

BRITAIN'S WORLD ROLE

AMERICA: As early as 1580, Sir Walter Raleigh had planned to establish a colony in Newfoundland as a way of removing all English Catholics. However, it wasn't until 1607 that Britain established her first permanent colony at Jamestown, Virginia. Britain employed many of the same tactics she had perfected in Ireland in attempting to exterminate the native American population. Britain used convict and indentured labourers, many from Ireland, to work her tobacco plantations in America and, when these proved too lazy and rebellious, Britain switched to the Atlantic slave trade. From 1619 on 13 million African slaves were transported to lives of torture, rape and humiliation in the new world, at least 2 million and maybe as many as one in four died on the voyage.

From 1634-8, British colonists engaged in the Pequot war against native Pequot Indians in Massachusetts. However, even the colonists were horrified by the tactics of English Soldier John Mason who burned alive 700 Indian men, women and children in what became known as the 'Mistic massacre' of 26th May 1637. The remaining Indian warriors were defeated in the 'Great Swamp Fight' and were deported to Bermuda so that their land could be stolen by the colonists.

From 1675-6, Britain fought another conflict against American Indians led by Chief Massasoit, which was known as 'King Philip's war'. This war led to the deaths of 600 British and 3000 American Indians.

After Britain captured France's colonies in North America in 1763, she sought to pay for their defence by taxing her north American subjects. This led to violent anti-taxation protests and eventual full revolt. On the 5th March 1770, British troops shot dead five American protesters in the 'Boston Massacre'. The first shots in the American war of independence were fired at Lexington on 19th April 1775 and hostilities did not end until the British were defeated at the battle of Yorktown on 19th October 1781. In that period, 25,000 American troops died, about 8000 in battle the rest from disease, many of whom were prisoners of war. Over 27000 troops, British and their German allies, also died, most from disease. It is estimated that between 15-20% of the American population were pro-British Loyalists, about 40,000 of whom were later expelled to Canada. Although Britain recognized U.S. independence in the treaty of Paris of 1783 she still resented her former colonials.

As part of Britain's war with Napoleon, Britain began to press gang American sailors into the Royal Navy and blockade American trade with her former ally, France. This led to the war of 1812-15, during which Britain supported Indian raids into America, sank American shipping and invaded Maine and Washington DC, burning the Whitehouse and Capitol building. In all, 2260 Americans died in battle and 17,000 of disease, while Britain lost 1600 in battle and 3321 to disease. With the defeat of Napoleon's France in 1814, the underlying cause for the war disappeared and gradually peace returned. There were occasional boundary disputes in 1842, 1846 and 1866 and, although Anglo-American relations gradually improved in the 20th Century, in many respects Britain and America remain 'two peoples divided by a common language'.

IRAN (PERSIA): The Persian Empire had a long and illustrious history stretching back into antiquity. However by the 19th century the weak, incompetent and bankrupt Qajarid dynasty had ascended to the Peacock throne. Due to its strategic location, Iran was victimized by Russian expansionism from the north and British expansionism from

the south. The city of Herat in Afghanistan was long claimed by Persia and when Persia annexed the city in 1856 Britain declared war. 700 Persians and 16 British were killed at the battle of Khoosh-ab in February 1857; 200 more Persians were killed the following month at Mohammerah. In that month, the Shah surrendered by pulling out of Herat, renouncing Persia's claim to Afghan territory and agreed a new south eastern frontier for Persia in the treaty of Paris. The weak and corrupt Shah Nasir Ud-Din was bullied by the British and Russians into making various concessions and 'capitulation agreements' on tobacco, trade, railways, banking, communications and defence, which led to his assassination in 1896. In 1909, oil was discovered in Iran; the 'D'arcy Concession' granted control over most of Iran's oil wealth to British companies. Southern Iranian cities were occupied by British troops and the Iranian government could not appoint ministers without British approval. During World War I, the country was occupied by the Russians and British. In 1921, Britain assisted a coup which placed a Cossack officer, General Reza Khan Pahlevi on the Peacock throne. By 1941, although neutral, Khan was now perceived by Britain and the USSR as being too pro-German; so, in August and September, the British and Russians invaded Iran, sent the old Shah into exile in South Africa and replaced him with his son who would rule until 1979. This coup cost the lives of 800 Iranian troops 200 civilians, 40 Soviet and 22 British troops; it safeguarded allied supply lines to the USSR and Britain's oil supply. By 1943 Iran had declared war on Germany.

In 1951, the new democratically elected nationalist Prime Minister Mussadiq nationalized the Iranian oil industry; at the time, this was Britain's largest overseas investment. Britain tried to force the Shah to sack Mussadiq, but he was prevented from doing so by huge popular protests. Britain then sought to co-opt American assistance for another Iranian coup; however, as the government was democratically elected, President Truman refused. Britain then tried to portray Mussadiq as a Soviet stooge. By 1953, MI6 and the CIA agreed to America's first covert operation to overthrow a democracy, 'Operation Ajax'. Mussadiq was placed under house arrest, the Iranian oil industry was carved up - 40% going to Britain, 40% to the USA, 14% to the Dutch and 6% to the French. Iran signed the Baghdad pact and became a regional bulwark against communism, while the Shah was kept in power by his ruthless secret police SAVAK who were trained by the SAS and had killed 135,000 people by the time the Shah was overthrown by the Islamic revolution in 1979.

OMAN: The Sultanate of Muscat and Oman became a British protectorate and the Dhofar region was annexed in the 19th Century. Britain frequently boasts that slavery was abolished in Britain and her colonies in 1833, decades earlier than in the USA. However, she neglects to mention that slavery continued in Kuwait until 1949, 1952 in Qatar, the early 1950s in Aden and 1970 in Oman. Britain had suppressed an earlier Saudi backed nationalist revolt in Oman in 1957-9. From 1962-1975, a Marxist group backed by Yemen and China, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman, staged a revolt in the region of Dhofar against this medieval despotism. Britain was backed in suppressing this revolt by the Shah's Iran. The conflict claimed the lives of 500 Iranians, 24 British and unknown numbers of Omanis. In 1970, the despotic Sultan Taimir bin Said was deposed by his reformist son, Quabus. Britain also changed her strategy by deploying the SAS and backing Islamic propaganda, which branded all rebels as communists, while amnesty and reward were granted if rebels surrendered their weapons. By 1975, the rebellion was defeated and Oman achieved its independence.

RUSSIA: The Russian Empire had been steadily expanding since the 1600's largely at the expense of Turkey. After 1676, there were 10 Russo-Turkish wars; from 1768-74, Russia conquered the Crimea, Azov and Bessarabia from Turkey and, from 1828-9, Russia conquered Georgia and part of Armenia and threatened to control the Bosphorus. This was viewed as a threat to Franco-British interests in the Middle East. In the 1840s-50s, Russia had been expanding into Kazakhstan, edging closer to British interests in India and Persia. Britain and Russia had been allies in the Napoleonic wars, but this perceived threat to her interests led Britain to jump into bed with her former enemy of 40 years before, France, and her future enemy, Turkey, whose massacre of Bulgarians a little over 20 years later was blamed on the 'unspeakable Turk'. In 1853, after a dispute over the control of Christian sites in the Holy Land, Russia invaded Turkish controlled Wallachia and Moldavia and sank the Turkish fleet. In response, Britain and France declared war on Russia in March 1854. The conduct of this Crimean war is a remarkable litany of ineptitude including the Siege of Sevastopol, the charge of the Light Brigade, and the defence of Kars. By the time of the war's end with the Treaty of Paris in March 1856, Russia had lost 300,000 men, France 100,000 and Britain 60,000, two thirds of whom died of disease.

Anglo Russian rivalry remained high and resulted in a period of espionage, intrigue and subversion in central Asia known as 'the great game', which lasted until the Anglo-Russian carve up of Persia into rival spheres of influence in August 1907. This agreement allowed Britain to enter into alliance with the imperialist, anti Semitic, Russian autocracy against a relatively liberal German democracy. With the 1917 Bolshevik October Revolution and Russia's exit from the war, Britain's new enemy became Russian Bolshevism. In March 1918, 1600 British troops landed at Murmansk and Archangel in the North while other British troops armed and trained the White Russian army of Admiral Kolchak in the South in the use of tanks and aircraft. During the conflict, 120 British soldiers died in combat. Britain used poison gas against the Bolsheviks and only pulled out of Russia in 1920.

When Germany and the USSR invaded Poland in 1939, Britain declared war only on Germany, despite Britain's knowledge that Stalin had killed at least 3 million people in the purges from 1933-39. In Yalta in 1944, as part of her alliance with Stalin, Britain agreed to send back 35,000 Don Cossacks and over 17,000 Cossack SS troops as well as white Russian emigres who had fled the USSR since 1921. At least 20% of the 5.5 million 'victims of Yalta' were executed by the NKVD or served 25 years hard labour in Gulags including many of those returned by the British who were executed at Judenburg.

YEMEN: Britain established its colony in South Yemen, or Aden as it was known in 1839, as a coaling station to supply ships on route to India. In 1947, in order to stop caravan raiders and an inter-tribal war, Britain used 66 tons of bombs and 247 rockets against the inhabitants. By the 1960s, the region was gripped by Nasser's Arab nationalism and groups like the NLF and FLOSY demanded independence. The Aden Emergency lasted from 10th December 1963 to 30th November 1967, ending with the pull-out of British troops and the creation of the People's Republic of South Yemen. In 1964, there were 280 attacks, in 1965, 500. Brigadier Cowper reorganized the local intelligence agencies in 1965 and introduced the SAS. Detainees were routinely tortured; many had burst eardrums, while others were subjected to the five techniques

used later in Northern Ireland. 1967 witnessed the battle of the crater in which Lt Col Colin 'Mad Mitch' Mitchell participated. In January 1967, a passenger airliner was shot down with the loss of all 30 on board. On 20th June 1967, 18 British were killed in a mutiny by local police and army units. In total, the conflict claimed the lives of 90 Britons, 68 of them British troops, while 322 were wounded. The number of Yemenis killed is unknown.

ARGENTINA: Britain had as early as 1790 formed plans to assist South American nationalists to gain their independence from the Spanish empire in return for the state of Florida, £30 million, opening up the Panama isthmus, a free trade and defence treaty and access to the precious metal reserves held in South American central banks. The outbreak of war between Britain and Napoleon's France and her Spanish ally in 1795 added a new urgency to the situation. In mid June 1806, an unauthorized 2000 strong British force attacked Buenos Aires, led by the adventurer, Admiral Sir Hope Popham. They defeated a poorly trained and incompetently led Spanish army of 6000 men with the loss of just one man and 13 wounded. Although the terms of surrender were generous, Spanish state property worth over \$1 million was sent back to England. The citizens of Argentina did not want to exchange a Spanish oppressor for a British one and rose in open rebellion in August 1806. Santiago de Linders drove the British into the city with the loss of 157 British and 205 Spanish troops. The citizens of the city rose against the British on 12 August and, using stones and boiling water, they forced the British to surrender. British reinforcements captured Montevideo and other parts of Uruguay, but their inhuman treatment of prisoners of war aroused such fury that two British prisoners of war were executed. In June 1807, a new British force of nearly 10,000 men, under the command of General John Whitelocke, set out to recapture Buenos Aires. They captured the town of San Pedro with the loss of 5 British and 120 Spanish lives; outside the city, they captured the Corral de Miserie ranch with the loss of 60 Spanish lives. On 5th July, the British attacked the city and, after much bloody street fighting, the British were forced to surrender having with 311 killed, 679 wounded, 208 missing and 1600 taken prisoner.

Whitelocke was later court-martialled and cashiered in shame, Popham was court-martialled and severely reprimanded, but later went on to lead the attack on Copenhagen. The British attack on Argentina united its people and enflamed their desire for independence, which was achieved in 1816.

The Falkland Islands (Malvinas), which are slightly smaller than Northern Ireland, had been claimed by Spain, France and Britain. By 1774, Britain withdrew her settlers and France withdrew her claims. The islands, however, remained a remote and lawless outpost for whalers, sailors and felons from around the world. In 1832, Argentina appointed Jose Mestivier as Governor of the Malvinas. While trying to raise taxes, he was murdered by mutinous felons. No sooner had the mutineers been arrested than a Royal navy ship, HMS Clio, arrived on 2nd January 1833 and claimed the islands for Britain. Argentina lowered its flag from the capital, Port Louis, and executed the seven mutineers for murder. On 26th August 1833, an Argentine, Antonio Rivero, and seven followers staged a revolt. Five leaders of the settlement were killed and the settlement was looted. By January 1834, another Royal Navy ship had arrived; Rivero and his men were hunted down and brought to London, but, because of the disputed jurisdiction, they were later freed. In 1841, the Falklands formally became a British colony.

On 29 September 1966, 20 Argentinean nationalists hijacked an airliner and landed it on the Falkland Islands; at the same time, two cars opened fire on the British ambassador's residence in Buenos Aires where Prince Philip was staying. The incident, which was intended to highlight Argentina's claim of sovereignty over the islands, ended without bloodshed when the hijackers surrendered to a Catholic priest.

By April 1982, the Falkland islanders found themselves governed by a bloodthirsty regime with no respect for human rights, but things got even worse on 2nd April when they were invaded by the Argentine military Junta. In the ensuing conflict, Britain reconquered the islands with the loss of the lives of 255 British, 652 Argentine soldiers, 3 civilians and 362 Argentine sailors from the 'General Belgrano', which was sunk outside the 'exclusion zone' while sailing away from the islands. Although this failed military adventure led to the overthrow of the brutal Argentine military regime, to this day Argentina retains its claim of sovereignty over the islands in its constitution.

SAN MARINO: This tiny Republic became fascist in 1923. From 17 September 1940 until the 1st April 1944, San Marino was at war with Britain when it declared its neutrality. Fearing the country was still being used as a base by Axis forces the country, was bombed by the RAF on 26th June 1944 and 63 people were killed. From 17th to 20th September 1944, the country was invaded by British and Indian troops, after which it declared war on Germany.

Paul McGill, June 2011