

# Learning Little from World War I

Looking back on the century of war and slaughter that has followed the start of World War I, one is reminded of Pete Seeger's classic lyrics: "When will they ever learn?" Today, major world leaders behave with much the same thoughtless hubris as their forebears in 1914, as Gary G. Kohls recalls.

By Gary G. Kohls

One hundred years ago, on June 28, 1914, the heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, one of the wealthiest men in Austria, was murdered in Sarajevo, Serbia. The shooting became the spark that started World War I, the war that was widely called "the war to end all wars" because of the unendurable mutual mass slaughter of an entire generation of young European men (on all sides of the war).

But who was the Archduke, the victim of the momentous assassination? Besides his excess wealth and his over-privileged position in life, there were lots of traits to despise about Franz Ferdinand. As a member of the Hapsburg dynasty, he joined the military as a child and, given his elevated status in life, he was frequently and rapidly promoted in rank. He received the rank of lieutenant at age 14, captain at 22, colonel at 27 and major general at 31.

But the Archduke had no significant experience as a commanding officer in wartime. Europe had been in a prosperous peacetime economy for generations. A year before his assassination, Franz Ferdinand had been appointed Inspector General of the empire's armed forces, and he was in Sarajevo discharging his duties while the empire's occupying army was on maneuvers.

The Archduke was also a compulsive trophy hunter. Today many would call him a "slob" hunter. In his own diaries, he documented over 300,000 game kills over his lifetime, 5,000 of which were deer (100,000 of his hunting trophies were on exhibit at one of his castles).

For every oppressed Serb, the autocratic Archduke and his empire were just the latest cruel colonial powers that were occupying Serbia, oppressing and taxing the Slavic people and denying freedom for those unfortunate indigenous folks who had been living, toiling and suffering there for centuries.

## **The Assassin**

Gavrilo Princip was the young Serbian who pulled the trigger on the Archduke and his wife Sophie, killing them both with one shot each from his 9 mm pistol. The assassin was an impoverished, unemployed, tuberculosis-infected 19-year-old

Serbian who grew up on a tiny farm in a rural part of the Balkan Peninsula that had been colonized and oppressed for centuries by the Turkish Ottoman Empire. Many of the Slavic people converted to Islam from their traditional Orthodox Christianity under the Ottomans, but the Principis had remained Christian.

Six of Princip's siblings had died in infancy or early childhood, which certainly negatively impacted the family psychologically and very likely angered the young boy, who never had an opportunity to attend school until he was 13 years old. His father needed him to help work the tiny 4-acre subsistence farm.

Early in his teen years, Princip moved away from his family to better himself by enrolling in a school in Sarajevo – his first formal educational experience. He proved to be an apt student and, in his studies, learned about Serbia's brutal history under the Ottomans and then under the jackboot of the Austria-Hungarian empire. Likely angered by what he learned about the unjust suffering of his people, he joined a secret pan-Slavic liberation movement (the Black Hand) that led him to that fateful day, June 28, 1914.

Interestingly, before Princip was born (in 1894), his impoverished, downtrodden and exploited father had once been a member of a militia group that tried to overthrow the Ottomans, whose overlords routinely took the first fruits of every farmer's harvest thus ensuring the relative starvation, continued poverty and ill health of his family.

By the time 1914 rolled around, the Ottoman Empire had been supplanted by the Austro-Hungarian Empire that was ruled by a dual monarchy dominated by the elderly Austrian Emperor Franz Josef, who had designated his nephew Franz Ferdinand to succeed him.

So now there was a new and deeply hated colonizing oppressor-overlord that was also an enemy of ethnic Slavs and Serbians. Seeing no willingness on the part of the oppressors to grant their freedom through negotiations, Princip joined up with the Serbian nationalist movement that had been demanding liberation and self-rule.

And, as usual, when ruling-class oppressors keep denying the legitimate international human rights to achieve liberty, equality and brotherhood the slogan of the French Revolution they often are forced to increase the decibel level.

## **Root Causes of World War I**

Figuring out the roots of the "Great War" is an enormously complex issue. Hundreds of books and thousands of scholarly papers have been written on the subject. Some of them have been written by militarists to obscure the issues,

but one of the usual conclusions that all authors draw is the fact that many of the European Great Powers at the time had, over the decades, made alliances between one another that pledged that one would come to the defense of the other if either one was attacked.

So Russia had pledged to militarily defend Serbia if Serbia was attacked. Likewise Germany would come to the aid of Austria if Austria was attacked. Both France and England had promised to come to the aid of Russia and Belgium if either nation was attacked. And so it went, in domino fashion

And so when a Serbian group assassinated the heir to the throne, Austria, to not appear to its critics to be "soft on crime" and to "save face," felt that it had to do something to punish Serbia even if the nation had nothing to do with the assassination.

After an investigation into the details of the assassination did not prove Serbian national guilt, Austria still decided to issue a 48-hour ultimatum (to be enforced by invasion if not accepted), that was actually designed to be rejected. Serbia actually accepted all of the terms of the ultimatum (save for one clause) and Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. And the dominoes fell. And the rest is history.

There is, of course, a lot of research that has documented the blunders, the laziness, the outright idiocy and the hubris of the ruling-class aristocrats, captains of industry, kings, diplomats, generals and the ever-present uber-patriotic newspapers in every city looking to sell papers.

Each of them had a role to play in the continued butchery that gutted an entire generation of young men, tens of millions of whom died on the battlefields or returned home crazy, haunted and demented as well as mentally, spiritually and/or physically disabled because of the miscalculations of each nation's incompetent and misguided leaders who couldn't get themselves to use the words "retreat" or "we were wrong" or "mea culpa" or "please forgive me".

Of course, the lessons from each and every international or civil war has been consistently unheeded by subsequent generations of so-called national leaders in the military, industry or politics. They consistently ignore the will of the people who are the ones who have to sacrifice their young to the vicious Gods of War and Mammon.

This 2014 centennial year of the beginning of the "War to End All Wars" will offer many opportunities to explore the blunders of the national leaders that allowed the mutual slaughter to continue, including the generals who suppressed the Christmas Truce of 1914 when disillusioned soldiers on all sides met in No-

Man's Land to celebrate a holiday dedicated to peace on earth. Heeding the wisdom of the millions of soldiers in the trenches would have saved the bodies, minds and souls of tens of millions of combatants.

By prolonging the war beyond Christmas 1914, the generals on all sides of World War I continued to blunder badly, thinking – from the safety of their bunkers that were well out of reach of the enemy's artillery shells – that they could still single-handedly and gloriously win the stalemated and unendurable (at least for the front-line soldiers) trench war, perhaps dreaming about writing their memoirs after "victory" was achieved; saving face through self-deception, thus avoiding the cognitive dissonance they would otherwise have experienced; advancing in rank (and pay grade); and being awarded more of the cheap trinkets and ribbons that would be pinned on the breasts of their nicely laundered and perfectly pressed officer uniforms.

No unforgettable stench of death came close to their nostrils. And the military commanders' illusions were reinforced by the co-opted war correspondents, most of whom weren't actually seeing or smelling the carnage at the front. Most approved journalists dutifully covered up the blunders and the carnage.

Today, many American TV networks just skip these middlemen and hire retired generals to do the bidding of the Pentagon and recite the U.S. government's talking points, all the while overlooking, covering up or lying about the unwelcome real truths of war.

**Dr Kohls is a retired physician who witnessed in his practice the soul- and psychic-devastation of war, domestic violence, punitive parenting, malnutrition, homelessness, poverty and the serious dangers of the chronic use of psychotropic drugs. He has tried to warn against the physical, neurological, psychological and spiritual consequences of all forms of violence.**

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## The Wisdom of Lawrence of Arabia

A century ago, during World War I, a British intelligence officer known as "Lawrence of Arabia" deeply understood the Mideast and saw hope for rational politics, but Western imperial ambitions intervened to ensure regional instability, as Bill Moyers and Michael Winship recall.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

As fears grow of a widening war across the Middle East, fed by reports that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) envisions a region-wide, all-controlling

theocracy, we found ourselves talking about another war.

The Great War or World War I, as it would come to be called – was triggered 100 years ago this month when an assassin shot and killed Austria's Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo. Through a series of tangled alliances and a cascade of misunderstandings and blunders, that single act of violence brought on a bloody catastrophe. More than 37 million people were killed or wounded.

In America, if we reflect on the First World War at all, we think mostly about the battlefields and trenches of Europe and tend to forget another front in that war – against the Ottoman Empire of the Turks that dominated the Middle East. A British Army officer named T.E. Lawrence became a hero in the Arab world when he led nomadic Bedouin tribes in battle against Turkish rule. Peter O'Toole immortalized him in the epic movie, "Lawrence of Arabia."

You may remember the scene when, after dynamiting the Hijaz railway and looting a Turkish supply train, Lawrence is asked by an American reporter, "What, in your opinion, do these people hope to gain from this war?"

"They hope to gain their freedom," Lawrence replies, and when the journalist scoffs, insists, "They're going to get it. I'm going to give it to them."

At war's end, Lawrence's vision of Arab independence was shattered when the Versailles peace conference confirmed the carving of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine into British and French spheres of influence; arbitrary boundaries drawn in the sand to satisfy the appetites of empire Britain's Foreign Office even called the former Ottoman lands "The Great Loot."

The hopeful Lawrence drew his own "peace map" of the region, one that paid closer heed to tribal allegiances and rivalries. The map could have saved the world a lot of time, trouble and treasure, one historian said, providing the region "with a far better starting point than the crude imperial carve up."

Lawrence wrote to a British major in Cairo: "I'm afraid you will be delayed a long time, cleaning up all the messes and oddments we have left behind us."

Since 2003, as the reckless invasion of Iraq unfolded, demand for Lawrence's book, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* increased eightfold. It was taught at the Pentagon and Sandhurst – Britain's West Point – for its insights into fighting war in the Middle East.

In 2010, Major Niel Smith, who had served as operations officer for the US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Center, told *The Christian Science Monitor*, "T.E. Lawrence has in some ways become the patron saint of the US Army advisory effort in Afghanistan and Iraq."

But then and now, Lawrence's understanding of the ancient and potent jealousies of the people among whom he had lived and fought generally was ignored. In 1920, he wrote for the *Times of London* an unsettling and prophetic article about Iraq then under the thumb of the British.

He decried the money spent, the number of troops and loss of life, and warned that his countrymen had been led "into a trap from which it will be hard to escape with dignity and honor. They have been tricked into it by a steady withholding of information. Things have been far worse than we have been told, our administration more bloody and inefficient than the public knows. It may soon be too inflamed for any ordinary cure. We are today not far from a disaster."

Not for the last time in the Middle East would disaster come from the blundering ignorance and blinding arrogance of foreign intruders convinced by magical thinking of their own omnipotence and righteousness. How soon we forget. How often we repeat.

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## Europe's Generational Change

**Exclusive:** The persistent European recession has undermined public support for the pillars of the establishment and opened a pathway for a generational change that could reshape the face of the Continent, writes Andrés Cala.

By Andrés Cala

Europe is heading into a generational transition, as younger leaders replace the old guard that has failed to restore the Continent's economic vitality and as new political approaches are tested to supplant the traditional policies that have so disappointed the people.

Disenchanted citizens across Europe are demanding drastic and sometimes contradictory corrections to the governing failures that are blamed for the high unemployment and the social unrest that have beset large swaths of Europe, particularly across the south. The ongoing political transformation, challenging the centrist status quo sometimes from the right and sometimes from the left,

varies from country to country but will determine Europe's future.

The conflicting choices include whether to seek more integration of the 28-nation European Union or more autonomy for the individual states? Should the 18 countries that use the euro more fully coordinate their budgetary policies while non-euro-zone states have more independence? Should Europe recommit to its liberal welfare system or move to laissez-faire economics? Should the continent become more or less green?

Despite the sometimes sharp contrasts in these choices, this evolution is occurring within the European style, meaning that the public eschews violent revolutions and armed struggles. There may be much noise and discontent, but there is little chance of an EU disintegration or the rebirth of Nazism or other extremist philosophies, at least nothing that could gain a significant hold on the population.

There is also no ringleader of this movement for change. The process appears chaotic, even lacking any significant regional coordination. One nation's electorate veers to the extreme right; another to the extreme left; yet another toward some oddball anti-establishment party. The only overriding consistency appears to be the alienation felt by the long-term unemployed and the youth, all looking for a way out of the current mess.

Beyond the discontented citizenry, the transition has begun to manifest itself among some in Europe's hierarchy, with the new king of Spain chastising the parliament for its failure to meet the people's needs and Pope Francis's breaking with the Vatican's extravagant ways.

### **Crisis Catalyst**

The chief catalyst for this political upheaval has been the economic crisis, dating back to the Wall Street crash of 2008. The grinding recession has steadily eroded the public faith in governing institutions. But Europe's embattled establishment is showing no sign of simply giving up.

In recent EU parliamentary elections, traditional parties in most countries won though their margins shrunk considerably and in the case of France and the United Kingdom they suffered embarrassing defeats. The establishment's fear is that these trends could extend into the more meaningful national elections over the next few years.

European leaders are alarmed that many citizens have come to so fundamentally mistrust institutions, both national and supranational, because of the failure to alleviate the jobless crisis. The European establishment's reliance on austerity as the prescription to cure the economic ills has stirred populist and

nationalist sentiments and heightened euro-skepticism from the left and right.

The most common demands from the political insurgents are for job creation, rebuilding the welfare state, rooting out corruption, replacing austerity with stimulus, and making policy-making more transparent. Some on the Right have also complained about low-wage immigrants from poorer parts of Europe taking jobs from citizens of better-off states.

Yet, traditional parties aren't offering much beyond pleas for more patience and warnings about dangerous alternatives. But patience is running out and the "dangerous" options are becoming more appealing to Europeans sick and tired of demands from the elites for more belt-tightening among the middle- and working-classes.

Beyond people motivated by the economic malaise, democracy movements are clamoring for a cleansing of the political system that has been stained by complaints about corruption and lack of transparency. Here's how the major European countries are coping with the crisis:

## **Spain**

Of the big countries, Spain has been the hardest hit by the recession, and the transformation there has been profound but not chaotic. The Occupy Movement was born here with protesters camping out in public squares in protest of the financial abuses that created the crisis. Traditional parties are bleeding support from the right and left. Calls for change are almost unanimous.

On June 19, King Felipe VI, who is 46, replaced his father King Juan Carlos, who abdicated to let a new generation take over. "A renewed monarchy for a new era," King Felipe VI announced in his proclamation speech to parliament.

The ceremony was symbolically austere and the king chastised lawmakers for their failure to fix the country. The crisis "has injured even the dignity of Spaniards," he said, exhorting legislators to make job creation a priority and to "revitalize institutions."

The king's words carry mostly symbolic weight since he has no executive authority, but his comments echo the society's sentiments. Spain's ruling elite got another jolt from the results of the EU's parliamentary elections as Spaniards turned increasingly to alternative parties.

Although the two biggest parties won, each shed at least half of their votes to smaller parties, which together captured 44 percent of the seats, compared to 13 percent in the 2009 election. The biggest gains went to parties against austerity. One of them, Podemos, was only created a month before elections. But



the real test will come in the general elections in 2015.

## **France**

The French also expressed disappointment in the EU. In the EU parliamentary elections, the four biggest parties received only 62 percent of the votes, compared to 88 percent the last time. And practically all those votes went to the National Front, the extreme right, ultranationalist, anti-immigrant, anti-EU party which won more votes than any other party, giving it 23 seats, compared to three in 2009.

Time, however, plays to the French government's advantage since national elections are not until 2017 when it's hoped that the economic circumstances in Europe's second-biggest country will have improved. Still, the FN has been gaining ground consistently over the years and could make further inroads into France's political structure.

## **Great Britain**

In the EU parliamentary elections, the UK's Independence Party won, defeating Labour and the Conservatives, the first time in over a century that the two top parties failed to come out on top. The Liberals, who govern in a coalition with the Conservatives, were annihilated.

General elections are in 2015, and polls show a consistent drain of votes from the three top parties, while the rightist Independence Party continues to advance with a euro-skeptic platform similar to that of the National Front in France.

## **Italy**

In Italy, the Left surged in the EU elections, while the right-wing populist movement of disgraced former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi tumbled along with liberals. The extreme right also lost almost half of its support from the last election. Major gains were made by the Five Star Movement of Pepe Grillo, the anti-establishment politician who is anti-austerity and a euro-skeptic at the same time.

Italy's renewal movement also has a moral component in reaction to the sex scandals swirling around Berlusconi and the appeals for social justice from Pope Francis. It will be years, if ever, before the Vatican remakes itself with the humility and transparency that Pope Francis seeks, but Europe's Catholic constituency is getting the Pope's message: less extravagance for elite institutions and more economic stimulus for EU citizens, especially in Southern Europe.

## Germany

As the economic motor and the undisputed leader of Europe, Germany drove the austerity agenda as many Germans resented having to pick up much of the tab for bailing out the weaker economies of Southern Europe.

The recession in Germany also was not nearly as severe as it was elsewhere on the Continent. Unemployment remained relatively low and spending cuts were far less painful. The most controversial part of the crisis was in rescuing the rest of Europe.

It's no wonder then that Germany's electoral map has not changed as much. The traditional parties overall did not lose much support although there was a modest shift to the left with Social Democrats making gains at the expense of liberals. But some voters did veer to extremes. A neo-Nazi party won representation as did a party that supports online piracy. A satirical party with silly proposals meant to discredit the system nearly won a seat.

## Where This Goes

It's impossible to calculate how Europe's economic recovery will unfold and how quickly it will trickle down to the suffering middle- and working-classes. Thus, it's unclear if the traditional parties will continue to shrink or will stabilize their positions.

The traditional parties look strong enough to retain power for now, but alternative parties on the Left and the Right, including extreme ones, could continue growing if the establishment can't develop solutions to the Continent's economic problems. Anti-establishment parties like Podemos in Spain and Five Star in Italy could exploit the growing alienation between the elites and the people.

At this point, the conservative euro-skeptics appear best positioned to capitalize on the public discontent, but they have little cohesion. It could be that a two-speed Europe emerges, one with minimal ties to Brussels and one with increased integration around the euro currency.

Whatever the case, when it all settles down, Europe will be in the hands of a new generation.

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# Obama's New 'Bias for Action'

President Obama seems so shell-shocked from all the political and media criticism about his "weakness" that he is "doing something" by intervening in both the Syrian and Iraqi civil conflicts, a risky "bias for action" that can do more harm than good, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

A "bias for action" has long been a buzz phrase in the business world. Tom Peters and Robert Waterman in their best-selling book *In Search of Excellence* put the phrase at the top of their list of attributes of what they considered to be outstanding firms.

For an individual hoping to make it big in business, it's not a bad phrase to keep in mind. Ambitious executives do not make names for themselves by saying they will take whatever organization they are responsible for and try not to screw it up. They make names by shaking things up. Moreover, the businesses with the most dramatic and admired garage-startup-to-behemoth histories necessarily had a bias for action.

Even in business, however, the behavior implied by the phrase has limitations. What is good for the rising career of an individual executive is not necessarily good for the firm. And for every Apple or Amazon we have heard about, there are many more companies we have not heard about in which the leader's bias for action led to unprofitable business lines, financial overextension, or other failures that caused the firm to crash and burn.

Applied to foreign policy, the soundness of behavior implied by a bias for action is even more questionable. Perhaps it is most valid when trying to build an empire. Otto von Bismarck, for example, had a bias for action when using wars against other European states as a means for putting together the German Empire.

But for most states at most times, that is not the case. It is not the case for the United States today. The United States has a responsibility, to itself as well as to world order, less to build a bigger empire than to avoid screwing things up. And when the United States screws up, things can get very bad, not only because as the world's only superpower it is more powerful than anyone else but also because with global involvement it has a lot of vulnerabilities that other states do not have. Crashing and burning is not an option.

Even without the influence of business gurus such as Peters and Waterman, a bias for action is nonetheless at least as apparent in U.S. foreign policy as in

commerce. One reason is the political pressure on leaders to be seen to be “doing something” about overseas problems. The partisan incentive to criticize opponents for doing nothing intensifies this pressure. In the United States the tendency is further exacerbated by a broader inclination to believe the United States ought to be able to solve any problem overseas.

We need to remember that a bias for action is exactly that: a *bias*. That means it is antithetical to an objective, unbiased assessment of what would be best for the United States to do or not to do. And that is not good. A bias for action has some of the qualities of the “ready, fire, aim” method of approaching a problem.

We can see some of these tendencies in the development of recent policy toward the turmoil in Iraq. The Obama administration’s dispatch of a few hundred U.S. military personnel, although they will be serving legitimate purposes, is probably best understood as a response to the pressure to do something. It probably was the minimum military measure the administration could get away with without incurring intense accusations of doing nothing.

I was asked the other day to define U.S. objectives regarding the situation in Iraq. There are two ways to answer a question like that. One is the conventional way, which is the way any president or senior official would be expected to answer it. That way would mention things such as seeking regional stability and quashing terrorist threats against Americans.

The other way is to ask ourselves what are the most significant respects in which U.S. interests have been affected, for better or for worse, by developments in the Middle East over the past decade or so. Then our objective should be to repeat or build on what has affected our interests for the better, and to avoid repetition of the sorts of things that have affected them for the worse.

By far the most consequential development for U.S. interests in the region was the Iraq War, and its effects on U.S. interests were overwhelmingly negative, with the thousands of Americans killed, the tens of thousands injured, the trillions of dollars in economic costs, and the stimulation of sectarian warfare and terrorism that we face today. The number one objective for dealing with a situation like the one in Iraq is to avoid doing anything that could lead to a mistake similar to launching the Iraq War.

No president, of course, could get away with defining U.S. objectives that way. It would sound too passive, and it would not embody a bias for action. It would not pass muster with Peters and Waterman, and it certainly would not pass muster with political critics.

That's too bad, because it is a very legitimate way to define a prime objective. It takes account of the most important ways in which U.S. interests have been affected, and it takes account of how in any unbiased analysis of how to pursue and protect those interests there is no reason either action or inaction should be favored.

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