

# Victory Days: Military Without Militarism?

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*I could not have been a pacifist, if by that one means waiver of the use of physical force in disputes. The reason is simple. In my childhood I had to actually hit someone who threatened me or positioned himself as if he would in order to end at least two years of harassment, including destruction and theft of my personal property while travelling to and from school. The actual punch that like a miracle sent some invisible wave throughout the scholastic environment was a panic reaction, a thrust to the face of the boy who once had been a playmate and for some only years later explicable reason had converted to lead tormenter.*

Although I grew up in a semi-military household, everyone on my father's side had served in the armed forces, while no one on my mother's side had, the military as regular and pernicious institutional violence was not present in my youth. We did not play "cowboys and Indians" in the fifth grade. Instead we imagined World War 2 battlefields. As I recall our sandpits resembled most the campaign waged in Italy after Anzio. My classmates had plastic rifles or machine guns with the advantage that they could make noise. I was armed with a wooden training rifle in the shape of the bolt action Springfield issued to US soldiers in the Great War. On one hand I was sorry that the only noise it made was a click when the bolt was drawn or the trigger pulled. Yet it had been used to drill ordinary soldiers and hence it was more realistic than all the other guns in our war games. In retrospect I find minor consolation that I did not wholly absorb the domestic enemy images in Western films. Nor did I ever acquire the fondness for violence which makes armed service so natural for many. These were games and not real life.

Throughout my life I have known soldiers and others engaged in warfare, mainly those serving either in the Forces of the United States or Her Britannic Majesty. Yet I have been spared the personal participation in war. Unlike many of my classmates whose military interest was technological—they liked guns—my interest the military as an organization. I began very early to read military history and the classics of military science. Strategy,

tactics, and logistics are above all organizational matters. Even if there were not a single rifle or warship employed, the military organisation remains distinctive, a particular way of getting work done.

On 9 May the Russian Federation, as the successor to the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic, the largest and core constituent entity in the defunct Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, celebrated the defeat of the Western fascist invasion spearheaded by the German Wehrmacht under the codename *Unternehmen (Operation) Barbarossa*.

The Second World War is called in the former Soviet Union the Great Patriotic War (*Velikya Otechestvennaya voyna*).

I can recall the years when condescending aspersions were cast on occasion of the military parades in Moscow on 1 and 9 May. These parades were always presented as evidence of Soviet aggressive intent.

*Trooping of the Colour* and the armaments and martial display in Paris on Bastille Day (14 July) were never subjected to such derision, despite the continued foreign wars in which both Britain and France were (and are engaged).

National holidays in countries that fought for their independence or safety might be forgiven for celebrating the forces with which those goals were attained. However 4 July commemorates the UDI and not the battles to be fought.

*Trooping the Colour* is celebration of the British monarch's birthday by means of a loyal display of close order massed formation of the regiments responsible for defending the monarchy, not Britain, from invasion. The Guards uniforms and massed bands add to the pageantry at Horse Guards Parade, Whitehall. However the archaic drill formations are not decorative. They are a living example of 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century infantry tactics for producing massed firepower from single shot muskets and rifles. Anyone with some knowledge of French history would find the parade down the Champs Elysées on 14 July incongruent with the storming of the prison by which the start of the French Revolution is remembered. After ignominy in the Great War and the surrender to fascism in June 1940, the ruling class, represented by a banker of 172 cm (while the emperor of the French was only 157 cm tall), can lay no serious claims to heroism in defence of the nation. Presidential celebration of the Jour de Bastille is essentially a commercial display for the French armaments industry, in tough competition with its Western allies.

Pacifism is a personal choice, like so many ethical decisions made by individuals, to be respected.

Perhaps there is a potential message for millions that conflict resolution or interest imposition must not necessarily require force of arms. However like vegetarianism and veganism, pacifism relies on simplifications of the world that are just as problematic as those simplifications that dictate force of arms as the pure means of resolving conflicts. If the purpose of conflict resolution is to prove one side to be right and the other wrong, then war is inevitable. There is no way to prove the ideas of someone else absolutely wrong unless one is prepared to exterminate all those who hold those ideas. Conflict resolution cannot be based on proving who is right and who is wrong—even if in our hearts we believe we know this. Instead of proof of right or wrong—although wartime slogans are usually

stated in platitudes and absolutes—conflict, even armed conflict aims to produce terms which both combatants can agree are sufficient to end hostilities.

The primitive propaganda of the NATO members, jointly and severally, has consistently argued that there is an absolute solution to end the war and that is to comply with the dictates of the West in NATO assembled. Pursuant to this unilateralism the Russian Federation, portrayed as the aggressor and hence in the wrong, is alleged to have the same absolute aims that the West in NATO assembled proclaims. Merely asserting this does not make it so—except in the minds of the other enemy NATO has pursued since 2001. This war in Ukraine, designated a special military operation by the Russian Federation and as a war for Ukrainian liberation from Russia in the West, is simultaneously a war against the ordinary inhabitants of the West, with a focus on the frontline sacrifice along the point of contact, stretches of the former NATO – Warsaw Pact border.

Watching the military parades in Russia and China it is tempting to see them as large scale militarist exhibitions. The serried ranks parading past the review stand in Moscow or Beijing cannot help but impress in terms of drilled precision. The strong presence of women, wearing skirts not trousers, conveys the image of an entire population under arms—if only because of the numbers in China. Casual Western observers and insincere critics alike are inclined to see such massive marching formations as incompatible with peace. I can even hear the sceptical remarks that such enormous displays prove that the Russians and Chinese are at least as belligerent as the armed forces in NATO. It is easy to wish that Russia or China, if they really wanted peace, would not so flagrantly display their military resources. Regular presence of US Armed Forces in all manner of sporting events with mass audience appeal is treated as routine with no ideological significance for countries beyond its borders.

Parades and all forms of pageantry are political events—even if promoted as entertainment. It is childish, ignorant or mendacious to attribute political motives to the parades of another country, one's enemy, while pretending that one's own country has no political motives for marching on holidays. It is necessary to ask what the motives of an event are and to consider them in historical context. Simply asserting that the bigger the military parade the more militaristic the parading is insufficient.

Long ago the so-called Western allies, Britain and the United States (for most of the war France was occupied by Germany or governed by an explicitly fascist regime in Vichy), were barely engaged in war against the Hitler regime in Germany. Despite claims to the contrary, the facts show that the Anglo-American alliance (essentially a Rhodes-Round Table compact made without the populations of either country) were on the side of anyone who would wage war against the Soviet Union. US ambassador to Moscow, Joseph Davies, was convinced that France and Britain were on the side of Hitler in preparing war against the USSR. So this conclusion as it applied until 1944 was no historical revision. It was in plain sight. The US was neutral until 1941 and Britain had nothing to say in the matter except to make money and avoid outright losses in its imperial corridors.

Although Vladimir Putin essentially repudiated the Soviet Union he was very clear in his speech this year that the military assembled were the descendants of the heroic men and women who defeated Nazism and the West's second major invasion of the Russian heartland.

Their parents and grandparents sacrificed more than their lives to stop German militarism

and its allies from destroying what the citizens of the Soviet Union had produced. They can claim the legacy of great armies of liberation in the hell poured over them since the October Revolution.

The People's Liberation Army, the descendants of the Eight Route Army and other Chinese revolutionary formations, not only defeated the Japanese and united a country torn by foreign invasion, exploitation and civil war. The PLA formed the basis for China's mobilisation to become the modern industrialised country it is now. When huge divisions parade before the reviewing stand in Beijing, they are celebrating the accomplishments of the fastest and largest poverty reduction in human history for which the PLA's organisational skills, bureaucratic structures and accumulated industrial know-how was essential.

Unlike the parades in Paris or London, trade shows for the parasitic weapons industry of revanchist France and monarchist Britain, the uniformed and armed or unarmed servants of the Russian and Chinese states can justly claim to honor the peoples their recent forefathers and mothers fought and died to defend and develop. One needs only look at the percentages of the war budgets of Russia and China and compare them to what prevails in NATO to see that military is not automatically militarism.

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