

Was Hitler Only an Irredentist?

Why Pat Buchanan's Revisionist Analysis of World War II Is Wrong

By Eric V. Snow

Did Hitler really want to conquer the world? Or would he have been content just taking over areas for Germany that were already populated by Germans (a foreign policy of irredentism)? Let's analyze Pat Buchanan's view of the Munich agreement in 1938, especially in light of the facts he leaves out that contradict his historical analysis. (For his full development of this thesis, see his book "Churchill, Hitler, and "The Unnecessary War": How Britain Lost Its Empire and the West Lost the World.") Even someone having little more than the facts and primary sources in William L. Shirer's "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich" and some detailed knowledge of WWI, can find all sorts of problems with Buchanan's revisionist history. Because his arguments resemble some of what the British historian AJP Taylor argued years ago (in 1961's "The Origins of World War II") and other revisionist historians, Buchanan's thesis isn't novel when it says that America and Britain should have just stood aside and let Nazi Germany go after Soviet Russia and let the totalitarian dictatorships mutually exhaust one another. Based on often secret documents written and statements made before World War II began, this essay will argue that Hitler's foreign policy aimed to conquer large areas without Germans already living there.

First of all, the reason why the Allies at Versailles didn't follow the principle of self-determination about Czechoslovakia's borders was a result of another concern: Suppose the Germans went on the march again, and sought revenge for their defeat in WWI. After all, after their similar humiliation in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, the French had wanted revenge after they lost the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany. So the Allies prudently decided that Czechoslovakia should be given a defensible border, which was the pre-1914 border between Germany and Austria-Hungary. To cede all the mountainous border areas with Germans to Germany would have made Czechoslovakia nearly as vulnerable as Poland later was to the German Wehrmacht (army). The Allies' diplomats had to choose among conflicting goals, and when political goals conflict, sometimes it's best on a practical basis to follow one principle rather than another. In this case, making it possible for Czechoslovakia to defend itself against renewed German aggression was more important than the principle of ethnic self-determination for every ethnic group within its borders. As the history of 1938 and the crisis preceding the Munich agreement showed, their concern was well founded!

Should Self-Determination Always Be the Ultimate Political Value?

After all, self-determination shouldn't always be the ultimate political value from a philosophical viewpoint: Anyone who thinks the Ottoman and/or Austrian-Hungarian Empires should have been preserved has to reject Buchanan's complaint about the 1919 Treaty of Versailles turning Czechoslovakia into a multiethnic country. Self-determination isn't always a benefit to the ruled: Where would average Chinese have preferred to live in 1972? Colonial British Hong Kong? Or Mao's Red China during the Cultural Revolution? The Chinese refugees who fled Chairman Mao's totalitarian state in order to live under British colonialist rule answer that question by the way they voted with their feet. Since Communism was normally worse than colonialism for average people, self-determination doesn't necessarily promote "the greatest good for the greatest number" when an independent state crushes more economic, religious, and political freedoms than a non-independent one does.

Germany Would Have Been Much Easier to Defeat in 1938 than in 1939

Buchanan claims that the Allies would have had a harder time of beating Hitler in 1938 in Czechoslovakia than they did in 1939 in Poland, but this is utterly false. The one-year delay in going to war hurt the (future) Allies far more than the Axis powers. First of all, although Britain could have only have landed 2 divisions on the Continent then (Buchanan isn't quite right to say none), Czechoslovakia had 35 well armed, well trained divisions that would have been well ensconced in their mountain fortresses. Furthermore, France could have mobilized 100 divisions against the weak available western German forces of 5 fighting divisions and 7 reserve divisions in a line of fortifications that was still under construction. On top of this, Czechoslovakia had a secondary guarantee of protection from the Soviet Union. Had France and Czechoslovakia had gone to war with Germany, the USSR may well have joined them in order to have it out with their fascist/Nazi ideological arch foes as well.

After World War II, during the Nuremberg war crime trials, top German generals were put on the witness stand and they explained their view of the would-be 1938 military order of battle. General Keitel, chief of the OKW (German High Command of the Army), then commented: "We were extraordinarily happy that it had not come to a military operation because . . . we had always been of the opinion that our means of attack against the frontier fortifications of Czechoslovakia were insufficient. From a purely military point of view we lacked the means for an attack which involved the piercing of the frontier fortifications." (Shirer, p. 423). We now know, much unlike the case for Poland a year later, the German army would have had a much harder time of conquering Czechoslovakia. Field Marshal von Manstein, one of the most brilliant German generals during WWII, commented: "If a war had broken out, neither our western border nor our Polish frontier could really have been effectively defended by us, and there is no doubt whatsoever that had Czechoslovakia defended herself, we would have been held up by her fortifications, for we did not have the means to

break through." Jodl, the "brains" of the OKW, testified about the imbalance in forces noted already above, that about 100 French divisions would have been thrown up against 12 German without the protection from completed fortifications. (In 1940, the French actually had more tanks than the Germans. A French attack against Germany's 1938 border wouldn't have failed like it did in 1914). Later on, Hitler himself toured the Czech fortress line, and candidly told Dr. Carl Burckhardt, the League of Nations High Commissioner for Danzig, "When after Munich we were in a position to examine Czechoslovak military strength from within, what we saw of it greatly disturbed us; we had run a serious danger. The plan prepared by the Czech generals was formidable. I now understand why my generals urged restraint." (Shirer, p. 424).

Furthermore, we now know how weak the Luftwaffe's (German air force's) strength was: It was in absolutely no position to bomb effectively London or Paris (as was feared then), since it would have been bogged down while performing tactical support for the Wehrmacht on the frontiers. As Shirer (p. 425) comments: "The German Air Force, like the Army, was concentrated against Czechoslovakia and therefore, like the Army, was incapable of serious action in the West. Even if a few German bombers could have been spared to attack London and Paris it is highly doubt that they would have reached their targets. Weak as the British and French fighter defenses were, the Germans could not have given their bombers fighter protection, if they had had the plans. Their fighter bases were too far away."

Therefore, Britain didn't need a lot of Spitfires when all these other military factors would have been far more in the (would be) Allies favor than they were a year later when Poland's turn came. Germany herself was still rearming, which is why the French and Czechs alone (without the Soviets), would have outnumbered the Germans more than two to one in 1938. Hitler could have been stopped with far, far fewer people killed had the inevitable war come in 1938 over Czechoslovakia than as it did over Poland in 1939. That's why Chamberlain's diplomatic calculations were so tragically foolish when seen in retrospect. Buchanan is totally, absolutely wrong to say the British Empire would have committed suicide by going to war in 1938 over Czechoslovakia, as the post-war testimony of German generals decisively proves. Chamberlain was totally mistaken when told the Czech President Benes via telegram that Germany would quickly overrun his country. Chamberlain also erroneously snubbed Stalin by not letting the Soviets participate in the Munich conference despite his country had a signed treaty for a defensive alliance with Czechoslovakia. That act of disrespect was one reason why Stalin made his deal with Hitler that started the war, besides the obvious weakness France and Britain had shown during the 1938 crisis, which showed they weren't reliable as allies. Furthermore, when France unilaterally abrogated its treaty with Czechoslovakia, it badly undermined its other alliances with Eastern European countries, since they saw that France's word was worth little. After Munich, France's national credibility was badly damaged. Building on the blow already inflicted on France's credibility during the

reoccupation of the Rhineland, Munich made these Eastern European nations consider what kind of deals they should make with the Fuhrer instead.

Hitler Could Have Been Disposed of in 1936 With Almost No Loss of Life

Of course, Hitler could have been much more easily disposed of with nearly no loss of life had the French resisted the military reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936, which violated the Locarno treaty. At Nuremberg, Jodl testified how easily the French Army could have won: "Considering the situation we were in, the French covering army could have blown us to pieces." Shirer then comments (p. 293): "It [the French army] could have--and had it, that almost certainly would have been the end of Hitler, after which history might have taken quite a different and brighter turn than it did, for the dictator could never have survived such a fiasco. Hitler himself admitted as much. 'A retreat on our part,' he conceded later, 'would have spelled collapse.'" Paul Schmidt, Hitler's interpreter, was told by Hitler: "The forty-eight hours after the march into the Rhineland were the most nerve-racking in my life. If the French had then marched into the Rhineland, we would have had to withdraw with our tails between our legs, for the military resources at our disposal would have been wholly inadequate for even a moderate resistance." After all, Germans had only sent across a mere 3 battalions into the Rhineland, while the French high command's decision to (casually) move 13 divisions into position nearby frightened the German High Command. So no general French mobilization would have been necessary to have disposed of Hitler at this point, unlike the case for Czechoslovakia 2 years later. Since the Treaty of Versailles had limited the Germany army to 100,000 men, the Nazis had to rebuild Germany from its relatively low level of military capability. In a giant diplomatic game of "chicken," Hitler gambled, betting that the French would back down and not intervene. Hitler had judged his opponents well: The bully won because his opponents were too afraid to take him on despite they had superior armed forces at their command. Because of France's national credibility was severely weakened by not responding to Hitler's move to remilitarize its border area with France, its foreign alliances to the east began to fray.

Should We Believe Hitler Didn't Want Additional Land outside of Poland?

Buchanan's claim that Hitler did not want war with Poland absurdly believes Hitler was telling the truth. For example, before the Rhineland reoccupation (in 1936) and the repudiation of Locarno, Hitler said in a major public speech: "We have no territorial demands to make in Europe! . . . Germany will never break the peace!" Obviously, this was false, when in a few years he made territorial demands of Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. For the meeting with Chamberlain, Hitler's translator wrote down in this notes a summary of Hitler's comments (my emphasis): "As he had already stated several times, **the Czech**

problem was the last territorial demand which he had to make in Europe."

Well, if that was true, why did he want Danzig a year later? Given this track record, are we foolish enough at this point in world history to believe Hitler wasn't lying a year later when saying the same thing about Poland? Hitler repeatedly during the 1930's gave speeches and interviews proclaiming his love of peace. Furthermore, since the Nazi archives are fully available, why should we believe such propaganda? For example, according to captured German foreign office documents (Shirer, p. 387), Hitler, in advance of taking the Sudetenland, stirred up Hungary and Poland to get in their part of Czechoslovakia, as well as encouraging unrest among the Slovaks. Buchanan writes as if the collapse and the German annexation of most of the rest of Czechoslovakia (besides the Sudetenland) would have happened without Germany's helping create this outcome in advance. Well, Hitler told the Hungarians he had no intention of letting even a rump Czechoslovakia to exist. According to a German Foreign office memorandum's summary, Hitler said: "It was Hungary's last opportunity to join in. If she did not, he would not be in a position to put in a word for Hungarian interests. In his opinion, the best thing would be to destroy Czechoslovakia." (Shirer, p. 388).

Secret Documents and Conversations Reveal Hitler's True Goals

Hitler's **real** geopolitical goals are much better revealed by secret government documents than in his major public speeches that were aimed squarely at foreign opinion. Furthermore, what did Hitler say his goals were at other places and times? Consider carefully what his political objectives were according to "Mein Kampf," much of which was written while he was in jail after his failed Beer Hall Putsch in Munich, Bavaria in 1923. In this combination autobiography and political tract, he declared his goal was to gain lebensraum ("living room") for the German people in the east, which meant they needed to occupy Russian land. Obviously, to do that, he would have to take Poland as well. After all, from his racist viewpoint, the Slavs were an inferior ethnic group, fit only for manual and/or slave labor: It was morally right to ethnically cleanse them from their land in order to make room for the racially superior Aryan Germans.

Let's consider now various secret documents and private conversations in which Hitler declared that his goals were to conquer Poland, attack France, Russia, etc. To believe Hitler's last demand for territory was going to be for a slice of Poland is simply absurd when all these records of his real goals are now available for inspection by historians and others. During the negotiations that led to the Rome-Berlin Axis alliance between Italy and Germany, Hitler told the Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano (quoting Shirer, p. 298): "Mussolini, Hitler declared, was 'the leading statesman in the world, to whom none may even remotely compare himself.' Together, Italy and Germany could conquer not only 'Bolshevism' but the West. Including England! The British, Hitler thought, might eventually seek an accommodation with a united Italy and Germany. If not, the two powers, acting together, could easily dispose of her.

'German and Italian rearmament,' Hitler reminded Ciano, 'is proceeding much more rapidly than rearmament can in England . . . In three years Germany will be ready . . .' The date is interesting. Three years hence would be the fall of 1939."

In late 1937 during a small meeting, Hitler told his geopolitical goals to the very top leaders of the German armed forces (as found in Shirer, p. 305): "He [Hitler] explained that he regarded the remarks he was about to make as of such importance that, in the event of his death, they should be regarded as his last will and testament. 'The aim of Germany policy,' he said, 'was to make secure and to preserve the racial community and to enlarge it. It was therefore a question of space [Lebensraum].' The Germans, he laid it down, had 'the right to a greater living space than other peoples . . . Germany's future was therefore wholly conditional upon solving the need for space.' Where? Not in some far-off African or Asian colonies, but in the heart of Europe 'in immediate proximity to the Reich.' The question for Germany was, Where could she achieve the greatest gain at the lowest cost? [The record of Hitler's words follow] The history of all ages--the Roman Empire and the British Empire--had proved that expansion could only be carried out by breaking down resistance and taking risks; setbacks were inevitable. There had never . . . been spaces without a master, and there were none today; the attacker always comes up against a possessor. [Back to Shirer's summary that sometimes quotes Hitler directly.] Two 'hate-inspired' countries, Hitler declared, stood in Germany's way: Britain and France. Both countries were opposed to 'any further strengthening of Germany's position.' . . . Nonetheless, Britain, France and Russia must be considered as [quoting Hitler] 'power factors in our political calculations.' Therefore: [Quoting the record of Hitler's words, my emphasis] **Germany's problem could be solved only by means of force, and this was never without attendant risk.**

Shirer then continues to quote Hitler's own words in analyzing the time and location to start the next war: "If one accepts as the basis of the following exposition the resort to force, with its attendant risks, then there remain to be answered the questions "when" and "where." There were three cases to be dealt with. Case I: Period 1943-45: After this date, only a change for the worse, from our point of view, could be expected. The equipment of the Army, Navy and Airforce was nearly completed. . . . Our relative strength would decrease in relation to the rearmament . . . by the rest of the **world** [my emphasis. If the "world" is who may resist Germany, Hitler wasn't just aiming to reacquire irredentist slices of German populated lands ruled by non-German nations!] . . . Besides, the world was expecting our attack and was increasing its countermeasures from year to year. It was while the rest of the world was increasing its defenses that we were obliged to take the offensive. . . . If the Fuehrer was still living, it was unalterable resolve to solve Germany's problem of space at the latest by 1943-45. The necessity for action before 1943-45 would arise in Cases II and III. Case II If internal strife in France should develop into such a domestic crisis as to absorb the French Army completely and render it incapable of use for war against Germany, then the time for action against the

Czechs had come. Case III If France is so embroiled by a war with another state that she cannot 'proceed' against Germany . . . [then] Our first objective . . . must be to overthrow Czechoslovakia and Austria simultaneously in order to remove the threat to our flank in any possible operation against the West . . . If the Czechs were overthrown and a common German-Hungary frontier achieved [i.e., Hitler wasn't planning to stop and be satisfied with only the areas occupied by Germans in Czechoslovakia], a neutral attitude on the part of Poland could be more certainly counted upon in the event of a Franco-German conflict.

Now then Shirer summarizes Hitler's plans again: "But what would France, Britain, Italy, and Russia do? Hitler went into the answer to that question in considerable detail. . . . Hitler then outlined some of the advantages of the 'annexation of Czechoslovakia and Austria': better strategic borders for Germany, freeing of military forces 'for other purposes,' acquisition of some twelve million 'Germans,' additional foodstuffs for five to six million Germans in the Reich, and manpower for twelve new Army divisions." Now Shirer goes back to quoting Hitler directly: "The time for our attack on the Czechs and Austria must be made dependent on the course of the [hypothetical] Anglo-French-Italian war . . . This favorable situation . . . would not occur again . . . The descent [attack] upon the Czechs would have to be carried out with 'lightning speed.'" Shirer then analyzes Hitler's secret plans to begin war in a few years: "Thus as evening darkened Berlin on that autumn day of November 5, 1937--the meeting broke up at eight-fifteen--the die was cast. Hitler had communicated his irrevocable decision to go to war. To the handful of men who would have to direct it there could no longer be any doubt. The dictator had said it all ten years before in *Mein Kampf*, had said Germany must have *Lebensraum* in the East and must be prepared to use force to obtain it" (pp. 307-308). Two of the generals present and his foreign minister questioned Hitler plans during this meeting, saying Germany wasn't yet ready for a big war and that to provoke a war now would risk disaster. They were soon sacked for their opposition. Notice, by the way, what Hitler said in "Mein Kampf" was to be put into practical action: Words have meanings, ideas have consequences, people who proclaim their aggressive goals in advance should not be discounted a priori if they (later or presently) have the power to do it.

Hitler's Plans to Expand Eastwards Far Exceeded reclaiming Danzing for Germany

On May 23, 1939, Hitler had another meeting with his top leaders of the armed services, which reveal his foreign policy wasn't merely about uniting German-populated territories (or irredentism) with Germany, but was much broader in scope. Hitler told his top generals and admirals (Shirer, p. 484+): "Germany's economic problems, he began, could only be solved by obtaining more *Lebensraum* in Europe, and [directly quoting Hitler] 'this is impossible without invading other countries or attacking other people's possessions. . . . Further successes can no longer be attained without the shedding of blood . . . **Danzing**

is not the subject of the dispute at all. [My emphasis. Buchanan mistakenly thinks it was! Hitler privately said otherwise!] It is a question of expanding our living space in the East, of securing our food supplies and also of solving the problem of the Baltic States. . . . There is no other possibility in Europe . . . If fate forces us into a showdown with the West it is invaluable to possess a large area in the East. In wartime we shall be even less able to rely on record harvests than in peacetime." Hitler also said on the same occasion: "There is no question of sparing Poland and we are left with the decision: to attack Poland at the first suitable opportunity. We cannot expect a repetition of the Czech affair. There will be war. Our task is to isolate Poland. Success in isolating her will be decisive." Buchanan falsely says Hitler didn't want war with Poland. What rubbish! On the possibilities of Russian intervention in Poland, Hitler commented: "It is not ruled out that Russia might disinterest herself in the destruction of Poland." But if the USSR did ally with the two Western powers, that 'would lead me to attack England and France with a few devastating blows.' . . . 'The Fuehrer doubts the possibility of a peaceful settlement with England. It is necessary to be prepared for the showdown. England see in our development the establishment of a hegemony which would weaken England. [Hitler here shows he is well aware of England's traditional military/diplomatic role as a balancer in European affairs, that England naturally opposes any one nation gaining dominant control of the European continent.] . . . The Dutch and Belgian air bases [Hitler says] must be militarily occupied. Declarations of neutrality can be ignored. If England wants to intervene in the Polish war, we must make a lightning attack on Holland. We must aim at establishing a new line of defense on Dutch territory as far as the Zuyder Zee. The war with England and France will be a war of life and death. The idea that we can get off cheaply is dangerous; there is no such possibility. We must then burn our boats and it will no longer be a question of right or wrong but of to be or not to be for eighty million people [i.e., Germany]. . . . The aim [Hitler said] must be to deal the enemy a smashing or a finally decisive blow right at the start. Considerations of right or wrong, or of treaties, do not enter into the matter. This will be possible only when we do not 'slide' into a war with England on account of Poland. . . . If we succeed in occupying and securing Holland and Belgium, as well as defeating France, the basis for a successful war against England has been created. The Luftwaffe can then closely blockade England from western France and the fleet undertake the wider blockade with submarines. . . . 'The aim,' Hitler concluded, [Shirer comments here] apparently forgetting all about Poland for the moment, 'will always be to force England to her knees.'" Again, if Hitler's geopolitical goals were merely one of irredentism, of uniting German minorities in neighboring countries with the Reich, there would be no need to be invade the Low countries, let alone plan to fight an all out war with Britain.

In "Mein Kampf," Hitler Proclaimed that Germany Should Attack Russia

Shirer, in words he broadcasted in 1939, predicted Germany would go to war with Russia based on what Hitler had said his goals were in "Mein Kampf." Although the Nazi-Soviet Non-aggression Pact put off that fateful conflict by nearly two years after they carved up Poland between each other in 1939, their showdown still came about nevertheless. Do we ever take the words of authoritarian or totalitarian bullies seriously when they have power to implement their goals? Or do we blow them off, like Chamberlain did, and Buchanan wants to do now? For example, if the Iranian president says he wants to wipe Israel off the map, and is presently building the machinery and infrastructure to make nukes, do we think he's just kidding? If so, why?

William Shirer said, in his "CBS Broadcast" from New York (14th July, 1939): "There is one reason which would seem to rule out the possibility of an alignment between German and Soviet Russia. It's this: Hitler's goal is the occupation and annexation of a vast part of Russia. How are you going to play ball with a man who covets your house and intends to settle in it if he can, even if he has to hit you over the head with his bat? And moreover says so.

"Because he does in *Mein Kampf*, that Nazi bible which we all have to go to to divine what the Fuhrer may have in his mind next. Hitler in *Mein Kampf* says very plainly that Germany will only be a great nation when it acquires a much larger territory in Europe. From where is that territory to come? Hitler very obligingly gives us the answer. It is: From Russia.

"A second reason is that if Hitler were to make a deal with Russia, the Japanese alliance, or whatever you call their present understanding, falls through automatically. Now the strange tie-up between Japan and Germany is not so strange as it seems, if we look into it for a moment. It's - valuable to Germany first as a part of a general threat to Britain and France - and to a lesser extent, the U.S. - in the East. Secondly, if and when Russia is to be conquered, it confronts Russia with a war on two greatly distant fronts, thus making Germany's job of conquering European Russia much easier. This second point is also the reason for Tokyo's friendship with Berlin - that is, if Japan is to get the Russian maritime provinces as well as Mongolia and a big slice of Siberia, Germany's military effort on the Western Front is absolutely necessary. Unless Japan ruins itself as a Great Power in China, and thus can no longer threaten the three Democracies in the Far East, there is little evidence that Hitler will ditch Tokyo. Along the path that he has apparently chosen, it is too valuable an ally."

From a Non-pacifist Perspective, Why Non-interventionism Is a Foolish Policy When Facing Aggressive Hegemonic Threats

Now, let's turn philosophical. Here I'm analyzing this from a worldly perspective (not a strict pacifist one, that condemns all wars fought for any reason because of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount). So what's the foundational flaw in Buchanan's historical reasoning? Much like the leftists and liberals who discounted the Communist threat in the past, and the threat of radical Islam today, Buchanan discounts the Nazi threat in the past in order to prop up a non-interventionist foreign policy. (Non-interventionists also commonly justify their position by discounting, whitewashing, rationalizing, excusing, "explaining," and/or otherwise justifying the atrocities of the Nazis, Communists, and/or conservative Islam). But when there's a serious hegemonic threat, a force that really could conquer and/or convert the world to a hostile ideology under totalitarian or authoritarian government(s), isolationism and non-interventionism are criminally foolish policies. Collective security and "peace through strength" by standing up the bullies is the correct (worldly) response to hegemonic threats. The British Empire and America have faced down three major hegemonic threats in the past century: Imperial Germany, Nazi Germany, and Soviet Communism. Regardless of what other sins can be charged to their account historically, this grand achievement greatly outbalances all the other general foreign policy sins of the "Anglo-Saxon Powers." It's unbelievable blindness to think that by burying our heads in the sand will make such aggressive threats will go away on their own. If your neighbor says he's going to kill you, and has lots of guns and ammo, should you pretend that he's no threat, that no counter-measures like informing the police should be undertaken? Fundamentally, the error in Libertarian isolationist/Liberal-Leftist foreign policy is a naive, optimistic view of human nature as being good. They don't think authoritarians and totalitarians really mean what they say, that they are never intrinsically aggressive on their own account, but are merely responding defensively to prior or current "provocations" of other nations. The Wall Journal opinion writer Bret Stephens comments about this kind of naivety: "George Orwell once observed that pacifism is a doctrine that can only be preached behind the protective cover of the Royal Navy. Similarly, libertarianism can only be seriously espoused under the protective cover of Leviathan." That is, the only reason why libertarians even have their freedom to complain about interventionist foreign policy publicly is because American (and British) interventions abroad against hegemonic threats gave them their political freedom that would rob them of their freedom.

Although he's a good Catholic, Pat Buchanan, the isolationist American Firster, at some level discounts the evil human nature of America's past and present foreign enemies, that bullies shouldn't be taken at their word when they make threats before taking action. He refuses to accept that one of the great tragedies of the interwar period was America's isolationist foreign policy. He may well be letting the traditional Irish-American animus against Britain for all its mistreatment of Ireland over the centuries cause him to look upon Germany favorably. He also has flirted with arguments derived from Holocaust deniers, which makes his attempt to whitewash Hitler's motives even more suspicious. For example, he

once argued that the gas chamber at Treblinka couldn't have killed all the people attributed to it because its diesel engines wouldn't produce enough carbon monoxide. He also once referred to "so-called Holocaust Survivor Syndrome," which involved "group fantasies of martyrdom and heroics." But of course, anyone who survived "the theory and practice of hell" in the concentration camps had awful emotional and psychological traumas, similar to what combat veterans suffer from after they return home from war. The charges of anti-Semitism that have been flung up against him are not by any means a priori implausible. (Years ago, I read his defenders on this score, and then saw the rebuttal by someone charging him with anti-Semitism in "American Spectator": The rebuttal was unexpectedly plausible, I had to admit). So then, should we be learning positive things about Hitler's goals and recent German history from such a source without subjecting it to withering scrutiny for what's distorted or left out? Here above, a big hole was punched in Buchanan's arguments about Munich mostly using Shirer's work. (Has Buchanan read Shirer? He shouldn't pretend he doesn't exist when writing about this period. Suppose I disagreed with Shirer as a historical writer. If I did, I would start by showing how he's wrong using the primary sources from the diplomatic archives, not by throwing out arguments that can be easily turned into mincemeat by someone familiar with Shirer, as done here). Suppose a professional historian, an expert on the 20th century diplomatic and military history of Germany and who can read Nazi Germany's archives first hand, scrutinized Buchanan's book and wrote up his critique. (Rather than a talented writer, but an apparent non-historian, such as Christopher Hitchens in "Newsweek" review of Buchanan's book). Such a historian probably could tear Buchanan's analysis of the 1930's diplomatic history of Europe into shreds.

How Should We Think about Hypothetical "What-If" Scenarios in History?

When analyzing and thinking about Buchanan's arguments, it should be noted much of this debate depends on where one draws the line in setting up various hypothetical, "what if" versions of history. How much "real" history should be allowed to elapse (blunders and all) before someone decides to set up various hypothetical scenarios to "fix" things compared to the actual historical outcomes?

It's unlikely that there's anything new in Buchanan's criticisms of the Versailles Treaty as a leading cause for World War II, since that's about as original a historical insight as it would be for Ford to start making Model T's again. The French Field Marshal, Ferdinand Foch, said as the treaty was being signed: "This is not peace. It is an armistice for 20 years." Of course, his reasoning for saying this was the opposite of how it could be interpreted today: Foch advocated a very harsh peace that would have stripped Germany of the Rhineland, and would have allowed France to permanently occupy it as protection against a future German attack. Wilson and Lloyd George wisely opposed this demand, so it

didn't happen. In retrospect, of course, had the War Guilt clause been omitted, and the load of reparations greatly lessened, average Germans would have been much less resentful of the Allies and would have had much less desire to vote for politicians who wanted diplomatic and military revenge. (However, it should be noted the War Guilt clause is more defensible historically Germans then would have admitted then: That is, recent historiography would make this statement defensible: "Germany and Austria-Hungary were three-quarters to blame for War War I, when considering both the weeks immediately preceding the outbreak of war in 1914 and the years of military build-up and diplomatic bluster in the preceding generation." Although not written by a professional historian, "Dreadnought" does an excellent job citing and analyzing the details that would justify this generalization. If someone disagrees, the objector should carefully quote from this book's cited primary sources and then state specifically what is wrong with Massie's analysis while citing primary source documents in response. A priori, any broad, off-the-top of one's head generalizations should be ruled out of court). The world economic system also would have been more stable had Germany been relieved of the load of reparations earlier than it was, and the Great Depression wouldn't have been as bad as it became. America basically lent money to Germany to pay France, which wasn't a sustainable economic dynamic. Of course, the diplomatic achievements of Stresemann and Brüning during the Weimar republic (before Hitler became chancellor) loosened much of the shackles of Versailles, including concerning reparations, with the Allies' consent.

How Early “Could-Have-Been” Interventions Could Have Prevented Most of World War II’s Deaths

So then, suppose we accept the Versailles treaty (real history, blunders and all), but then fast forward to the 1930's, and start cranking out historical hypotheticals. Had France stood up to Hitler at the Rhineland in 1936, Hitler could well have lost power without even any shedding of blood or a general mobilization by France. Or, there's the what-if Shirer expertly summarizes concerning Czechoslovakia in 1938 (p. 426): "Germany was in no position to go to war on October 1, 1938, against Czechoslovakia *and* France and Britain, not to mention Russia. Had she done so, she would have been quickly and easily defeated, and that would have been the end of Hitler and the Third Reich." I maintain either of these hypothetical scenarios is much, much better than the one that presumably follows Buchanan, under which the Nazis would have duked it out with the Soviets and have exhausted each other. Under my two scenarios, 27 million Russians, 6 million Jews, 6 million Poles (counting 2 million Jews again), and 7 million Germans are saved from death. My abhorrence of Soviet Communism wouldn't make me want to look upon favorably upon the would-be collective sufferings of average people when these totalitarian dictatorships would clash. During the TV coverage of the millennial celebrations on the eve of

1999 going into 2000, I remember seeing all the people gathered in Red Square. I then thought about how truly miserable Russia's history had been in the preceding century, and felt especially sorry for them. Also, if Germany and the USSR (only) had gone to war, the Holocaust almost surely would still have taken place in Eastern Europe: The Shoah just wouldn't have destroyed the Jews west of the Rhine. Under the cover of total war, Hitler's regime could do this, but he couldn't have done it during peacetime.

I don't believe Germany couldn't have won after invading Russia, despite the citation of the Bulgarian ambassador that has been made. That is, had Leningrad and Moscow had fallen, the two leading cities of Russia, one the traditional and restored capital, the other the former capital, Russian morale would have sustained two crushing blows. Much of the success in waging war concerns sustaining people's hopes for victory psychologically. Furthermore, had Hitler's 1942 thrust to capture the Caucasus' oil fields had succeeded, which ultimately failed because of Stalingrad, the most decisive single battle of the entire war (in this regard even Midway isn't its equal), the Red army likely wouldn't have had much oil to run its military machine on. As the Germans experienced at the battle of the Bulge, tanks aren't very useful when they run out of fuel. Just how well-tapped were the Siberian oilfields in 1941? I doubt they would have been enough, but I'm open to an empirical refutation by someone with specific knowledge cranking out the numbers.

Would have Hitler have stopped after invading and conquering Russia, and left the USA alone? Well, he wasn't exactly rational, was he? If he believed the Aryan race (i.e., Germans) should rule the world, would he have not only built nukes, but used the technology developed for V-2 rockets launch them from ships to drop them on American cities? Let's not forget all the super weapons that Germany could have developed much more had they focused on them, such as jet airplanes, rocket planes, the V-2, the beginning of nuclear bomb research, submarines that didn't need to surface to get more oxygen, etc.

Also, had Britain lost the Battle of Britain, Germany's transports could have received adequate air cover to keep the Royal Navy from sinking them. Pearl Harbor, Taranto, and the sinking of the Prince of Wales and Repulse all showed how vulnerable surface ships without air protection were to enemy airpower. The Royal Navy's surface superiority wouldn't have saved Britain from its last (successful & hostile) invasion in 1066 by William the Conqueror. (William III invaded England in 1688 also, it could be argued, but he had an engraved invitation from much of the British establishment). Britain barely won that battle, largely because of German mistakes: The Luftwaffe didn't focus on one kind of target, such as airbases, but kept changing target objectives. Then, in response to a (small but embarrassing) British air raid on Berlin, Hitler and Goering went after London, which distracted them from destroying British fighter airplanes and killing British pilots. Britain could easily have been starved out by German

submarines (and indeed it was a close thing in 1942; Britain really wasn't safe until the disastrous May 1943 sinkings of u-boats in the Battle of the Atlantic). Churchill, interestingly enough, did plan on unleashing poison gas on the Wehrmacht if the Germans tried to land in Britain.

Clearly, early major interventions against Nazi Germany at either the Rhineland or Czechoslovakia could have saved far more lives than Buchanan's preference for Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia to mutually destroy each other. Of course, all war is sin and evil. I'm a good pacifist, who accepts a literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38-48). But if we're playing these hypothetical what-ifs concerning the worst war in history, my two scenarios are far better than Buchanan's main choice.