

Appeasement 101 [Excerpts]

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TBC Today: Israel and Islam

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It is easy to damn the 1930's appeasers of Hitler -- such as Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain in England and Edouard Daladier in France -- given what the Nazis ultimately did when unleashed. But history demands not merely recognizing the truth post facto, but also trying to reconstruct the rationale of something that now in hindsight seems inexplicable.

First, Europe had nearly been destroyed during the Great War, a mere 20 years prior. No responsible postwar leader wished to risk a second continental bloodbath.

Unfortunately, Hitler understood that all too well. In a game of diplomatic chicken, he figured many responsible democratic statesmen had more to lose than he did, as the weaker and once-beaten enemy.

Today, the 50-year Cold War is over, and Europe is at last free of burdensome military expenditure and the threat of global annihilation. Like Osama Bin Laden, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad senses a certain weariness in much of the West as it counts on perpetual peace.

He assumes that most sober Westerners will do almost anything to avoid military confrontation to stop a potential threat -- even though, unlike Hitler, Ahmadinejad not only promises to liquidate the Jews but reveals his method in advance by seeking nuclear weapons.

Some naive conservatives in prewar Europe thought the German and Italian fascists would prove a valuable bulwark against communism, and so could be politically finessed. So, too, it has been at times with Islamic fascism. Arming the mujahadeen in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Saudi Arabia was once seen as an inspired way of thwarting Soviet communist imperialism.

Just as Hitler concocted incidents such as the burning of the Reichstag to create outrage, Islamist leaders incite frenzy in their followers over a supposed flushed Koran at Guantanamo and several inflammatory cartoons, some of them never published by Danish newspapers at all.

Anti-Semitism, of course, is the mother's milk of fascism. It is always, they say, a small group of Jews -- whether shadowy cabinet advisers and

international bankers of the 1930s or the manipulative neoconservatives and Israeli leadership of the present -- who alone stir up the trouble.

The point of the comparison is not to suggest that history simply repeats itself, but to learn why intelligent people delude themselves into embracing naive policies. After the removal of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, the furious reply of the radical Islamist world was to censor Western newspapers, along with Iran's accelerated efforts to get the bomb.

In response, either the West will continue to stand up now to these reoccurring post-Sept. 11 threats, or it will see the bullies' demands only increase as its own resistance weakens. Like the appeasement of the 1930s, opting for the easier choice will only guarantee a more costly one later on.