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Winston Churchill: Warlord and Peacemaker

by Werner Vogt

NZZ's famous wartime editor-in-chief, Willy Bretscher, pronounced the simple truth in a simple sentence: "In 1940 Winston Churchill saved Europe." And he did it with ultimate bravery, astounding energy and an insurmountable belief in the British people and in his capacity to lead them in what was to become "their finest hour". He knew perfectly well, that the war could never be won without the Armed Forces of the United States and he was convinced that he was capable of convincing Washington to come to the aid of Europe in its fight against the Nazi tyranny. But before that the United Kingdom and its Commonwealth allies from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada was on her own.

In 1940 one catastrophe hunted the next. After the fall of Norway and Denmark Hitler attacked France by marching through neutral Belgium and Holland and witnessed by a free world under shell shock, France's armies were flattened by the Wehrmacht in six weeks. It took courage to fight on at this particular moment. Churchill had it and troops and weapons in the UK being scarce the Prime Minister mobilised the English language in speeches, which are unforgotten to this day:

- [13 May: Blood, Toil, Tears & Sweat](#)
- [4 June: We Shall Fight](#)
- [18 June: Their Finest Hour](#)
- [20 August: The Few](#)

In the middle of a crisis unseen in this dimension in British history Churchill was able to give the common people – soldiers and civilians alike – the courage to fight on, against all odds. It is often forgotten that Germany's defeat in the Battle of Britain was of utmost strategic importance since the British Isles were ready like a giant aircraft carrier for the 3 million soldiers, airmen and sailors who were deployed in Normandy as of 6 June 1944 and further in the East.

From 1940 on Winston Churchill was a Warlord in the best sense of the word, a soldier at heart whose leadership was one by example. Having seen action in Cuba, Afghanistan, The Sudan, South Africa as a young man, the horror of World War I in Flanders, Churchill was of course fascinated by everything which was military and he was obviously in his element visiting air fields and destroyers to talk the men who actually waged the war.

But Winston Churchill was in the same right a man of peace. As Leader of the Opposition (1945-1951) and even more so when he was Prime Minister the second time (1951-1955) Churchill was horrified by the prospect of a nuclear war, so that questions of international security topped his agenda in the Cold War.

In this sense Churchill's speech in Zurich on 19 September 1946 was visionary: A reconciliation between the former enemies France and Germany as the nucleus of "some sort of United States of Europa" was visionary thinking just a year after the end of World War II. Today in 2016, we take peace for granted in Western Europe. Remembering the civil war which erupted after the collapse of Yugoslavia in the early 1990ies, looking at what happened in the Crimean and in Eastern Europe it is clear that living in peace should never be taken for granted.

From this point of view, we should commemorate and honour Winston Churchill for his supreme leadership in World War II as well as for all his efforts to establish a sustainable security architecture in Europe.