

World War IV at the Door

By Eric Rozenman

Recent references to a potential World War III abound. They include those from a George F. Will *Washington Post* column headlined “Averting World War III starts with [stopping Putin](#)”. There was also Holman W. Jenkins, Jr.’s *Wall Street Journal* commentary implying the Biden administration has left the United States “on the doorstep of [World War III](#)” and the bipartisan Commission on the National Defense Strategy’s report warning that, in the words of chair and former U.S. Rep. Jane Harman (D-Calif.), “we [face threats greater than any time since World War II](#) and more complex than the Cold War.”



AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein, File

But World War III is not around the corner. World War IV is.

The Cold War was World War III. Uncle Sam managed to prevail in that 1949 – 1989 struggle against Soviet communism with its global ambitions. America and its Western European allies did so by perseverance. Being in it “for the duration” enabled Washington to overcome stalemate and defeat in related hot conflicts, Korea and Vietnam, respectively.

Though each of the three previous global wars and subsidiary clashes possessed discrete causes and effects, identifying

them correctly helps illuminate a continuing underlying struggle. Since August, 1914 and the eruption of what was first known as “the Great War,” the world has been caught in a sporadic but unfinished battle.

World War I brought down four dynasties and their empires: Russia’s Romanovs, the Middle East’s Ottoman Turks, central and southern Europe’s Hapsburgs and Germany’s Hohenzollerns. With them went rule by aristocracies, at least titled aristocracies of birth.

Their collapse raised a still-unanswered question: Under what sort of government shall most human beings live? That dedicated to ensuring that all people are created equal and “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness,” as the Declaration of Independence radically declared? Or will it be “a boot, stamping on a human face—forever,” as George Orwell warned in *1984*?

Allied victory in World War II and the American-led Cold War triumph assured the continuation of liberal democracies. They also enabled expansion of freedom and relative prosperity to previously captive peoples from Poland to Kazakhstan.

Now, will the West, however imperfectly represented and led by the United States, provide the model for humanity, or will it be totalitarian rule, embodied by Communist China—Orwell’s [Big Brother on steroids](#)—assisted by Russia, North Korea and Iran? Though they differ in many respects, members of this axis of brutality fear and despise free nations and free individuals. And they already are fighting to destroy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

A bit more historical review is useful. World War II formally opened with Nazi Germany’s invasion of Poland in 1939. Americans could no longer avoid direct participation after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor two years later.

But the global conflagration began, barely noticed in the United States, with Japan's 1931 invasion of China. It accelerated with Italy's 1935 assault of Ethiopia and Russian and German involvement in the 1936 – 1939 Spanish Civil War.

The global tinderbox of the 1930's beckoned opportunistic dictators. Likewise, the 2010s.

Russia launched World War IV with its 2014 invasion of Crimea. China, according to the Defense Department, continues a decade-old enlargement of its military to [“overturn the international rules-based order.”](#) Meanwhile, Beijing attempts to coerce Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia, Japan, South Korea and even India. Moscow's 2022 attack on the rest of Ukraine and Iranian support for 2023-2024 Hamas-Hezbollah-Houthi assaults to destroy Israel marked World War IV's expansion.

During America's “vacation from history” between the Soviet Union's 1991 collapse and al-Qaeda's 2001 attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C., some, like Francis Fukuyama in his best-seller [The End of History and the Last Man](#), posited a final triumph of Enlightenment liberalism. History's murderous return, with the 9/11 destruction of the World Trade Center and attack on the Pentagon was medieval Islamic imperialism saying “not so fast.”

But rather than open World War IV, [as Norman Podhoretz asserted](#), Islamist terrorism provided a bridge to it. If we fail to put this history into numerical order, Americans will miss what could be termed the meta-lesson of the past 110 years: Freedom still has enemies, and the sacrifices—in time, treasure and life—demanded to defeat them will be great.

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