

# Normalizing the Unthinkable in “Western” Exceptionalism

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Global Research, December 02, 2017

Theme: [History](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

*On November 11, Polish Independence Day, Warsaw saw large throngs pouring into the streets chanting “Clean Blood,” “Death to enemies of the homeland,” “Europe will be white or uninhabited,” and “No to Islam.” Neo-fascists were seen giving the “Sieg Heil” salute with balaclavas to hide their faces. When the grouping All Poland Youth began organizing this march back in 2010, parallel to the official celebration marking the end of foreign imperial rule in 1918, it used to attract a few hundred hard-core supporters. This year three ultranationalist groups managed to bring out 60,000 people.*

The popularity of fringe movements has risen sharply with the large influxes of refugees from the Syrian conflict. By hanging on to the coattails of the United States in its most recent attempt to destroy the government of Syria, the European Union (EU) led by England, France and Germany unwittingly threw open the refugee floodgates, provoking virulent anti-immigrant reactions especially among the EU’s poorer member states. Far from settling, this chain reaction portends ill for the stuttering EU. It has certainly destabilized further troubled countries like Poland and poisoned relations with its current regime. The EU leadership, long been criticized for haughtily overriding local concerns, is now at loggerheads with Poland on a number of issues, just as it has been with Bulgaria’s nationalist and publicly abrasive leader. In Germany, the refugee crisis precipitated by the war against Syria has cost Chancellor Angela Merkel valuable voter support that would have averted the predicament she faces trying to form a new governing coalition.

## A New Language of Intolerance



“White”—a pseudo-racial designation originally coined by the English—has strangely

become standard among extreme nationalists living in culturally and historically distinct eastern Europe. The old Pan-Slavism and other ultranationalisms had a pronounced tendency toward intolerance and mutual hatreds, but dividing the world into “white” Europe and the “nonwhites” of everywhere else is quaintly new. It mocks humanity, of course, not to mention the reality of population distribution since the dawn of history. Above all, though, it indicates the extent to which radicals there have learned to parrot the language of western Europe: “We the West” (enlarged to include central and eastern Europe) vs. “They the rest.”

By “nonwhite,” of course, they mean to refer to all “outsiders,” as Muslims have been specifically designated. It makes no difference whether the “nonwhite” outsider’s hair is blonde or blue, whether his or her country of origin lies just across the EU border or halfway around the globe. The absorption of the former Warsaw Pact countries into the EU has warped people’s self-perceptions, and thus their politics, by aligning public mentalities with a vestige of the colonial era: the racial worldview according to which England and France originally interacted with the rest of the world after gaining world hegemony a century and a half ago.

Unfortunately, the ultranationalists conveniently overlook the histories of their own countries. Islamic civilization has been indigenous to the European subcontinent since the eighth century AD. Covering almost the entire civilized world and profoundly pluralistic, religiously as well as ethnically, it predominated for around twelve centuries. From the two opposite ends of the subcontinent seeped the philosophy, science and technology of this brilliant civilization into a tiny, geographically isolated northwestern region. Hopelessly backward and straddling present-day France, England and Spain, the northwest was the core region that the 19th and 20th centuries later christened “the West.”

Today, 35-50 million Muslims are *indigenous*—not immigrants—to the European subcontinent. They live in the Balkans and up to Poland itself. There they have remained despite the mass expulsions and systematic massacres, including the murder of hundreds of thousands in Bulgaria in the 1890s. Though still numerous, Bosnians were once a strong and proud nation that contributed great leaders, thinkers and scientists to the Ottoman world. Miraculously, Muslim-majority countries like Albania, Azerbaijan, Russia’s Caucasus republics and others elsewhere also have survived. No one really knows how many millions in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Iran and Palestine trace their ancestry to the expulsions from Europe.

The long Islamic experience of eastern Europe survives in the languages, culinary habits and collective memories of people, just as it does in modern Spain. Yet, this did not prevent a shocking banner during a Polish independence demonstration in 2015 that read: “Prayer for an Islamic Holocaust.” Poles are thought to have lost about a quarter of their population when they were conquered by Nazi-ruled Germany. Nazi racial doctrine relegated them—like most eastern Europeans—to “mongrel” or “subhuman” status.

Despite mainstream media reports, the offensive banner fortunately was not sighted in this year’s march. However, the present government is led by the right-wing Law and Justice Party, and authorities decide what is legal and acceptable for public display. Ministers went out of their way to describe what was merely an annual march by fringe groups as a “regular event,” thereby granting it an official stamp of approval. When the demonstration was over, they insisted that all legal requirements had been met. Granted, the violence triggered in the past by counterdemonstrations did not happen, but Interior Minister Mariusz Blaszczak also denied there were any racist slogans.

“It’s only your opinion, because you behave like a political activist,” he answered the prying reporter interviewing him.

### Liberal or Conservative?

The interior minister’s party rode to power on the same xenophobic wave that placed many rightist parties and their candidates in positions of power all over eastern Europe and in Austria, Germany, France, England, the United States. This is not to say that many, if not most, voters are not appalled at the direction that the public discourse has taken. So, politicians are well-advised to avoid the expediency of using back-alley prejudices to endear themselves to a fictional electorate. Fear of instability usually overrides other considerations come voting time.

There are already signs of a backlash against the populist tide. Like Donald Trump in the White House, British PM Theresa May’s stubborn tone and incoherent policies have isolated her—she and several of her ministers face repeated accusations of incompetence. Whereas the Labor Party’s new Palestine-friendly leader, Jeremy Corbyn, is on the ascendancy, France’s Front National leader Marine Le Pen received a beating in the last election, despite her image as an inveterate iconoclast.

The new political actors of the right have, in one way or another, contested the way politics has been run, internationally and on immigration-related issues, though May appears little more than a weak mouthpiece for the single-issue proponents of Brexit. Traditional liberals and not a few progressive voices have shown their true stripes by joining the chorus over regime-change schemes abroad. In their hatred for President Trump, their lightning rod, they have made a contrarian’s miscalculation that my enemy’s friend must be my enemy. They lump Trump with Russian President Putin in an underhanded conspiracy to hobble the former, while longing for an “even-headed” leader like Barack Obama. Never mind that there have been calls for Obama, whom many others consider a worse warmonger than Bush, Jr., to be stripped of his Nobel Peace Prize. On Obama’s watch, moreover, the National Security Agency (NSA) and other intelligence services intruded—among other things—into the private lives of literally everyone on the planet, not just Americans. Only a short while ago that was the stuff of thrillers and SciFi flicks.



Still, there is no turning back the clock. The wave of populism sweeping the Western world has already upturned the glib politics-as-usual of the overbearing Liberal Establishment. Nevertheless, the liberal wing of the Establishment, taking no for an answer, is melding indistinguishably into the Neoconservative cabal, whose primary objective is to lock US foreign policy into the pro-Israel lobby’s plan for the Middle East. Ironically, “liberals” have been able to forge ahead without missing a beat *thanks to*, not in spite of, Trump. Trump has opened new doors for entrenched interests in government bureaucracies and big

business frustrated by a changing world. Wasting no time to turn everything on its head, he has resorted to direct threats instead of multilateralism or the liberals' usual doubletalk, with which the rest of world has learned to roll.

### Some Background

"Liberal Establishment" is a popular catchall label, but it's not bad for a description of the motley political and economic interests that have made common cause as the self-crowned defenders of "world order." It should be noted, though, that the word liberal here has little bearing on how open- or close-minded a person happens to be. "Neoliberal" economic policy, for example, is a form of "revolutionary" conservatism that seeks to deregulate everything, including the banking sector whose creative practices precipitated the most calamitous financial crises in living memory. It does so solely to allow big business to milk an economic system that is in unremitting historical decline. Neoliberal economics has been used since the 1970s to overturn social orders, not preserve them, but in a manner that safeguards a few vested interests. Much like in a corporatist state, those interests are assigned the broad task of driving economic activity along a prescribed path under new and increasingly turbulent conditions.

Yet, the Liberal Establishment flirted with rival policies long before neoliberalism decisively replaced the Keynesian model, and has been steering the same capitalist ship under successive liberal- and conservative-led governments. Whatever its policy of the day happens to be, it has learned to adapt to the disorders it creates while augmenting its worth in the eyes of the public as the indispensable guarantor of security. Its legitimacy depends entirely on its ability to perpetuate unsustainable economies through overabundance, the expansion of security regimes and one foreign war after another.

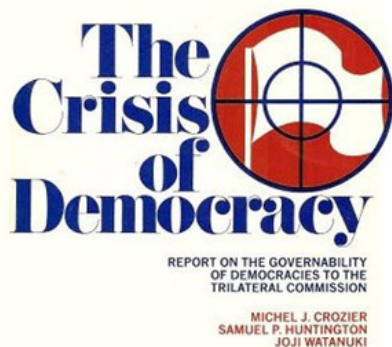
In the past few decades, there has been no shortage of criticism of the overbearing character of the Postwar order. Without a broader context, though, critics are easily co-opted, and the mistakes of the past are liable to be repeated. If, as Marx once wrote, history repeats itself only as a farce, then I think too many progressive-minded people have chosen either to live farcically in past glories, without truly understanding the past, or to surrender effete to what they figure they can't do much to change. If you can't beat 'em, I guess, why not join 'em?

This is exactly the kind of collusion between supposedly rival ideological camps that political historians tell us happened in the horrible chapter of history that presaged World War II. We've almost forgotten that most of the political and civil freedoms we take for granted were enacted in the Postwar period to enhance the toolbox of control. And they are once again being regarded with cold detachment as part of what has euphemistically been named the Liberal order. In the 1990s, conservative intellectual Francis Fukuyama arrogantly claimed that the Western liberal order signaled the "end of history," meaning that no other system of government can supersede it anywhere in the world. But nothing could be further from the truth. Since the 1970s, there have been persistent and rather disturbing efforts at institutional redesign. These efforts were based on the equally arrogant notion that the "West" must keep expanding worldwide, given that it was somehow above history and above the needs of the rest of the world.

The meeting of minds across political and intellectual boundaries clearly demonstrates, as the rise of fascism did in the 1920s and 1930s, how fast liberal political circles become enamored of radical elements in their midst whenever structural shocks threaten the

supremacy of financial elites. A fine recent example of this is the support that Hillary Clinton managed to garner from the most rabid Neocon elements in the American political scene, all of them fearful of candidate Trump's supposed desire for rapprochement with Russia.

The ambiguity of liberalism, even after the Democratic Party's historic dissociation from segregationists in the South, has been evident in American politics ever since the series of assassinations of President John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and the ever-shifting Robert Kennedy blunted its force in the 1960s. Such ambiguity allowed the rise of Mussolini and Hitler to fill the gaps, just as it did liberalism's alliance with radical conservative—sometimes pro-fascist—elements in England and France during the same period. President Eisenhower did not throw caution to the wind on a whim when he sternly warned about the “military-industrial complex,” which had outgrown the American role in WWII.



In 1975, an influential book was published titled *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, in which the authors—Samuel P. Huntington (who later wrote *The Clash of Civilization*), Michael Crozier and Joji Watanuki—expressed deep pessimism about liberal democracy. They determined that the institutions of political socialization were falling apart and that the changing of values constituted a major contributing factor—in other words, fewer and fewer people believed what their governments and media were telling them.

In the context of the mass protests against the Vietnam War, pessimism was commonplace among Cold War intellectuals. Many outspoken academics and intellectuals belonged to think tanks tied to elite circles like the Trilateral Commission, which gathered together influential figures of every hue from the US, western Europe and Japan. Since 2011, this is the selfsame mindset that has impelled the politicians we keep electing, the spy agencies they run and those who bankroll their election campaigns to use Wahhabi terrorists to demolish sovereign states in the Middle East ostensibly for security reasons and in defense of “Western values.”

We have essentially been lulled by lip service paid to some abstract fight to the finish against international terrorism, while mountains of arms purchased with our tax dollars and



mind-boggling sums of Peninsular Arab oil money are funneled to terrorists the likes of which no one has ever seen before. The selective violence of the leftist Red Brigades and the Baader-Meinhoff Gang is almost like a tender dream now.

### Oil, Terrorists and the Syrian Debacle

The new terrorist mutations needed only to operate at a safe distance against Syria, a country we didn't care much about but whose will had to be crushed to make way for the new. Besides, Israel had to be guaranteed a sustainable future even if the entire region had to be leveled and responsibility for the dispossession and genocide of the Palestinian people erased from the world's memory. This reasoning falls into lockstep with threats—albeit increasingly hollow—made by Israel against Iran and Lebanon for one troubling fact: Israel illegally owns hundreds of nuclear weapons aimed not merely at every capital in the neighborhood, but at the heart of Europe itself, just in case. Since 9-11, the key to the impossible puzzle of legitimizing a race colony built on real estate that belongs to another people has thus revolved around the forcible removal of any force that might challenge the decision of the three Western ringleaders to dispatch the Jews to Palestine.

Unfortunately, the confluence of interests that has bound Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Liberal Establishment for decades has proved a miserable failure. But it is being tried again, this time in the open, with Saudi Arabia even keeping Lebanon's prime minister either a willing or an unwilling hostage. Everything else has failed, and the third party—the Wahhabi terrorists—have taken to committing horrific acts of violence inside the EU and elsewhere.

But what did the liberals and the Neocons on both continents do in response to these terrorist acts? They became even more fervent in their call that Syria's legal government be removed, not through negotiation but, at the point of the gun. Why? Because the mere presence Bashar al-Assad—went the wisdom—promoted radicalism. What more convenient way for someone giving himself civilized airs than to use a third party like the head-chopping Wahhabi mercenary armies?

The hilarious fact is that the attempted demolition of Syria introduced Iran and Russia for the first time right on the border with Israel, a worse scenario for the West than before the war. And notwithstanding the ragtag elements of "Marxist" militias run by treasonous Kurds, the United States stands powerless to reverse this introduction on pain of taking down Europe with it. The risk of direct conflict with either Iran or Russia is not something any sane person contemplates. Consequently, the panicked, coercive way in which the alliance between Israel and the Persian Gulf Arabs is being refurbished, on the back of the Palestinians, only confirms the steep decline of the US, the main power behind the Postwar order.



There is no other way to describe it: America, England and France have sunk themselves to the level of spoilers in their Middle Eastern playground, a secondary role the Soviet Union was forced to play even in its heyday. Every new diplomatic initiative on Syria serves as just another platform for them to repeat the demand that Russia give up Bashar al-Assad before it's too late and stop obstructing their efforts to maintain their "world order."

Russian diplomacy's first breakthrough, for example, allowed Syria to relinquish its chemical arsenal, thereby removing the pretext for an imminent military attack by the US. This unilateral initiative set the stage for the Geneva declaration that later emerged about some vague notion of a "transition" as a way out of armed conflict. Both could have served as precedents toward eventual peace negotiations. But Western governments have been ineptly trying to parlay every diplomatic initiative into the forcible removal of Syria's government, with no thought to the unimaginable consequences of such an outcome. They pepper their game with regular accusations about chemical weapons, before following up the "moral outrage" with new measures, including air strikes against the Syrian army. No matter what Syria does, like Iraq in the past and Iran today, it remains under permanent suspicion concerning WMDs (weapons of mass destruction). When the subject does not involve nuclear weapons, it turns to missiles designed for self-defense, like those of Iran, alleged shipments to Lebanese Resistance forces in Syria, and everything but the kitchen knife.

This is all a transparent—and very dangerous—way to pursue narrow interests at the expense of a world that no longer feels beholden to the Western powers. It is neither respectful nor productive to speak to other nations this way. Unless, of course, Western governments are acting out of sheer panic.

President Putin's ability to check, if not neutralize, the Western alliance's aggressive attempts at expansion in the post-Soviet era, and his active encouragement of other countries to take a more independent stance, has put the new Russia, too, on a permanent blacklist. But his presence on the international scene also underscores Syria's own historical and geopolitical significance, which our bellicose and ignorant politicians barely suspected back in 2011 when they went for the jugular. Syrian war has acted like a powerful vortex in the international order. It made short shrift of the old love affair that the Liberal Establishment has with third parties willing to do its bidding.

The Establishment now has Donald Trump, an outsider and a willing warrior who suffers no compunction at all when it comes to beating back the Muslim horde. It clearly follows the wake of his grating stridency, which it uses for better penetration much as the German and

Italian “liberal” elites did before WWII. Congress may gripe about Trump’s questionable language, but they feel unstoppable now with respect to Iran and Russia. Likewise the EU leadership. It complains about him in public, yet denounces Iran’s destabilizing activities in the Middle East, as if the Middle East belonged to the West and Iran was not located there at all.

But the cost has been steep. Domestic politics has turned the US into a farce of history. Besides Israel, the US’s best friends in the world are the descendents of Saudi desert brigands who used to raid trade routes, ambush the Ottoman army, and murder masses of noncompliant Muslims. Trump has earned the full support of the same Peninsular Arabs, who sold Palestine to England a century ago for a few silver pieces on a promise to make them rulers of a newly invented “Arab” world. With English counsel, the Saudi clan conjured up a new “religion” for their Wahhabi heresy and a quaint “Arab” identity for Arabic speakers outside the Arabian Peninsula. Both concepts are utterly foreign to the vast majority of Arabic-speakers, who have their own ancient ethnic identities and linguistic roots.

And the masquerade continues with the tragicomic League of Arab States’ serial condemnations of Iran and any other country daring to defend itself against the alien Zionist race-colony to the south. Israel murdered 24,000 Lebanese citizens when it invaded in 1982, a horrific spectacle I distinctly remember and that a silent world simply watched. The bill for that crime has yet to be paid. Since then, the reflexes of the world have been conditioned all the more by Wahhabi and Zionist heresies joined at the hip from birth.

#### Some History Repeats Itself in Ever-smaller Farces

Some observers have noticed that the present rush to the right is bringing to a head developments that predate WWII. One of them is Alastair Crooke, a former British diplomat and one of the most astute observers of current events with an impressive historical perspective.

He has written extensively on various aspects of the illusion of Postwar normalcy that has been hanging precariously until only recently. This illusion came crashing with the demise of the USSR and the Western rush to swallow up the fragments. Measured against a possible big with a formidable foe like the USSR, and with “small” hot wars like those in Korea and Vietnam subsiding, Syria seemed like a delectable fruit. The trouble is that Syria is not like other countries. It is a central piece in a larger mosaic stretching from the Middle East to the Ukraine. All that used to be one world. Still, one has also to wonder if the wider chaos unleashed inside Syria is not precisely the balkanization that the old colonial powers had in mind all along for the entire Middle East. Western ruling circles are intensifying familiar policies, not changing them. Only, this time they seem to be waging rear-guard actions in a vain hope to recover, if only for a fleeting moment, their fading hegemony over the lives of billions of human beings. To put everything in perspective, let us do a little comparison.





Hitler during the WWII

Imagine yourself in the middle of WWII. The Nazi clique ruling Germany basically won the war, having overrun subcontinental Europe in roughly two years and secured a period of calm. What would have happened if the Hitler had been able to cement this short-term victory, instead of precipitating the renewed warfare that finally ended the Nazi state? We shall never know, because he decided to advance into Eurasia against the politically and geographically isolated USSR. The Western allies seized upon the failure of the epic battle that unfolded in the east to launch their Normandy invasion. As in the past, their victory was assured only by a third party, this time the unlikely Soviet Marxists. They used the Soviet Union as a battering ram without having to lift a finger, at the cost of more than twenty-four million Soviet lives.

Take a moment to think about what the Western powers were at that moment: the same colonial predators they always were. And once the German army started to beat a retreat on the Eastern Front, the Allies embarked on a policy of mass murder in the heart of Europe and the Far East at levels unequaled either in World War I or during their own colonial conquests.

The alliance of Atlantic states barely managed to pry the “Western” torch from the hands of Hitler, who had hoped to strike an *entente* with England and even the US, given their cultural proximity. Hitler’s weakness was to have had a beggar’s envy, which afflicted the crushed, rootless humanity that survived the aftermath of WWI and the Great Depression. the grandiose dream he harbored of incarnating the myth of “Europe” was the great tragedy of Germany, which was kept an outsider no matter how culturally important it was to the rest, or how disproportionately it contributed to intellectual and scientific endeavors. The colonial powers that saw fit to crush it a second time—the first being the financial burden imposed on it after WWI—were an England that assisted in the Palestinian genocide, and a France that attempted an Algerian genocide.

The Trump presidency is cut from the same cloth as the liberal and conservative elites that fused together inside those colonial powers, not just in Germany after World War I. All the same, the order over which he presides culminates what the Nazi clique had already refined into an art. The Nazis idealized the corporatist state, which they designed to manage various elites, the manpower working the factories and the armed thugs who kept everyone in line. They pioneered tools of statecraft that we take for granted today, including the welfare state and novel technical features of mass propaganda. Their scientists advanced the development of nuclear weaponization and rocket technology, which the US recovered for its Cold War race with two Communist superpowers. And experts still admire the

technical mastery—if not the moral content—evident in Nazi-era architectural design, cinematography, and other technological breakthroughs.

To put it mildly, Nazism designed a good portion of the future we live today. Imperial Japan also made its contributions—e.g., medical research into the cooling process of captives' bodies leading to death. After a few guilt pangs, the American government quietly took possession of the results of those experiments too for its own use.

In short, one can only gasp at what the Western powers victors of the war pilfered in ideas and technology from the losing side. It gave them a new lease on life. Germans are an inventive, industrious people. I know their language and for years have studied their philosophers. But their fate was sealed when their liberal and conservative elites, fusing together during the Weimar Republic, sold their soul to the same devil of self-worship that ruled to the west and which continues today in the name of exceptionalism.

The reason for my comparison of alternative possibilities during WWII is to underline a lingering question on my mind: Has the Allied victory really altered the course of history? Or, is the rise of the Trump and the extreme right in the West a resumption of what Hitler began? Perhaps we still have time to decide.

### The Roots of Western Exceptionalism

The Western powers are once again howling about foreign “enemies,” whom they vilify and sanction because they stand in their way. Their elites continue to frame their “right” to dominate the world in a secular, “universalist” language of freedom and the rule of law that has served to hide the root of their failure: the same exclusivist tribalism that has given us the English delusion of divine destiny, the Puritan self-image of Chosen People, American Manifest Destiny, Afrikaaner supremacism, Zionism, Wahhabism and other modern aberrations.

Without exception, these ideologies originate at time of history when the Old Testament was being interpreted in peculiar ways. The vast majority of the Old Testament lacks modicum support from archaeological and historical evidence. Yet, as historians tell us, the Bible began to be paraded for the first time as actual history in the 18th century. Something similar happened in the Islamic world when Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, an ignorant wanderer preaching in the wild Najd desert of the Arabian Peninsula in the late 18th century, gave the Saudi clan its signature ideology. But his heretical doctrine, amounting to a new religion, influenced many educated people, most notably Muhammad ‘Abdu and the strange crop of “reformist” Islamists and nationalists he inspired. They suddenly claimed to be “Arab,” even if the word “Arab” meant little more than “uncouth” and “desert-dweller” in Arabic. Touched by the same pervasive envy as their counterparts in western Europe, they looked to the “superior” French and English occupiers of their lands for inspiration in matters of social and theological interest, including Social Darwinists like Herbert Spencer.

More importantly, they also set out to redesign Islam in the image of *Western* Christianity to make it more modern, little realizing that uprooting their millennial tradition with such violence opened the door to the mass murderers of the Nusra Front and Daesh. That was about the time, too, when elements in the English government began toying with the idea of creating a Vatican-like entity on the Arabian Peninsula to wrest authority over the holy sites from the Ottomans, and from there to control the rest of the Islamic world. It was an ignorant and dumb idea, but Trump has revived it by calling Saudi Arabia the leader of the

“Arab” world and of Islam.

Lest we forget, the damage of “Christian” Zionism—the original template—manifested itself also in the form of “Jewish” Zionism which, in turn, led Hitler to declare in *Mein Kampf* his utter admiration for the “indomitable race consciousness” he imagined sharing with the Jews. A bigger tribute to the procreative power of the parent ideal of Zionism is hard to imagine. Hitler cared for neither the living Jews nor the Old Testament Jews invented by the Christian historians and exegetes of the Bible. He was articulating the tribal essence of the “Western” myth, nothing more. Everyone, it seems, has dreamed up a divine destiny of his own fit for a chosen race.

#### Exceptionalism – That Other Gift from the Recent Past

One would think that exceptionalism was something the Nazis might have concocted to justify their draconian laws. While contentious as a legal concept, however, its role has expanded in the Western world, especially America’s judicial system and foreign policy. Interestingly, the person who bequeathed the legal reasoning behind it to the West, alongside the other things we inherited from that era, was Carl Schmitt. He was the foremost legal, constitutional and political theorist in prewar and wartime Germany, and certainly not a minor thinker in international law. Rather than a convinced Nazi, however, he was an opportunist, as legal historians generally believe and his own Nazi colleagues realized to their chagrin. Nevertheless, he was part of the political and intellectual edifice built by the Nazi clique. What may be unfamiliar to many readers is that his reputation as the most effective debunker of liberalism is fully acclaimed *in the postwar Western world*, outside Germany.

I had completely forgotten about him before Alastair Crooke brought him up in a published piece in *Consortium*. Crooke contrasted his ideas with a much older conservative thinker, Edmund Burke, as a way to divide American foreign policy not into liberal and conservative camps, but more accurately into two strands of conservatism. Obama thus represents the soft-spoken, pragmatic Burkean approach to politics, while Trump and the Necons echo Schmitt’s more decisive but intrusive approach.

Unfortunately, Schmitt cannot be so lightly dismissed. He correctly identified a fundamental failing of liberalism: its recurrent paralysis in the face of exceptional circumstances. The butt of his criticism was British-style parliamentarism as it existed in Weimar Germany. He argued that legal norms, which depended on a “homogeneous medium,” were useless in a chaos. On the other hand, when the spirit of exceptionalism is enshrined in law to deal with concrete circumstances, it renders the authority it recognizes as the executing authority equally exceptional and permanent, with the risk of turning this authority into an arbitrary instrument of the law.

The fact that the liberal constitutions of modern states do not traditionally recognize a bearer of sovereign authority has provoked long debate about the need for a sovereign authority in the application of the law. Therefore, liberal constitutionalists insisted that particular acts of state had simply to apply the general norms of the law to maintain the predictability of the law and diminish the arbitrary authority of persons. Schmitt contended, on the other hand, that legal norms could not govern a state of *exception* or an extreme emergency. Applying the law normally under totally abnormal circumstances led to unpredictable results and undermined any action to end the emergency. Because who interprets and applies cannot be determined by the material content of the law, an authority

was needed to apply general legal rules to concrete cases. General legal norms alone cannot automatically give determinate guidance without over-interpretation and interstitial legislation. Only sovereign authority ensured the continuity of legal order.

What is certain from the arguments he presented to that effect is his limpid understanding of his time. Basically, embracing the permanence of the crisis of capitalism became central to him as a condition for the application of law. He stood for a conservatism adapted to the revolutionary upheavals of the epoch, rather than beholden to the fiction of a status quo.

It worked disastrously then, and the fundamental flaws of liberalism have yet to be rectified. Crooke's historical association of this major current of legal thinking with Trump's political function is interesting, but from a different angle. Trump relishes his own unpredictability as a tactic, actively seeking through impetuosity to create his own conditions. I doubt if he or the Neocons fully realize what legal consequences flow from the new normal they insist on *creating* with their idea of "creative chaos." They are not adapting to anything, but need constantly to overthrow. The Neocons under the Bush administration flirted with exceptionalist legal arguments justifying the official use of torture. Court rulings are being handed down ordering the seizure of other states' properties. Under Trump, Congress—the legislative branch—is fast-tracking the enactment of laws that freeze the assets of any foreign person or entity violating sanctions it decrees on its own territory. Meanwhile, the President himself is issuing one special executive order after another on immigration and other areas, as far as executive prerogative will take him, until he gets his way. Elsewhere, he has taken to the habit of threatening Beijing one day then calling on it to help "me out" with North Korea.

All this smells like the offspring of the old marriage of liberalism and conservatism. Their distinction now seems academic. A society of the rootless, without the continuity of tradition, community, religious practice, has still to steer itself with every new situation deemed exceptional. When this state of affairs persists, exceptionalism becomes the law, the authority and the guide. There is no other country where this is clearer than the United States.

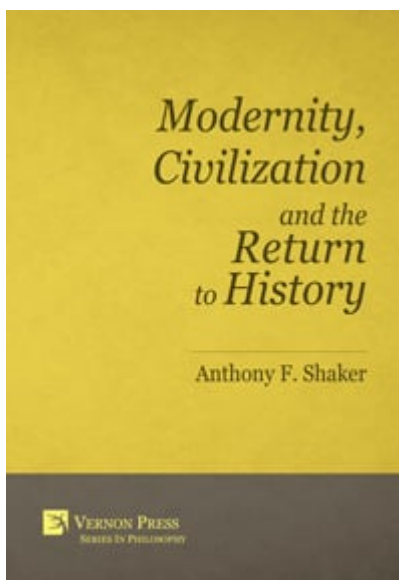
Although a conservative thinker, Schmitt is sometimes described as a defender, not just a critic, of the Weimar "liberal order." But liberal order, then as now, has always rested on a collection of elite interests, regardless of their political or moral affiliations. His writings during the Weimar period are said to highlight, in particular, the compatibility between economic liberalism and political authoritarianism. However, this compatibility has been a historical reality in the latter part of the twentieth century, as well, most starkly in post-Allende Chile and the series of bloody dictatorships installed in Argentina, Brazil, Egypt and elsewhere, though with different emphases on how various interests are managed.



There is no question that Trump's meteoric rise has helped unleash venomous, retrograde forces around the world harking back to the worst segments of the last century. The acid effect of his discourse has emboldened everyone from France's anti-immigrant Front National to Zionist outfits in the US specialized in the pilfering of Iranian money through lawsuits over 9-11, of all things, and to the Saudi would-be king, Prince Muhammad Ibn Salman in his vicious rampage in the region.

But it would be far too easy to heap the blame on trash-talk alone. These forces have existed for quite some time. On the European subcontinent, they've been around especially since the 1920s and have made a strong comeback since the Thatcherism of the 1970s. We just haven't been attentive enough to the dangers they pose to our future or how they are driven by elite interests.

Nevertheless, the populist airs that Trump gives himself have done what I thought in my youth would take decades to complete. The man has ironically shattered the Western and, in particular, the American claim to exceptionalism. The elite interests he defends have hit a wall before his rise. and beyond this wall lies the abyss of world conflagration. The more Western governments push, the more violent everything will turn. The new reality is that they can no longer have their way without consequences.



The severity of this unprecedented limitation confirms that Western exceptionalism has all along been an interlude, not to say a bare-faced myth. Since the Second World War, this myth has been nourished by the historically untenable claim that something called the West (America, England and France) somehow began in ancient Greece and has brought enlightenment to the world: modern technology, science, civil liberties and the rule of law. Such narcissism is on full display in documentaries and books. We are inculcated in it starting in elementary school. Never mind that the former Roman provinces in western Europe lived their entire history in darkness and barbarism until only very recently. Western Europe was one of the last places on earth to have stumbled upon humanity's long tradition of science, philosophy and human rights, thanks to the ambient Islamic civilization.

Nearly 100 million deaths in two world wars, and the endless other minor wars that have swallowed up at least another 55 million lives—we're supposed to forget all that. Maybe the chickens are finally coming to roost, as Malcolm X once said.

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