



# **GPN** GENOCIDE PREVENTION NOW

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## **What If: Obama and Biden against Hitler, or....Chamberlain and Halifax against Ahmadinejad?**

GPN Original

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Photo: Guy Assayag, for Calcalist

*The parallels to the run-up to WWII are striking. During this period, Hitler bullied and bluffed as the world cringed. Suppose Obama and Biden had been in power in the US at the time. What would they have done?*

As Ahmadinejad struts into the UN Non-Proliferation Treaty meeting, Obama and his Administration continue to dither. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards are racing towards nuclear capacity and ever more potent missile delivery systems, stepping up their genocidal incitement and support for terror proxies, and suppressing dissidents. Obama's clenched fist has withered into a limp wrist.

The parallels to the run-up to WWII are striking. During this period, Hitler bullied and bluffed as the world cringed. There was the Anschluss of Austria in March 1938, the Munich Agreement in Sept 1938, and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on Aug 23 1939, one week before Hitler invaded Poland and Chamberlain's UK declared war.

Let's do a little counterfactual history to examine the roles of yesterday's appeasers and today's engagers. Then the actors were Neville Chamberlain and Lord Halifax, who were pitted against Hitler and his Axis. Today they are Barack Obama and Joseph Biden, his all influential Vice President, and formerly the powerful chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Today's Hitler wannabe is Ahmadinejad, along with his Axis of Genocide and Genocidal Terror.

### **Fact and counterfact**

Counterfactual history is the academic buzz term for playing "what if."

The idea is to simulate how the big players in past crises would act in current crises, or conversely, to simulate how players in current crises would have -- or should have -- acted in past crises. Because we know the results of decisions in past crises, we can make some educated guesses about the results of such decisions in similar crises today. Counterfactual history implies there are lessons from yesterday's then and there to today's here and now ---, and vice versa. As a medical doctor with history as a hobby, I think it would be interesting if historians were to diagnose, prognose, prescribe, make house calls, and tell us when our leaders could be sued for malpractice.

### **Hitler and Ahmadinejad:**

Both Hitler and Ahmadinejad mobilized hate language to dehumanize, demonize and delegitimize. A copy of Mein Kampf in Iranian is the centerpiece of the show window in the bookstore alongside the entrance of Iran's Foreign Ministry, but Ahmadinejad's explicit calls for destruction of Israel surpass Hitler's euphemisms. Hitler annexed Austria, forged alliances with Italy and Japan, and then signed the notorious non-aggression pact with Russia, while discreetly supporting indigenous Nazi front movements in Norway, the Netherlands and France. Ahmadinejad's diplomats have shrewdly built an axis of genocidal and genocidal terror, which now includes Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas, with Venezuela as a possible enabler, protector and accomplices, and they are drawing Turkey into Iran's orbit. Ahmadinejad, like Hitler, disarms appeasers and doubters, by making eloquent and moving peace speeches every now and then--while intimidating the world.

In the meantime, the clock on Iran is ticking. (Today the two big US players are Barack Obama and Joe Biden, now as powerful as Cheney was in Bush Jr's first term.)

### **Obama and Chamberlain**

Google gives more than 600,000 hits for the phrase "Obama and Chamberlain." Obama sees himself as a mediator healing the rift between clashing civilizations--Christian and Muslim; Chamberlain saw himself as saving the world from war. Like Chamberlain, he has been socially progressive, humane and enlightened, but does not support groups subject to conquest, (Tibet), and projects a low profile towards human rights abuses of repressive regimes (the state orchestrated political starvation campaigns in North Korea and the repression of the Falun Gong in China, and the protestors of a stolen election in Iran). Some historians say he appeased to buy time for a weak England to get ready. He has backed away from supporting dissidents in Iran---e.g., his famously closing the New Haven Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. I would not be surprised to discover that he sees himself as a future Secretary General of the UN, as the Grand Conciliator.

Obama's administration has even turned a blind eye to Iran's support, equipping and training of groups attacking civilians and US soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This prolonged dithering in response to loss of American lives goes far beyond Chamberlain's appeasement, which abruptly came to an end on Sept 1 1939, when Nazi Germany attacked Poland, a faraway place for Brits. Chamberlain then declared war on Germany--to honor the UK's treaty with Poland. Would Obama have done so, had he been the UK's Prime Minister, and if so how long it would have taken him to decide?

We have forgotten Chamberlain's progressive domestic policies, but remember his appeasement and its disastrous consequences. But Chamberlain was a faster learner than Obama has been until now. Right after returning from Munich, he ordered increases in the British defense budget, manufacture of aircraft and heavy weaponry, and distribution of gas masks to the population for the war he knew was coming. And after all, he went to war immediately in response to Hitler's invasion of Poland. This was the very war which appeasement sought to avoid, but in fact brought on. By contrast, Obama's dithering has bought time for an originally weak Iran to raise the ante against the U.S.



### **Biden and Halifax**

Many know about Chamberlain, but few remember Lord Halifax, his Foreign Secretary, and perhaps the strongest proponent of appeasement. Halifax was a pillar of British society and a deacon in the Anglican Church. After replacing Anthony Eden, who resigned in February 1938 in protest against Chamberlain's appeasement, he supported the Munich Agreement with Hitler to destroy Czechoslovakia. Halifax also meddled in French politics, toppling Leon Blum, who had his doubts about appeasement. Daladier, Blum's replacement, was a more complaint type, who went along with Chamberlain's Munich deal.. During the 5 days of Dunkirk, when Hitler was sending out generous peace feelers, Halifax wanted to take England out of the war.

Just before Dunkirk, after backbenchers led a rebellion to force Chamberlain to resign, there was a touch-and-go period in which Halifax could have become Prime Minister instead of Churchill. Had he been the man, one shudders to think what would have happened to Europe, and Western Civilization. Thanks to Churchill, all the rest is history.

Is Joseph Biden today's Lord Halifax as it were? A liberal Democrat on domestic issues when in the Senate, as the powerful Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, he voted against sanctions against Iran. Most notably, he blocked the Senate from considering a 2007 House of Representatives Resolution calling upon the US Government to use the tools of international law to indict Ahmadinejad for his incitement to genocide, support for terror, and illegal development of nuclear weapons. He has called for dividing up Iraq, which would have turned over its western side to Syria and its eastern side to Iran. Biden is said to be the Iranian Mullah's favorite senator. He has been silent on their brutal repression of dissidents.

What would Chamberlain and Halifax have done to confront the Iranian threat? They probably would have appeased. What would Obama and Biden have done against the Nazi threat had they been in charge of the UK? They might have engaged, endorsed the Munich agreement, and wobbled on the UK treaty to join Poland when Germany attacked it. Would Biden, had he been in the US Senate in the dark days of the Battle of Britain, have advised FDR, to go along with Joe Kennedy to abandon the UK?

Joe Biden's influence may be one reason why President Obama's clenched fist has withered into a limp wrist. JB Kelley has used the term "preemptive cringe" to describe "engagement." In fairness to Chamberlain and Halifax, some historians say their appeasement during the mid 1930's right up to Sept 1939 and even after, was based on a realistic perception of the UK's military weakness and unpreparedness and the need to buy time.

Furthermore, the world then lacked a coherent body of historical experience on the furious evil energy which drives modern megalomaniac totalitarian genocidal regimes. The tools of international law to counter genocidal threats did not exist yet. There was no UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, or a body of cases in criminal international law, Universal Jurisdiction, or a Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court specifying that incitement to genocide is a crime against humanity.

Today, Obama and Biden would be expected to know what happens when such regimes are appeased, a.k.a. engaged. Yet the two have been distinguished by their failure so far to make use of the tools of international law against genocide and its incitement. The world developed these tools precisely to prevent such threats. There can be no more compelling case for applying these tools than Iran's incitement to genocide, its support of genocidal terror and its suppression of human rights. Since incitement to genocide leads to genocide, Obama and Biden's indifference to the dehumanizing hate language of Ahmadinejad and his associates means they have become complicit bystanders.

I suggest that the foregoing counterfactual comparisons suggest a harsh counterintuitive conclusion: Obama and Biden deserve lower ratings than Chamberlain and Halifax.



### **What if: The bit players**

Others have bit roles in this exercise in What If's. William Shirer, in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* writes about how Geoffrey Dawson, the editor in chief of the *London Times*, killed reports from his correspondent in Berlin on the Nazi brutality inside Germany. He was protecting Chamberlain's appeasement policies. I was reminded of Dawson's role by the postures of the editors of the *NY Times* in US and *Haaretz* in Israel, both the *Daily Bibles* of the liberal classes. Recall the *NY Times* Roger Cohen's description of the vibrancy of Islamic democracy in his pre-election reports on Iran just before the regime's brutal crackdown on dissidents. David Landau, the former editor of *Haaretz*, suppressed reports of the investigation of Sharon's corruption so as to not to jeopardize the withdrawal from Gaza. He remains notorious for telling Condoleezza Rice that Israel needed to be raped for its own good.

Let's get back to Anthony Eden, who quit in protest against Chamberlain's appeasement. Is Robert Gates trying to play Obama's Eden? As John Bolton has pointed out on *Fox News*, Gates' leaked memo to Obama warning that the US government has no Iran policy is the classic Washington DC CYA maneuver for paving the way for a resignation.

### **Is there a Churchill in the House?**

Churchill towers over all, but only in hindsight. In real time, he was regarded by his peers as a failed military strategist after the Dardanelles disaster in World War I. A political opportunist who ditched the Liberals for the Conservatives, he had been on the outs for some 20 years, having the reputation of a brilliant, witty, boozing loose cannon. A non-apologetic imperialist, he was hated by Indians for calling Gandhi a dirty little Indian. An opponent of the socialists, he was hated by trade unionists for crushing the strike of coal workers. But he instinctively sized up Hitler as a monster of apocalyptic evil.



As the genocide scholar Robert Melson has written, had Churchill been Prime Minister in 1938, he might have gone to war to protect Czechoslovakia, and perhaps would have toppled Hitler. But thousands of British soldiers would have been killed.<sup>1</sup> He would have been hauled before a Parliamentary Commission of Investigation, and hounded out of office. Opponents would have said he had no business pursuing a reckless military adventure so far away from home.

Suppose Obama and Biden had been in power in the US at the time. Would they have distanced themselves from Churchill? There were plenty of reasons to do so. The US had not recovered from the effects of the Depression's second hit in 1937. Anti-Semitism was endemic. The US population was isolationist. Would Obama and Biden have orchestrated some backchannel moves to topple Churchill, perhaps with the help of Joe Kennedy. I infer this "what if" scenario from their failure to counter Iranian terror raids in Iraq, Syrian support for terror, their lukewarm support for the dissidents in Iran, their shutting off of funding for the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, and the cold reception for the Dalai Lama. Add to this list the appeasement of Syria as well as Iran, the wobbliness on North Korea, and their attempts to bludgeon Netanyahu and destabilize his government.

Today's Joe Kennedy could be Martin Indyk. And John Bolton may be today's John Kennedy, who later wrote the book, *Why England Slept*.

Back then, the air was thick with appeasement, Now it is thick with engagement. But appeasement produced a chain reaction, ending with the Molotov Ribbentrop Pact, after Stalin panicked, and felt that the Western allies would do nothing if Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. Churchill would have thundered against the dangers of the United States pandering to the enemies of freedom and democracy and dumping its friends.

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#### Reference Notes

<sup>1</sup> Melson, Robert (2008). Churchill in Munich: The paradox of genocide prevention. *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, 3(3), 297-308.