Who Won, and Who Lost, World War II?

Sunday, the 80th anniversary of the Nazi invasion of Poland, Vice President Mike Pence spoke in Warsaw's Pilsudski Square of "five decades of untold suffering and death that followed" the invasion. Five decades!

What Pence was saying was that, for Poland, World War II did not end in victory but defeat and occupation by an evil empire ruled by one of the greatest mass murderers of the 20th century, Josef Stalin.
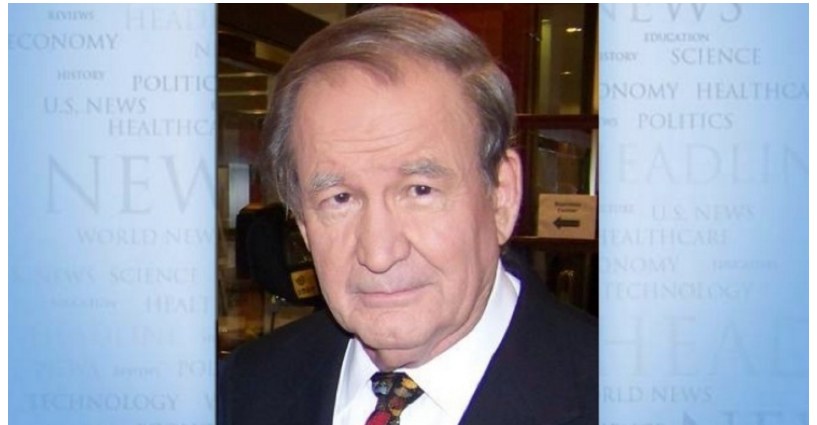
The "Liberation of Europe," the 75th anniversary of which we celebrated at Omaha Beach on June 6, was a liberation that extended only to the Elbe River in the heart of Germany.

Beyond the Elbe, the Nazis were annihilated, but victory belonged to an equally evil ideology, for the "liberators" of Auschwitz had for decades run an archipelago of concentration camps as large as Himmler's.

So, who really won, and who lost, the war?

Winston Churchill wanted to fight for Czechoslovakia at Munich in 1938, and Britain went to war for Poland in 1939. Yet if both nations ended up under Bolshevik rule for half a century, did Britain win their freedom? And if this was the predictable result of a war in a part of Europe where Nazis confronted Bolsheviks, why did Britain even go to war?

Why did Britain declare war for a cause and country it could not defend? Why did Britain turn a German-Polish war into a world war that would surely bankrupt her and bring down her empire, while she could not achieve her declared war goal — a liberated and independent Poland?

What vital British interest was imperiled by Hitler's retrieval of a port city, Danzig, that had been severed from Germany against the will of its 300,000 people and handed to Poland at Versailles in 1919?

Danzigers never wanted to leave Germany, and 90% wanted to return. Even the British Cabinet thought Germany had a case and Danzig should be returned.

Why then did Britain declare war?

Because Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had insanely given the Poles a blank check, a war guarantee on March 31, 1939: If Germany uses force to retrieve Danzig, and you resist, we will fight at your side.

Britain's war guarantee guaranteed the war.

Given the cause for which their country went to war, British actions during the war seem inexplicable.

When Stalin's army invaded Poland, Sept. 17, 1939, two weeks after Hitler, Britain did not declare war on the Soviet Union.

The Polish officer corps were executed on Moscow's orders in 1940. When the bodies were unearthed in Katyn in 1943, Churchill, now an ally of Stalin, responded to the Free Poles' request to investigate the

atrocity: "There is no use prowling round the three year old graves of Smolensk."

Rather than attack Hitler after he invaded Poland, Britain and France remained behind the Maginot Line and waited until Hitler's armies stormed west on May 10, 1940, the day Churchill took power.

In three weeks, the British army had been defeated and thrown off the continent. In six weeks, France had surrendered.

After Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain in 1940, Britain refused all of Hitler's offers to end the war, holding on till June 1941, when Hitler turned on his partner Stalin and invaded the Soviet Union.

Churchill is the "man of the century" for persuading Britain to stand alone against Nazi Germany in 1940, Britain's "finest hour."

But at war's end, what was the balance sheet of Churchill?

The Poland for which Britain had gone to war was lost to Stalinism and would remain so for the entire Cold War. Churchill would be forced to accede to Stalin's annexation of half of Poland and its incorporation into the Soviet Bloc. To appease Stalin, Churchill declared war on Finland.

Britain would end the war bombed, bled and bankrupt, with her empire in Asia, India, the Mideast and Africa disintegrating. In two decades it would all be gone.

France would end the war after living under Nazi occupation and Vichy rule for five years, lose her African and Asian empire and then sustain defeats and humiliation in Indochina in 1954 and Algeria in 1962.

Who really won the war?

Certainly, the Soviets who, after losses in the millions from the Nazi invasion, ended up occupying Berlin, having annexed the Baltic states and turned Eastern Europe into a Soviet base camp, though Stalin is said to have remarked of a 19th-century czar, "Yes, but Alexander I made it to Paris!"

The Americans, who stayed out longest, ended the war with the least losses of any great power. Yet, America is a part of the West, and the West was the loser of the world wars of the last century.

Indeed, the two wars between 1914 and 1945 may be seen as the Great Civil War of the West, the Thirty Years War of Western Civilization that culminated in the loss of all the Western empires and the ultimate conquest of the West by the liberated peoples of their former colonies.

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