

# D-Day anniversary: Commemorating the Second World War and preparing the Third

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Few will remain unmoved by the appearance Friday on the beaches of Normandy of 90-year-old veterans marking—in many cases for the last time—the slaughter of D-Day in which nearly 20,000 troops—both Allied and German—lost their lives. Those present for the 70th anniversary commemoration were among the lucky who survived that day in 1944, but surely they have remained haunted by the memory of those who did not and marked for their entire lives by this terrible experience of their youth.

The presence of this dwindling band of survivors of World War II—the greatest exercise in mass killing in the history of the planet—only underscored the boundless hypocrisy of the official ceremonies in which President Barack Obama played the leading role.

Historic ironies abounded at Normandy's 70th anniversary. In the run-up to a ceremony ostensibly marking a decisive defeat for fascism, the US president toured Europe to drum up support for a Ukrainian regime that came to power in a US-backed coup spearheaded by neo-Nazis. These same ultra-right forces are now being employed with Washington's support to carry out war crimes against the people of eastern Ukraine.

The principal foes of the US and its allies in World War II—Germany and Japan—are today being prodded by Washington to re-militarize for the purpose of assisting US imperialism in the encirclement of Russia and China. In both Germany and Japan, historians are reworking the portrayal of World War II to justify the crimes carried out by German and Japanese imperialism.

Obama's speech at Omaha beach was typical for the US president, filled with empty rhetoric, historical references stripped of any real content, and personal anecdotes that managed to be both exploitative and insincere.

Obama had next to nothing to say about the cause for which the sacrifices of 70 years ago were made, outside of a brief reference to "Nazi guns" and "Hitler's wall." He

demonstratively excluded from his potted history any reference to the Soviet Union, which by the time of the Normandy invasion had already inflicted a strategic defeat on the Wehrmacht at Stalingrad. The Red Army was responsible for 80 percent of the casualties inflicted on German forces, and the Soviet people suffered 26 million dead in the war.

Perhaps the most bizarre part of Obama's speech was his attempt to equate the war fought by the aged veterans brought together in Normandy with the "post-9/11" US military and its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. He predicted that someday "future generations... will gather at places like this to honor them—and to say that these were generations of men and women who proved once again that the United States of America is and will remain the greatest force for freedom the world has ever known."

What "freedom" did the US bring in wars that killed over a million Iraqis and Afghans? And at what places will future generations gather to mark these wars—Fallujah, Abu Ghraib, Haditha, Bagram prison or the scenes of countless drone strikes, bombings and night raids against civilian populations?

Even as Obama was speaking, his European tour was overshadowed by a right-wing furor in the US media over the release of Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who apparently walked away from the war in Afghanistan after writing that he was "sorry for everything here" and describing the US military as "an army of liars, backstabbers, fools, and bullies."

In World War II, the American ruling class was largely able to conceal its own militarism and global appetites behind a broader democratic appeal, thanks to the intense hostility of working people in the US and internationally to Hitlerite fascism. Today, it cannot credibly make any such appeal. The American establishment confronts a population that is largely in sync with the sentiments of Sergeant Bergdahl and hostile to foreign military

interventions.

World War II, nonetheless, was no more a war for democracy or crusade against fascism than World War I was the “war to end all wars,” or, for that matter, the invasion of Iraq was a struggle against terrorism. In the period leading up to the war, major capitalist interests in Western Europe and the US lauded both Hitler and Mussolini, seeing their fascist dictatorships as bulwarks against socialist revolution.

In the end, it was an imperialist war waged by the rival capitalist great powers for the re-division of the world’s markets and resources in the profit interests of financial and manufacturing conglomerates.

In 1934, analyzing the emerging contradictions that, without the spread of socialist revolution, would inevitably give rise to another World War, Leon Trotsky wrote: “US capitalism is up against the same problems that pushed Germany in 1914 on the path of war. The world is divided? It must be redivided. For Germany it was a question of ‘organizing Europe.’ The United States must ‘organize’ the world. History is bringing humanity face to face with the volcanic eruption of American imperialism.”

The prescience of these words is becoming clearer with every passing day. While US imperialism succeeded in reorganizing the capitalist world in the aftermath of World War II based on its economic strength, today it is driven by its crisis to resort to military means in an attempt to overcome its loss of economic power.

In his speech, Obama praised the assembled veterans for having “waged war so that we might know peace,” and called for God’s blessing upon today’s US military “who serve today for the peace and security of our world.”

For all the talk of “peace” at this commemoration of the Second World War, it is evident that US imperialism and the Obama administration are furiously preparing a third one.

With its Asia-Pacific “pivot,” it is deliberately provoking China, while egging on Japan, the Philippines and other countries in the region to create the conditions for a military confrontation.

In its campaign for regime-change in Ukraine, it is confronting Russia with the existential threat of NATO advancing to its very border.

Ultimately, its aim is to break the power of Russia and China to check US hegemony both regionally and internationally and reduce both countries to the status of semi-colonies. In recklessly pursuing this strategic aim, it risks igniting a nuclear Third World War.

Obama’s four-day tour of Europe, however, has turned into something of a debacle, exposing the increasingly open reluctance of the European powers—particularly France and Germany—to toe Washington’s line in escalating the confrontation with Russia.

This found explicit expression Friday in a column published in the influential German newspaper *Die Zeit* entitled “Europe needs to readjust its relations with the US.” The article warns that, “neither the US policy towards Ukraine and Russia nor America’s grand strategy as such is in Europe’s interest.”

It goes on to argue that Washington’s aggression is laying the foundations for a Chinese-Russian-Iranian axis that “would force the West to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy [i.e., war] to secure its access to important but dwindling raw materials such as oil.” In opposition to this, the commentary insists that Germany’s independent interests lie “with preserving and deepening Europe’s relations with Russia,” while pursuing similar ties with Iran.

The threat of a new world war lies not only in the confrontations being stoked up by US imperialism with Russia and China, but also in the conflicting imperialist interests of Europe and America which, under the lash of the continuing economic and financial crisis, threaten to be transformed into a ferocious conflict of each against all.

Once again, for the third time in 100 years, mankind is confronted with the threat of a global imperialist conflict—one far more terrible than those that began in 1914 and 1939—and the choice of socialism or barbarism.

There is no means of stopping a new imperialist war outside of the international socialist revolution. The decisive question is that of establishing a new revolutionary leadership in the working class through the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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