

Top Military Historian: Iraq War Is Like 1938-39

by Mark Burdman

In recent weeks, one of the most trenchant critics of the Iraq war in Great Britain has been Prof. Corelli Barnett, Fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge University. He has made known his strong views about this insane imperial adventure through the letters pages of leading American newspapers and other channels.

Professor Barnett is one of Britain's most renowned military historians and strategists, whose special expertise is the study of the two world wars of the 20th Century. His book, *Hitler's Generals*, is a crucial reference document for understanding World War II, the workings of the Nazi regime, and the doom that Adolf Hitler brought upon Germany. Barnett's historical work was looked upon favorably by the most important military historian of the Second World War, Edinburgh University Prof. John Erickson, whose studies of the 1941-45 war between the German and Soviet armies has been likened to the work of the Greek historian Thucydides on the Peloponnesian War.

Before lunging into the Iraq war, the British and American administrations would have done well to listen to Corelli Barnett. When regimes don't listen to their most respected historians, they fall victims to the adage made famous by Spanish philosopher George Santayana, that he who does not learn from history is doomed to repeat it.

'Madness and Monstrosity'

On March 17, *EIR* spoke about the Iraq war with Professor Barnett, who began by insisting that the war project is "entirely madness." He expressed his strong opposition to the accusation now being made by the Bush and Blair governments, that "because France, Germany, and Russia won't fall tamely into line with the American position, they are guilty of starting the war. This is ridiculous! All the more so, as the United States was the principal founder of the United Nations. And now that commitment is being replaced by the notion that if you don't like what the UN does, you are free to act yourself. Washington's insistence that the UN is only legitimate if it implements Washington's policy, is a monstrosity."

Barnett added the proviso, that "when I speak, I am *not* condemning America and Britain as nations; I am condemning the Bush and Blair regimes."

What he was then asked to explain, is a point he has made in letters to the London *Guardian* and London *Times* since September of last year: the ominous parallels between 1938-39 and the present. Barnett has emphatically rejected as absurd the constant propaganda emitted by the Bush and Blair governments, insisting that the threat from Saddam Hussein is like that represented by Hitler in the late 1930s, and that those who oppose the war against Iraq are like the "appeasers of Hitler." Barnett sees the real parallel as being between the Anglo-American plan to invade Iraq today, and Hitler's bellicose threats against Czechoslovakia in 1938 and his invasion of Poland in 1939.

This latter point was stressed by U.S. Democratic Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche, during a March 19 interview with Britain's *Talksport Radio*: "This idea of preventive war, we recall from 1938, against Czechoslovakia, by Hitler; against Poland, in 1939. And there's no difference, essentially, between the proposed military attack on Iraq, and what was proposed by Hitler—in terms of military policy—against Czechoslovakia and Poland."

War Is Inherently Unpredictable

Professor Barnett emphasized, "The problem is, the recourse to war is inherently unpredictable. When Hitler and his generals moved into Poland in 1939, they were convinced it would be a short and quick success. In and of itself, it was. But it was the prelude to European war and world war, with all the devastation for Germany itself that that entailed. This crowd in Washington and London today, has no understanding about the uncontrollability of what is unleashed by starting war."

On the attempts to liken the "Saddam threat" and the "Hitler threat," Professor Barnett exclaimed: "It's so absurd, because then the British had a legitimate *casus belli*, and did not go to war. Today is not even like 1990-91, when there was a legitimate war, with UN approval, to contain Iraqi aggression. Saddam is indeed a monster, but one with limited capacity to threaten. He's no direct threat to us, and there is no proven connection to al-Qaeda. He's not even a threat in the Middle East region, with American and British planes always patrolling Iraqi airspace."

Professor Barnett had two other, related concerns. He expressed total agreement with LaRouche, in drawing parallels between Thucydides's account of the fate of imperial Athens and the dangers of the United States attempting to become an empire today. "This attempt to establish an empire is enormously destabilizing. The only basis for effective world order, is relations between sovereign states, with respect for borders. When this is replaced by a divine mission to topple regimes, the situation becomes incredibly dangerous," he said. "All the more so, as the regimes in Washington and London, now, are acting like the mirror-images of Bin Laden. They believe themselves to be 'born-again Christians' with a religious mission. This terrifies me."