



Pat Buchanan on Winston Churchill
Guest: Pat Buchanan
May 7, 2014

Pat Buchanan has been a senior advisor to three presidents, a two-time candidate for the Republican presidential nomination—he won the New Hampshire primary in 1996—and was the presidential nominee of the Reform Party in 2000. He has been a staple on American television for decades. He is the author of ten books, including six consecutive New York Times bestsellers, among them [Churchill, Hitler, and the Unnecessary War: How Britain Lost Its Empire and the West Lost the World](#).

WOODS: Pat, there was a poll done in 2002, conducted by the BBC. They polled a million people and Churchill was chosen as the greatest Briton of all time. So you've got quite a long row to hoe here, Pat, in being a Churchill skeptic. What is it that is attractive to people about Churchill? It basically boils down to 1940, doesn't it?

BUCHANAN: I think it boils down to 1940 and Churchill's role as an inspirational war leader at the time. The British were being thrown off the continent at Dunkirk, and you had the Battle of Britain with the British Spitfires against the Luftwaffe, and it was a great and historic moment. And Churchill was an inspirational leader undeniably, and as that kind of war leader I think he was certainly, I think, peerless in World War II. But the problem with what Winston's Churchill's legacy is, if you take his career from going into the First Lord of the Admiralty in 1911 to leaving as Prime Minister in 1945, that encompasses basically the bankruptcy and the breaking of Great Britain and the collapse of the British Empire, to which, Winston Churchill contributed more than any other man.

WOODS: What is it about Churchill that the neoconservatives are especially attracted to? From what we can see in that poll, everybody more or less admires Churchill. Like it or not, they all admire him. But the neocons are especially insistent on the Churchill cult, if we might call it that. Why is that?

BUCHANAN: I think that goes back to 1940, but it goes back before then. They believed that Churchill was the great, far-sighted leader who saw Hitler as a great menace earlier than anyone else and who predicted his rise, and who spoke out against him when others did not, and who stood up against the Munich deal, and who led Great Britain against Nazi Germany, which the neoconservatives consider the great, monstrous evil of all time and him the one farsighted leader who saw this. And I think if you read the neocons consistently, you will find they keep going back to the Munich conference, to the Sudetenland, to the sellout of Czechoslovakia, and Churchill is the one man who stood against it. That is really the moment in their lives of the last century that was most critical, and so I think that's one of the major reasons they stick with Churchill. Even though if you look at the sweep of his entire career, it was a thoroughgoing disaster for the British Empire.

WOODS: But from the point of view of twentieth-century history and totalitarianism, couldn't one say, though, playing devil's advocate against you, that the fact that Churchill's decisions led ultimately to the downfall of the Nazis, the fact that he refused to take a negotiated peace, that he doggedly insisted on carrying on the war, that in turn led Hitler to engage in the invasion of the Soviet Union, as you argue in your book, to knock out the Soviets as a way of really isolating the British and bringing them to heel. The Soviet invasion led to the downfall of Hitler, as it turned out, so all these decisions made by Churchill led to the downfall of the Nazis. So no matter what you can bring against him, wouldn't you say that that was nevertheless a life well lived? What could possibly be in the debit column if bringing the Nazis down is in his credit?

BUCHANAN: Well, what did Churchill want to go to war for? First, he wanted to go to war for Czechoslovakia, to maintain that ramshackle state that had been set up at Versailles. Second, he thought they should go to war on behalf of Danzig and the Polish Corridor and against Nazi Germany for that. How did Czechoslovakia wind up? How did Poland wind up? The Poles lost somewhere between five and six million people in the war and ended up in the maw of Joseph Stalin, a man far more evil, even from the beginning, than even was Adolf Hitler, who killed many more millions than Adolf Hitler ever killed. The consequence of Churchill's desire to get into a war with Germany and to bring down Nazi Germany at all costs was a success. He did help bring down Germany. His resistance and refusal to negotiate in 1940 to 1941 led Hitler to attack Great Britain, and then he declared war on the United States. So it brought Hitler down, and it brought Great Britain down, which was on food stamps in 1945, living off the Americans. It brought the British Empire down. It led to the death of 100 million people in central and eastern Europe, and indeed, many in western Europe, the complete destruction of Germany, and the fact that Stalin and the

Americans, who pushed the British aside, then ruled the world. Now if that's your great goal, that we're going to bring down Hitler even if we bring down everything else, I mean, that's the so-called Samson Option.

WOODS: Let me read to you, Pat, a couple of passages from your own book. These are quotations from Churchill. This is Churchill in 1942 speaking about Stalin. He says, "This great, rugged war chief. He is a man of massive, outstanding personality suited to the somber and stormy times in which his life has been cast, a man of inexhaustible courage and willpower, and a man of direct and even blunt speech. Above all he's a man with that saving sense of humor which is of high importance to all men and all nations"—he's a funny guy, that Stalin—"but particularly to great men and great nations. Stalin left upon me the impression of a deep, cool wisdom and a complete absence of illusions of any kind."

I can't resist, Pat; I've got to read a couple more. This is 1944. This is Churchill addressing the House of Commons. "Profound changes have taken place in Soviet Russia. The Trotskyite form of communism has been completely wiped out. The religious side of Russian life has had a wonderful rebirth." And then finally at Yalta: "It is no exaggeration or compliment of a florid kind when I say that we regard Marshall Stalin's life as most precious to the hopes and hearts of all of us. I walk through this world with greater courage and hope when I find myself in a relation of friendship and intimacy with this great man whose fame has gone out not only over all Russia, but the world."

Now two comments, Pat, then I am going to turn it over to you. The first one is, the statement about the religious side of Russian life puts me in mind of an old story from Joe Sobran, who said that he was on a tour of Soviet Russia, and he was being taken around in a tour bus, and they were pointing out all the beautiful churches in Russia. And he said, "How many of those have been built since 1917?" And of course, dead silence was the answer. The other point is, couldn't you say, all right, well, this is understandable. These sorts of statements are over the top, but they are the sorts of things that you say in diplomatic situations.

BUCHANAN: Well, the second part of what you say, there's some truth to it, but when you come back and make these statements that he had to know were utterly false. No one had written better or spoken better on Soviet Bolshevism in 1919 and 1920 than Winston Churchill. I mean, he talked to them in excoriating terms, what a dreadful bunch they all were. He knew this. And then to come back and to mislead his countrymen and speak in terms about Stalin, where Neville Chamberlain never spoke in those kinds of glowing terms about Adolf Hitler. He merely had come home and foolishly said, it is peace for our time. I had his signature on this paper. And he's one of the great fools of history, we are told. How then can they defend Churchill? I can understand when you're sitting there in Yalta as he was—I mean, I have been in Beijing writing posts about Mao Tse Tung for Richard Nixon which would make you throw up, but that's what you do on these diplomatic tours. But when you come home, you don't make statements like that, which are utterly deceptive to your own people, about what is happening not only in Russia but in eastern

Europe as Stalin is winning this war. And you go back, Tom, and look at what Churchill did. He snuck into Moscow with what he called his naughty document, and he there decided basically to cede to Stalin Romania, Bulgaria, 50 percent of Yugoslavia and Greece. We British get 90/10. You get the 10. And then you found him a year later or two years later out there in Missouri saying an Iron Curtain has fallen across Europe. The Iron Curtain was exactly where he and Stalin were deciding it should fall.

WOODS: You wrote in your book, “Churchill’s concessions at Moscow were far worse than Chamberlain’s at Munich.”

BUCHANAN: Exactly. I mean, what could Chamberlain concede at Munich? The Sudetenland, the Sudetenlanders who had been taken away from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and put under Czech rule against their will and against the promises of Wilson and against the right of self-determination, wanted to go back to the German rule. By then Hitler had taken over Austria, but they wanted to go back to the rule of Germans, and what was Chamberlain supposed to do? We’re going to fight another world war against Germany and once we win the war against Germany, we’re going to put these Germans back under Czech rule? There was no cause for which the British should have gone to war, in my judgment. That doesn’t exonerate Chamberlain from how he handled it, but that was basically Chamberlain acceding to the inevitable and accepting the inevitable and letting people leave Czechoslovakia to go where they wanted. Listen to the Poles who fought alongside the British. They didn’t want to be under Josef Stalin’s rule. They resisted it. They had fought Stalin’s regime in 1920. So what Churchill did was infinitely worse than what Chamberlain did at Munich.

WOODS: Pat, tell us about the Morgenthau Plan and what Churchill’s views on it were.

BUCHANAN: The Morgenthau Plan was devised by Henry Morgenthau, who was the Secretary of Treasury under FDR and whose first deputy was Harry Dexter White, who was a Soviet spy. The Morgenthau Plan was designed at the end of the war to deindustrialize Germany and turn it into a pastoral country, which would have meant the death of millions of Germans. This was presented to Stalin at Quebec, at the conference in Quebec, and Churchill resisted. Then it was pushed upon him, and he tried to impose it upon his own government, and he got behind this plan, which would have been one of the monstrous war crimes of all time, somewhat along the lines of what Stalin did in the Ukraine, and Winston Churchill got behind it. Fortunately, it was leaked to the American press late in the war, and I can remember as a kid my father talking about the Morgenthau Plan—what an outrageous, and horrible, and un-American thing this was, and of course, FDR, as expected, ran away from it. But Churchill had come out for it. It was appalling.

WOODS: Now that puts me in mind, anyway, of what wound up happening to some of the Germans after the war

who had to be relocated in order for the various territorial concessions to work. You wound up having, what, two million dead Germans? I think most people don't know anything about that.

BUCHANAN: It was something like at the end of the war because of the way Churchill—Churchill was the one who sat down at Yalta and showed Stalin how they were going to move Poland to the west by ceding the sections of Poland that Stalin had seized in concert with Hitler. He would keep those, and then Poland would be rewarded with German territory. What happened was the Germans of Pomerania, and the Germans of East Prussia, and the Germans of the Sudetenland, all of these people were driven like cattle out of lands on which they had lived for centuries, their families had, and in this mass exodus there were rapes and murders and people dying of starvation and people dying of various things. Something like 13 to 15 million Germans, by final count, were ethnically cleansed from lands on which they had lived their entire lives and their families had lived, and they were pushed over into West Germany and into East Germany. Germany was reduced in size and parts of it were simply annexed. Take a look at what they call Kaliningrad now. That is Königsberg, the home of Immanuel Kant! And now the Russians have renamed it. It's a little slice between Poland and Lithuania that they've gotten, but all the Germans were driven out of these places. This is a monstrous war crime.

WOODS: I am reading right here from your book a statement by Solzhenitsyn, who has more moral authority than all of these politicians put together. This is in the context of Briton's treatment of the Cossacks. He says, "In their own countries, FDR and Churchill are honored as embodiments of statesmanlike wisdom. To us in our Russian prison conversations, their consistent short-sightedness and stupidity stood out as astonishingly obvious." Comment?

BUCHANAN: Well, it's not only obvious, it's worse than that. With regard to the Cossacks, what Truman agreed to—Operation Orange, and there's another name for that operation, whereby all Russian prisoners of war were sent back to the Soviet Union to Stalin. You can imagine what happened to them—several million. The famous Vlasov's army, a general Vlasov who was a Russian commander had been captured, and he agreed to lead units in battle against Stalin's army. He was sent back and hanged I believe in 1946, but millions of these POWs were sent back. But the terrible tragedy was Cossacks and others were sent back who had not fought against the Russian army, and who had simply fled after the Red/White Civil War in Russia from about 1919 to 1922. They had fled, and they and their families were sent back. I think it was William Sloan Coffin was a soldier during the war—you would have to check this—and he was one of those in charge of putting these Russian prisoners on these trains, and he said they would smash their heads through the window and rub their throats on the broken glass to kill themselves before they got back to Russia—and Keelhaul was the name of it—Operation Keelhaul. Folks should read that. And these Russians were all sent back, and I am sure they were not just Russians because the Soviet Union, they were I'm sure Ukrainians and Belorussians and others who were in the Red Army who were all sent back to Stalin and to death,

and this is something which Truman signed on to as did Winston Churchill.

WOODS: You know, Pat, a historian you and I like, probably with some reservations, is Paul Johnson. I think he has some neoconservative inclinations, but even he, looking on the war years, doubtless has some sympathy for Churchill, but is appalled at the decision to bomb civilian centers. Who really started that practice?

BUCHANAN: Well, it was the great man himself, Winston Churchill. By my recollection, the Germans went into Denmark and Norway, and this was one of Churchill's follies: apparently Churchill had blabbed that he was going to move ships into northern Norway and go across Sweden and then help the Finns. And Word got to Hitler and Hitler sent Admiral Raeder, and he got there 24 hours before the British. So he captured Norway. And then I believe it was April 10th, the German army came west, and it was April 11th, I believe, that Churchill ordered bombing cities in Westphalia. It was the first bombing of cities undertaken in World War II. FDR had said, let's hope to the Lord we don't have bombing of cities, when the war began. And Churchill began that, and he got a warning from Hitler about this, and he continued to bomb and bomb, and he said, "This is the only way once you're thrown off the continent—the only way we can punish the Germans is by bombing their cities. We can't reach their armies, and we can't get back across the Channel. We can't get into Norway. But we can bomb their cities." And Churchill began the systematic bombing of cities, and Coventry and London were retaliations for what Winston Churchill himself had begun. And of course, if you read about Dresden, he was the one responsible for that unnecessary massacre.

WOODS: Looking at the broad sweep of twentieth-century history, what would have happened if there had been no British war guarantee to Poland? I realize that this brings in the entire thesis of what is quite a substantial book. But I think you probably can give us the—

BUCHANAN: Yeah, I know what you mean.

WOODS: Yeah, so what's the *Reader's Digest* answer to that?

BUCHANAN: All right, my belief is this, and I think it's valid. When Hitler came to power, he was determined to bring the Germans back under German rule that had been moved away from them in Versailles. He unified with Austria, he got the Sudeten Germans back, he got the Germans back in Memel up in Lithuania, and he wanted to bring the Germans back in Danzig. He never wanted war with Great Britain. He admired the British, the British Empire. He saw the world as four great powers: the Americans in the Western hemisphere, the British Empire, Germany, and Japan. He was anti-Bolshevik to the core, and of course he was viciously anti-Semitic. But what he wanted—take a look at the record of Hitler. He never demanded the return of Alsace-Lorraine, which had been taken away from Germany at the end of World War I. He never demanded the return of South Tyrol, which had been given to Italy and

taken from his own country, Austria. He never demanded the return of Eupen and Malmedy in Belgium or of the parts of Denmark which had gone to Denmark after a plebiscite. He was moving eastward.

You read his statements. He said, you know, we turned away from our policy toward the West, and we turned to the East. I think that if Great Britain and France had not given the war guarantee to Poland, and Hitler had gotten into a war with Poland, what the British should have done is send their troops to France, get behind the Maginot line, and tell Hitler if you cross this red line, we are at war. I don't believe he would ever have crossed it. There was nothing he wanted in the West. When he won France, he went there, spent three days, went back home. He never demanded the French fleet. He never demanded to take control of Syria, where he could have attacked the Suez Canal. He wanted to end the war with the British, whom he admired, and he—I've reread parts of my book, and he said, if they just give me back one or two of my colonies, in other words, to show that I have done a victorious thing here, I'm willing to end this war. He desperately did not want to go to war with the British. He wanted to end the war with the British. It was Churchill who was determined not to end the war with Germany and to keep it going until Russia and/or the United States came in. And they finished off Germany and Churchill won that battle, and Hitler went down and Germany went down in flames and ashes, and the British Empire went down and Churchill won the game. What did he get?

WOODS: Well, Pat, of course, the final question that would be on everybody's mind after all this—of course, we've focused primarily on just one chapter of your book *Churchill, Hitler, and the Unnecessary War*, the Churchill chapter. But people want to know what about what happened to the Jews. At least certainly by wiping out the Nazis, many, many Jewish lives were saved is the conventional wisdom, and you dissent from that.

BUCHANAN: When did the Holocaust begin? There are two different views. One is it began when Hitler invaded Russia, and the Einsatzgruppen followed the German army in, and they were initially killing, as I understand it, the commissars of the Soviet Union and the Red Army, many of whom were Jewish. Others say that the Einsatzgruppen were even killing civilians. So let's say the Holocaust began in late June of 1941, and then the Wannsee Conference where the trains started moving after that. That was held in late January of 1942. Now, let's suppose that Hitler had gone in to Poland and taken it himself or split it with Stalin, and Great Britain says, well, we couldn't help them, and so we're going to end the war now. There is no Holocaust, because the Holocaust did not begin until over a year later. Why would Hitler go about putting Jews on trains to work and work camps and things like that if he was not at war? I mean, this is my view. The whole Second World War could have been stopped, I think, if Great Britain had said we've done our best: we fought in France, we've lost, we've won the Battle of Britain, and we will not give up a single possession, but we will have a truce or an armistice with the Germans. I think that would have been the end of the war. Why would Hitler have started another war? And if he did, where was he going to go?

WOODS: Pat, when you wrote this book, I think it was a time when everyone would not have begrudged you a quiet retirement. You've written and said a lot of controversial things over the years. You've taken a lot of unjustified abuse over the years. You could have just written your column and had that be that. But something compelled you to take on one of the sacrest of sacred cows in the whole world, which is the subject of this war and of Churchill in particular. I just want to know, as a parting note, what made you do it?

BUCHANAN: Well, fundamentally, I think World War I and World War II will be seen as the death blows of Western civilization. I think from 1914, I would say, to 1945, Western civilization, part of it had been torn away or had gone heretical in Russia and Germany. Western civilization fundamentally destroyed itself, and I don't think it's going to survive it. You take a look at the demographic trends and everything, and so you ask yourself, how in heaven's name did this happen and was this avoidable?

Now, let me say this: on World War I and Versailles, I think the views I have presented in there and even on Great Britain getting into the war, they are now far less controversial than they were. Many people accept that Hitler—as Lady Astor said, asked where Hitler was born, she said, “Versailles.” So you go back into before World War I, it was the British Empire that brought everybody in to make it a world war, and then you go to World War II, and you see all the death and destruction. Everybody agrees Hitler is a monster and an evil person and Stalin is a monster and an evil person. But were these wars necessary? Even Winston Churchill, the title *The Unnecessary War*, that came from Churchill. He told FDR as soon as he came over when Americans got into the war, “We ought to call this the unnecessary war,” and so I wanted to find out to my best satisfaction were the wars avoidable, who made the mistakes, who made the blunders, or is the conventional wisdom true that Chamberlain was responsible for it all. And what I came to the conclusion is, Churchill was in many ways a great man with gifts beyond many other men of that century or any century, but as someone said, “Great men are rarely good men,” and I think Winston Churchill is the prime culprit in the decline and fall of the British Empire. And I think he's the principal actor in having brought Great Britain into two unnecessary wars against Germany. People forget: the Germans never declared war on Great Britain. Britain declared war on Germany twice.

WOODS: Pat, as I close, I want to just let you know I have a lot of libertarian—

BUCHANAN: Will you speak at my funeral?

WOODS: That's right. (laughs) Well, I have a lot of libertarian listeners, and one of the great economic historians we have is a guy named Robert Higgs. You may be familiar with his work. He just praises this book of yours to the skies. He says that the judgments in here are sober and judicious. They are based on very wide reading. He can find nothing to quibble with in this book. It lays out the thesis very, very provocatively, but persuasively. I would also add

that most official libertarians who are located in D.C. or who run magazines will run completely in the other direction when this subject comes up. But you combine them all, roll them up into a ball, and put them to the side, and their opinion isn't worth the one opinion of Bob Higgs. So I want to urge people to check out this book. The ideas in here are ones that people have got to be familiar with. We didn't even get to the military strategy issue; we think of Churchill as a great military strategist. We didn't get to that, or his views on race, which were extreme even by the standards of his day.

BUCHANAN: There's no question about, I mean, the views on race. They are extreme by the standards of today. But I will say this, I have read—I must, I have got right behind me something like 120 volumes, and I would say most, 80 or so, deal with the British role in the two world wars, and these views in this book are not unique to me. They come out of British writers and authors I respect. Men like A. J. P. Taylor on the naval agreement. Paul Johnson agrees with me. Arthur Herman agrees with me. There are American historians and British historians. There's no doubt when you—once you move into the pre-World War II there is a set belief. The court historians, if you will, have prevailed. But even there, I was invited over on the 70th anniversary of 1939 to debate in London. Then they had to move it to a larger theater, and there was 1,800 people. We started out with 10 to 1 voted against me, but by the end it was only 7 to 1.

WOODS: Ah, that's not bad!

BUCHANAN: No, but I think people are now open. People are asking themselves how in heaven's name could tough, intelligent men and empires and statesmen go into one after another of these cataclysms the outcome of which—even if you got Hitler dead in his bunker, for heaven's sake somebody could have shot him and ended this thing. Did 100 million in this civilization have to die for this? And I think if folks will sit down and read that book I think they will see—and I am, let me say this. I know it was controversial, but I am immensely proud of that book and proud of having done it and having sat down and written it and done all that reading.

WOODS: Well, when it came out, for what it was worth, I played a small role in cheerleading for it. We had a symposium on it in *The American Conservative* magazine, and people said nice things about it. Everybody had some hemming and hawing to do, but I just came out with guns blazing, saying thank God for Pat Buchanan coming out and doing this for us.

BUCHANAN: Well, I appreciate it immensely. But look, it's such an important subject, and in terms of the history of our civilization it's almost impossible to think—I mean, you have to go back frankly to the Holy Land and 2,000 years ago to find a more important subject for Western civilization, I think, and what happened in these two world wars. It just destroyed so much of what was so good about the West and so good about the world.

WOODS: Well, Pat, we're grateful to you for tackling that and for your generosity with your time today. Thanks so much.

BUCHANAN: Thank you, my friend.