was quick to provide since it established his regime’s ideological foundations: for the French marshal turned politician, France lost because it had “too few children, too few weapons and too few allies”. Therefore, this defeat was an opportunity to establish a “national revolution”, or a “new order” (as Pétain called it in his 11 October 1940 speech) based on conservative principles, authoritarianism, state-sponsored antisemitism, and organicism.

However, the memories of World War II in France are far from being limited to the Vichy regime. Unlike the First World War, which provided a relatively similar experience of trench warfare for millions of individuals, thus creating a widely shared memory of the event among veterans, the French experience of World War II was extremely diverse.

On the allied side, French troops served as part of the Free French Forces in North-Africa and/or on the Western front, some in Madagascar, and some even served on the Eastern front, as part of the “Normandie-Niemen” fighter regiment (which was the only western military unit to fight together with the Soviets until the end of the war in Europe). In addition to these troops who fought abroad, a variety of resistance networks emerged in occupied France that fought the Germans in the French homeland, mainly by conducting sabotage and providing intelligence to the Allies.

However, there was also collaboration between the French state and Nazi Germany. It is well documented that, as time passed, the Vichy government gradually increased the scope and intensity of its collaborationist efforts, either by creating a paramilitary police force, the “Milice” or by encouraging young Frenchmen to join the Waffen-SS in what would become the 33. Waffen-Grenadier-Division SS “Charlemagne”. Former Waffen-SS and “Miliciens” also had an important role in structuring far-right networks in post-World War-II France and while such figures were obviously fringe in post-World-War II France, they add

another layer of complexity to the memory of the war: being on the losing side and unrepentant. Therefore, the memories of World War II in France are shaped by the multiplicity of experiences for French fighters. Despite this diversity, one can identify three areas in which World War II had a distinguishable influence of French defence policy: nuclear deterrence, the perception of allies, and the empire as a source of power and strategic depth.

The French nuclear deterrent is the first, and most obvious, direct legacy of World War II and the invasion that followed.

The defeat shaped the perception of a major strategic vulnerability which should not be allowed to happen again. Indeed, the sociology of the people involved in the origins of the French nuclear programme is quite telling. Before World War II, France was already strongly involved in nuclear research through the work of Irène Curie, her husband Frédéric Joliot and his team at the Collège de France. After the fall of France, the French stock of heavy water was smuggled to the UK by two members of Joliot’s team, with the aim of continuing research. The nuclear scientists who had joined De Gaulle created the group *Atomiciens de la France Libre* (Free French Nuclear Physicists), which was able to improve De Gaulle’s bargaining power with Churchill and Roosevelt by demonstrating that France had a scientific, and thus strategic, role to play once the axis would be defeated. In 1945, the government established the Atomic Energy Commission (CEA), which would ensure the development of a nuclear bomb from 1954 onwards. The spirit of the Resistance was quite important in shaping these developments, since Pierre Guillaumat, who headed the CEA between 1951 and 1958, capitalised on his experience acquired as a member of the Bureau Central de Renseignement et d’Action (BCRA), Free France’s secret service. Crucially, Guillaumat appointed Pierre Buchalet, the first director of military applications at the CEA, specifically because he had been engaged in the Resistance.

For Paris, a major lesson derived from World War II has been that France can work with allies but, ultimately, has to guarantee its own security: alliances are never to be entirely trusted. This attitude has defined France’s relationship with its key alliance in the post-World War II era: NATO. The most obvious political outcome of the preference for flexible alliance relations was De Gaulle’s 1966 withdrawal from the NATO military structure that followed his failure to establish a Franco-American-British triumvirate to lead the alliance. The rationale for the decision was a conceptual distinction between NATO as an organisation and the alliance as a political commitment – for De Gaulle, NATO was a tool serving a broader political purpose: there is no need to be committed to a tool, which can be discarded when obsolete.



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This distinction between the alliance as a political concept and NATO as an organisation has since been accepted by generations of French security policymakers and analysts, although it usually baffles the allies.

Finally, the memories of World War II played an important role in defining France’s colonial and post-colonial policies. French policymakers drew an important conclusion from World War II: France had owed its survival to the possession of its colonial empire. Colonies were the place where Gaullist troops challenged and eventually overcame the rule of the Vichy regime, served as a large supplier of troops in the French First Army commanded by De Lattre de Tassigny, and were the reason why France was still considered an important power after World War II, despite its military defeat in 1940. As such, even though the French colonial empire was largely

dismantled after 1962, practices of security cooperation were established with the former colonies, reflecting a deeply held belief that such relations are a source of power for France.

Arguably, the memories of the conflict still drive French defence policy in major ways in 2020: De Gaulle is more lionised than ever, the vocabulary of “resistance” saturates public discourses, etc. It remains to be seen whether these memories end up creating a form of rhetorical entrapment that could make French defence policy unfit for the strategic challenges of the 21st century: for a declining power, not everything needs to be about “grandeur”, and “resistance” is a word that should be used with care. In any case, it is safe to say that the future of French security and defence policy is defined by its past, or more precisely how its past lives on in memories.

# THE SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY OF THE NETHERLANDS SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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The catastrophic defeats in May 1940 and in the Netherlands Indies in 1941-42 formed a watershed in Dutch security policy. It was the definitive unmasking of the neutrality policy of the Netherlands. It became clear to the government and the military leaders in exile in London that from now on the Netherlands would only be able to guarantee its security by entering into alliances with major powers during peacetime. In 1948, the Netherlands therefore joined the Western Union, and subsequently NATO in 1949.

NATO was dependent on what the individual sovereign member states were prepared to make available for allied defence. With regard to the Dutch land and air forces, there was soon international consensus: they were much needed for direct defence on the continent. That did not apply to the maritime contribution of the Netherlands. The United States and the United Kingdom wanted to limit this to the coastal waters, while the Royal Netherlands Navy wanted an ocean-going fleet that was as complete as possible – a lesson learned from the Second World War – so the voice of the Netherlands could be heard loud and clear internationally. Parliament and, subsequently, government supported this vision. The NATO allies had little choice but to accept the Dutch maritime offer.

During and after the deployment of troops to Indonesia (1945-1949), the Royal Netherlands Army had difficulty making the shift to establishing units that were fully deployable by NATO. In addition, the army that had initially been entirely in line with the British Army, had to fully convert to the American organisational model. This was a condition for obtaining equipment under the US military aid programme. Furthermore, Dutch officers had gained little to no combat experience in an international alliance in Europe.

The air force had very few problems operating under allied command. Three Dutch squadrons had already operated in the British Royal Air Force in the Second World War. This trend was continued after the war. It included establishing allied air defence in the ‘front garden’ of the United Kingdom. In this way, the Netherlands gained ‘complete’ armed forces in the 1950s, with three fully fledged services that each went their separate ways with regard to their structure and operations. This situation would not change for the next 50 years.

Initially, the Rhine was NATO’s main line of defence. At the request of the Netherlands, it was extended by the IJssel Line, so that a larger part of Dutch territory would be protected.

When the line was moved forwards at the end of the 1950s/early 1960s, the Dutch army corps, as part of the Northern Army Group, gained its own ‘sectors’ by the Inner German Border. The crucial question was whether the divisions would be able to reach their sector in time in the event of a threat of war. Stationing a brigade near the deployment area, in Seedorf, was insufficient to compensate for this maldeployment.

The shift of the NATO strategy from massive retaliation to that of flexible response in the second half of the 1960s led to a permanent conventional and nuclear arms race. The Netherlands, small as it was, participated in full. It wanted to be a loyal ally. All services were assigned nuclear tasks. As a result of France withdrawing from the military organisation of NATO, the relative relevance of the Netherlands increased, because the American, Canadian and British military defence were now more dependent on Dutch ports and roads to reach the Central Sector. At the beginning of the 1970s, the maritime cooperation with the United Kingdom took shape, including in the form of what would later be called the United Kingdom/Netherlands (UK/NL) Landing Force, a directly deployable unit for the vulnerable northern flank of the treaty area.

Sustaining ‘complete’ armed forces was a very costly matter. Critics had already pointed out at the start of the 1950s that the Netherlands would never be able to continue delivering on its commitments in the long term. When the Cold War persisted, the Netherlands was one of the first member states to put on the agenda the problems of sustaining the defence efforts within the alliance.

In the mid-1970s, the central-left Den Uyl government cut the Gordian defence knot.

Initially, it gave the allies a real scare with very far-reaching proposals as a result of which the Netherlands would no longer be able to meet all its commitments to NATO. On balance, though, they will not have been dissatisfied with the measures taken. Under the motto “quality over quantity”, the armed forces may have been reduced, but they were also modernised on a large scale. In the calm following the heated public debate about the introduction of ‘neutron bombs’ and the siting of Pershing II missiles and Tomahawk cruise missiles, the armed forces were given the equipment to develop into one of the most modern in Europe.

The Netherlands ‘complete’ armed forces of the Cold War were therefore still standing proud when it ended. The defence policy was no longer exclusively ‘threat-driven’. For more than two centuries, the Dutch defence efforts, based on the implicit or explicit support of one or more major powers, were primarily focused on the general defence of the territory. That was the main task. Now the defence efforts were also shaped by the political ‘level of ambition’. The government

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**For more than two centuries, the Dutch defence efforts, based on the implicit or explicit support of one or more major powers, were primarily focused on the general defence of the territory**



Credit: Ben Koorengel on Unsplash

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Despite cautious increases in the defence budget, many good intentions, and multiple new initiatives for international cooperation, the Dutch armed forces are not in a position to carry out all their tasks in a manner that is acceptable from either a military or an international point of view

and parliament would determine, with ever decreasing budgets, what the capabilities of the armed forces should be, so the Netherlands could make a realistic contribution to the enforcement and promotion of the international rule of law. That became its second main task. Defence operations shifted from deterrence and defence to out-of-area operations and interventions all over the world.

New threats (risks) since 9/11, such as terrorism, the use of weapons of mass destruction by rogue states and criminal organisations, and cyber attacks, have also meant that military support of national civil authorities in legal enforcement and disaster relief has become a high priority. That is now the third, national, main task of the Netherlands armed forces.

The most visible continuity in the Dutch defence policy after the Cold War is the continuation, for as long as possible, of the old ‘complete’ armed forces structure, with the capability to participate at all levels of force. As there were no clear agreements in the EU and NATO regarding the allocation of tasks and with a view to its international reputation, the Netherlands wanted to continue to have as many military capabilities at its disposal as possible, so that it could in principle always respond to a request to participate in a mission. The most commonly used method of reorganisation

was that of across-the-board cuts (always cutting a frigate, a brigade and a squadron). Nonetheless, a shift was made to modest modular expeditionary armed forces that operated joint and combined and were tailored to the new tasks, but still had nearly all the functionalities from the Cold War, just in much smaller quantities. The most important exception was the dissolution of all tank units in 2011. Defence continued to be a closing entry when it came to the budget, which meant that the Netherlands had to constantly lower its military ambition level. European operational cooperation at a lower level (such as the German/Netherlands Army Corps, and the integration of the Belgian and Dutch navies) could not compensate for this loss in capabilities. This is now particularly painful as Russia has openly taken a revanchist course, as a result of which the protection of NATO territory in Europe again demands a lot of attention and resources.

Despite cautious increases in the defence budget, many good intentions, and multiple new initiatives for international cooperation, the Dutch armed forces are not in a position to carry out all their tasks in a manner that is acceptable from either a military or an international point of view. That is, incidentally, not only the case for the Netherlands. It is a symptom of the incapability of Europe to manifest itself as a power factor in our multipolar world.



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**To conduct and sponsor research and analysis into the enduring nature and changing character of conflict on land and to be the active hub for scholarship and debate within the Army in order to develop and sustain the Army's conceptual component of fighting power.**