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From Munich to Kosovo

By John Laughland, Ria Novosti

<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20081001/117364733.html>

The 70th anniversary of the Munich agreement, reached on 30th September 1938, opens what will doubtless now be many years of formal reminiscence about the Second World War. As the events of the 1930s and 1940s recede in time, indeed, the shadows they cast over the present seem to grow ever longer. Contemporary politics is now guided by only a single (and negative) moral lodestar: the black hole of Nazism.

The memory of Munich is therefore very important. The agreement between Britain, France and Fascist Italy to allow Nazi Germany to annex the Sudetenland (the Western, German-inhabited parts of Czechoslovakia) was the fruit of that policy known as appeasement by which London and Paris tried to mollify Hitler. The failure of this policy became spectacularly obvious when Hitler occupied all of the Czech lands in March 1939 and then attacked Poland on 1st September 1939.

As a result, Munich stands as a symbol for shameful capitulation towards aggression. Faced with the threat of the use of force by Hitler, the Western powers agreed to destroy the very state they had themselves created at Versailles only twenty years previously. Czechoslovakia's immediate neighbours behaved no better: Poland, which later succeeded in presenting itself as the supreme victim of World War II, annexed the territory around Teschen, while Hungary occupied parts of Southern and Eastern Slovakia.

Munich is therefore frequently invoked, especially by American neo-conservatives, in justification of contemporary wars which, they say, are also responses to aggression. Whether it is with respect to the Yugoslavia of Slobodan Milosevic in 1999, the Iraq of Saddam Hussein in 2003, or almost any country or situation in the world, the mantra is that the mistakes of 1938 must never be repeated.

How strange, therefore, that in the 70th anniversary year of Munich, the Western powers have indeed precisely repeated it. In February 2008, in the face of the threat of the use of force by Albanian separatists in Serbia, the United States and the European Union recognised the independence of Kosovo. They had in fact strongly encouraged the original proclamation of independence, and indeed the use of force itself to the extent that they attacked Yugoslavia in 1999 in support of the Albanian cause. They thereby unilaterally destroyed the territorial integrity of Serbia, just as the integrity of Czechoslovakia was destroyed 70 years ago.



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The EU then immediately dispatched a 2,000 strong team of administrators to run the province, which in any case is already home to a massive United States military base housing thousands of GIs. To that extent, the "independence" of Kosovo resembles the bogus "independence" of Slovakia under the puppet regime of Monsignor Tiso, which Hitler encouraged Tiso to proclaim in March 1939 and which he used as a pretext for the simultaneous German occupation of the Czech lands.

Both recognitions destroyed the governments of the countries affected. In 1938, Munich led to the immediate collapse of the patriotic government of President Edvard Benes; in 2008, the recognition of Kosovo immediately destroyed the government of Vojislav Kostunica, the very man the West hailed as a great democrat in 2000 when he toppled Slobodan Milosevic from power. In Prague in 1938, a collaborationist government took power under Emil Hacha, who promised to try to protect Czechoslovakia's position in the New European Order which was then emerging. (Many of his ministers were convicted as war criminals in 1946.) In 2008, the new Belgrade government under the leadership of the Democratic Party President, Boris Tadic, has similarly confirmed that Serbia's "principal strategic goal" is to become a member of the European Union - the same organisation which now illegally administers Kosovo. (The EU administration is illegal because United Nations Security Council 1244, passed in the aftermath of the NATO attack on Yugoslavia, reaffirmed that Kosovo is part of Serbia and that it is administered by the UN; its existence emphasises that the so-called "independence" of Kosovo is, in reality, a kind of annexation.)

The parallel even extends to the last-ditch attempts made respectively by Prague and Belgrade to hold on to their territories. President Benes negotiated with Konrad Henlein, the Sudeten German leader, and promised both substantial autonomy for the German-inhabited parts of the country and a cabinet post for Henlein himself. The government of Vojislav Kostunica was prepared to give so much autonomy to Kosovo that the province would have been freer in Serbia than it now is as a US-EU protectorate. In both 1938 and 2008, more importantly, the domestic negotiations then under way were deliberately wrecked by outside intervention. Hitler's occupation of the Czech lands in March 1939, on the basis that the "artificial state" of Czechoslovakia had collapsed and that Germany needed to preserve peace and stability, then invoked exactly the same logic as the Western interventions in the former Yugoslavia today.

It is obvious that the EU and the US, unlike Nazi Germany, do not secretly harbour any plans for wholesale genocide. The evil they have perpetrated is therefore not in the same league as Hitler's. But it is evil nonetheless, in particular because it represents a unilateral abrogation, backed by military force, of international laws (general principles of law as well as UN Security Council resolutions) to which these powers have themselves signed up. It is here that the similarity with Munich is strongest. As for the consequences of the Kosovo recognition, it appears, also like



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Munich, to have started a dangerous ball rolling in the Caucasus. It must be our fervent hope that the parallels stop now.

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