

Fra arkivet: Om 1. verdenskrig og den cubanske missilkrise: Må kanonerne i august, denne gang, forblive tavse.

I anledning af krigen i Ukraine, genudgiver vi følgende artikel af Michelle Rasmussen fra august 2005.

May the Guns of August, This Time, Remain Silent

There is an expression, "Those who do not learn from history, are doomed to repeat it." Well, that is not quite true, because every historical period has its own peculiarities – for example the culture, economic conditions, political landscape and the character of leading individuals – a concept Lyndon LaRouche refers to as historical specificity.

However, if we look at history as drama, we can, as Schiller wrote in his "Theater as a Moral Institution," learn from the tragedy we see come to life on the stage before us, and come out better people. We can see specific moments, punctum salia, at which, if the leading characters had acted otherwise, it were possible to have had a different outcome. We can especially learn about the qualities of personal courage required to intervene in a way that could have changed history, when faced with an accelerating momentum heading directly towards a tragedy, such as a great war -- how one must act, after hearing the drums of war, in order to muffle them, or silence them completely.

On July 27, 2005 , Lyndon LaRouche, entitled his press release aimed at exposing the current drive towards preemptive war against Iran , including plans for the use of nuclear weapons,

“Stop Cheney’s ‘Guns of August.’” In doing so, he brought a powerful metaphor into the battle to prevent such a war.

✘ “The Guns of August,” by Barbara Tuchman, (published in ✘ Danish as “Kanonerne i August 1914”) is an insightful book about many of the factors that led up to WWI, and the first thirty days of the war, which has the qualities of a dramatic historical tragedy. She shows us, her readers, in detail, how “The Great War” broke out on August 1, 1914, as a result of geopolitical strategies, “unchallengeable military necessities,” wrong assumptions, miscalculations, denial, and political cowardice. Thereby implicitly, and in several cases explicitly, showing us how the war, and especially the immense extent of the war, could have been avoided.

Released in January 1962, “The Guns of August,” itself, changed history. John F. Kennedy, and members of his administration, read the book just before the outbreak of the Cuban Missile Crisis that October, and consciously used the lessons they learned from it, to navigate through the dangerous waters of the crisis, and successfully avoid escalation into a nuclear war with the Soviet Union .

Edward VII’s Geopolitics

The colorful scene at the opening of “The Guns of August” is the funeral procession of King Edward VII of Great Britain , four years before the outbreak of war. The most prominent guest is Edward’s nephew, and arch enemy, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany . The funeral becomes the backdrop in front of which Mrs. Tuchman weaves the story of the construction of a geopolitical minefield, in which one wrong step could be enough to detonate the whole. (footnote 1)

The book fills in the details behind LaRouche’s analysis that Edward VII was the manuscript writer for the war, but that the “Three Kaiser Bund,” comprised of Kaiser Wilhelm – “Willy,”

Czar Nicholas II of Russia – “Nicky,” another nephew of Edward, and cousin to Wilhelm, and the Hapsburg Emperor of Austro-Hungary, all too willingly played their parts, along with the French. Their own folly allowed Edward to put them against each others throats.

She relates how Edward, Lord Palmerston, and the British imperial faction, methodically worked to create “understandings” with their old enemies France and Russia , and buffer zones (independent Belgium), to ensure that British interests would never be challenged by other powers or alliances.

Kaiser Wilhelm clearly perceives Edward’s strategy of encircling Germany through the creating of the “Triple Entente” with France and Russia, but he sees no alternative to Germany breaking out of that containment through war, after his own attempts to ally Germany with Russia and/or France fail. Kaiser Wilhelm states, that the British want war, but we have to start it.

Later, just days before the outbreak of war, Wilhelm says “The world will be engulfed in the most terrible of wars, the ultimate aim of which is the ruin of Germany . England , France and Russia have conspired for our annihilation ... that is the naked truth of the situation which was slowly but surely created by Edward VII ... The encirclement of Germany is at last an accomplished fact. We have run our heads into the noose ... The dead Edward is stronger than the living I.”

Was the war “inevitable”?

All heard the drums of war, and prepared for the war in varying degrees of effectiveness, but none prepared effectively enough to silence them. Yet, paradoxically, Mrs. Tuchman shows that the war was not inevitable, and especially the scale and length of the war, if certain leading actors,

had acted otherwise. Here are some of the examples she highlights.

For example, the French Commander in Chief designate, General Michel, after correctly surmising the essential content of the German Schlieffen Plan of attack on the western part of France through Belgium , proposes a defensive strategy to parry this. The response? – to fire him immediately, because his plan challenges the prevailing French military “tradition.”

Or, that war with France might have been avoided altogether, if Germany had granted autonomy to Alsace and Lorraine , the two French provinces which Germany annexed after the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian war.

Or, how, when the German ambassador to London was discussing with the British ambassador the possibility that German forces might invade neutral Belgium, in order to reach France, “‘If so,’ Lichnowsky said, voicing the eternal epitaph of man’s surrender to events, ‘that could not be altered now.’”

Or, how General Moltke, the younger, chief of staff of the German military forces, “could have changed the history of the twentieth century,” if he had accepted Kaiser Wilhelm’s desperate, last minute proposal. She dramatically describes how on Aug. 1, Wilhelm sent a messenger to intercept Moltke, then on his way to give the orders to begin the attack. Waving a copy of a telegram from the German ambassador to London, stating that Britain would stay out of the war, if Germany only declared war against Russia, and not France (which, in fact, turned out to be incorrect – footnote 2) the Kaiser asked Moltke to divert the bulk of the German forces towards east, one hour before the first German troops were to take over a railroad center in Luxembourg, .

“Your Majesty, it cannot be done. The deployment of millions cannot be improvised. If Your Majesty insists on leading the whole army to the East it will not be an army ready for battle

but a disorganized mob of men with no arrangements for supply. Those arrangements took a whole year of intricate labor to complete.” And then Moltke states, as Mrs. Tuchman writes, “the inevitable phrase when military plans dictate policy – ‘and once settled, it cannot be altered.’”

“In fact it could have been altered,” she reports. After the war, the Chief of the Railway Division, General von Staab, wrote a book proving that the redeployment could have been accomplished, and Moltke, 6 months after the outbreak of war, admitted that he had made a mistake.

This is not to say that “only” a German-Russian war would have been acceptable, as a key British geopolitical strategy has always been to get those two rivals to bleed each other. But that the outbreak of war, and the scale of the war, were not “inevitable,” if leading political and military leaders had had the courage to intervene effectively.

In a recent memorandum, LaRouche explained that those who want war to further their political or economic agenda, create the impression that such a war is inevitable. He stressed that for the London-based financial oligarchy, sustained peace is more frightful than fanning the flames of war. In this case, their fear of an American System economic policy spreading from Germany to the rest of the continent, including Russia, and peaceful transcontinental economic cooperation, was the cause of the geopolitical machinations which, finally, led to the war. This was the “field” that courageous individuals, acting as singularities, would have had to transform by their actions. (Such economic questions is the only major cause Mrs. Tuchman does not sufficiently develop, but which LaRouche provides in his writings.)

The above examples, and others, dramatically described in “The Guns of August,” of how no one acted effectively to prevent the war from breaking out in the first place, and then escalating into a world war, with such tragic consequences for

a whole century, made an impression on a future leader of a nation, John F. Kennedy, about the need to devise alternative strategies than those presented by military leaders who state that there is no alternative to a military invasion, and already completed warplans.

“In the month of August, 1914,” she wrote, “there was something looming, inescapable, universal that involved us all. Something in that awful gulf between perfect plans and fallible men that makes one tremble with a sense of ‘There but for the Grace of God go we.’”

“Her hope was that people reading her book might take warning, avoid these mistakes, and do a little better. It was this effort and these lessons which attracted presidents and prime ministers as well as millions of ordinary readers,” Robert K. Massie wrote in his introduction to a recent edition of the book.

The Guns of August, JFK and the Missiles of October

As mentioned above, JFK and leading members of his administration read “The Guns of August” just before the onset of the crisis provoked by the American discovery of Soviet missiles on Cuba . Especially those who had read the book became aware of the danger of heeding the drums of war as the conflict became ever more serious.

Robert Kennedy cited in his book “Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis,” which we can also learn from, JFK’s discussion of the impact that the book had on him, in a discussion with Robert, presidential advisor Ted Sorensen and another aide, in the midst of the crisis:

“‘The great danger and risk in all of this,’ he said, ‘is a miscalculation – a mistake in judgment.’ A short time before, he had read Barbara Tuchman’s book The Guns of

August, and he talked about the miscalculations of the Germans, the Russians, the Austrians, the French, and the British. They somehow seemed to tumble into war, he said, through stupidity, individual idiosyncrasies, misunderstandings, and personal complexes of inferiority and grandeur. We talked about the miscalculations of the Germans in 1939 and the still unfulfilled commitments and guarantees that the British had given to Poland .”

Robert also writes about JFK’s discussion of the book at a later point during the Cuban missile crisis:

“As mentioned before, Barbara Tuchman’s *The Guns of August* had made a great impression on the President. ‘I am not going to follow a course which will allow anyone to write a comparable book about this time, *The Missiles of October*.’ he said to me that Saturday night, October 27. “If anybody is around to write after this, they’re going to understand we made every effort to find peace and every effort to give our adversary room to move. I’m not going to push the Russians an inch beyond what’s necessary.”

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin asked U.S. Ambassador at Large Bowles for a meeting. The following is an excerpt from a secret memo to President Kennedy that Ambassador Bowles wrote about that meeting.(footnote 3) He reports that he discussed with Dobrynin that some U.S. Sovietologists thought that the Soviets wanted to deliberately provoke a crisis in Cuba, to divert attention from Berlin, and enable the Soviets to charge the US with aggression in the UN. He writes that he told Amb. Dobrynin that, if so, such thinking “was extremely dangerous.” If we did move into Cuba in response to some overt act or offensive build-up by the U.S.S.R., a global chain of events might be set in motion which could have catastrophic consequences. For instance, the Soviets might then be tempted to take what they would term “counter-action” in Berlin and perhaps Turkey ; and the U.S. , by that time in an extremely

tense mood, would react with vigor. The U.S.S.R., in turn, would feel pressed by the Chinese and other extremists to counter our moves, and we would be on our way together down the long slippery slide.

"I asked Dobrynin if he had read *The Guns of August*. He said "only a three-page summary." I urged him to read at least the first few chapters in which he would see a pattern of politico-military action and counter-action that could be repeated in the next six months.

"In July 1914," Bowles said to Dobrynin, "men of intelligence in Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, France and England, all quite conscious of the forces which were feeding the approaching holocaust, found themselves enmeshed in internal pressures, commitments and precedents which left them powerless to avoid the inevitable. It would be the greatest folly in history if we were to repeat this insane process in the nuclear age.

"Dobrynin asked me what, in the circumstances, I thought could be done in regard to Cuba . Stressing that I was speaking solely as an individual, I suggested three moves that the U.S.S.R. could sponsor to ease the situation."

In fact, as the " *The Guns of August*" shows, the unfolding of the events that led to WWI were not "inevitable," – if men and woman of good will had had the courage to intervene to prevent "the inevitable." John F. and Robert Kennedy, and their faction, would succeed in presenting and implementing alternatives to a course demanded by a faction of their own military, which they were sure would lead directly to nuclear war. In a parallel to the determination behind solving the problem of bringing the damaged Apollo 13 spacecraft back to earth, "Failure is not an option," the Kennedy's were determined that nuclear war was not an option. After the crisis, J.F. Kennedy presented the book to British Prime Minister Macmillan, saying that the Western world had

something to learn from the lessons of August 1914.

If we are to learn from "The Guns of August" when faced with a similar war party, this time, with occupants in the White House itself, now intent on war with Iran, even nuclear war, we must intervene effectively to silence the drums of war. This time, in Germany , Chancellor candidate Helga Zepp-LaRouche and the current Büro national election campaign have shown the way, by making stopping a war against Iran one of the most important issues in the current election campaign, and creating the political climate for Chancellor Schröder to speak out.

This time, in the U.S. , Lyndon LaRouche and the LaRouche Youth Movement have shown the way by exposing the plans for war, and working to create a bi-partisan coalition to replace those, who would cast humanity into a new tragedy.

This time, will you learn from history, and help make their voices heard?

(A German translation of this article, appeared in Neue Solidarität on August 24, 2005)

Foto: President John F. Kennedy addresses the nation during the Cuban missile crisis, 1962

Footnotes:

1. That step, the immediate trigger to the war, would be the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne while in Serbia. The Austrians then declare war on Serbia, which brings Serbia's ally Russia , and Austria's ally Germany into the war.

2. The British, in fact, offered to not declare war on Germany , if Germany refrained from attacking France, and Russia .

3. Secret Memorandum From the Ambassador at Large (Bowles) to President Kennedy, 13 October 1962, available on the internet at:

www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bowles.htm.