

What If? ...

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Region: [Europe](#), [USA](#)

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“What If?” histories are a good read. They are entertaining, and they provoke thought and encourage the imagination. How different the world would be if different judgments, decisions, and circumstances had prevailed at history’s turning points.

Certainly English history would have been different if King Harold’s soldiers had obeyed his order not to pursue the defeated fleeing Normans down the hill. This broke the impenetrable Saxon shield wall and exposed King Harold to Norman calvary.

http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Battle_of_Hastings

Would there ever have been a Soviet Union if the Czar had stayed out of World War I?

Would there have been a World War II if British, French, and American politicians had listened to John Maynard Keynes’ warning that the Treaty of Versailles would result in a second world war? Germany had been promised a different outcome—no reparations and no territorial loss—in exchange for an armistice. As Keynes realized, the betrayal of the peace led to another great war.

There are a couple of what ifs that I have been waiting for historians to explore. As no historians have risen to the challenge, I will have a go. Keep in mind that a what if outcome is not necessarily a better outcome. It might be a worse outcome. As what if did not happen and there is no what if history, there is no way of making a judgment.

Suppose Churchill had not succeeded in pressuring Chamberlain to interfere with Hitler’s negotiations with the Polish colonels by issuing a British guarantee to Poland in the event of German aggression. Would World War II have resulted or would it have been a different war?

The British guarantee emboldened the colonels and frustrated Hitler’s attempt to restore a Germany dismantled by the Versailles Treaty. The result was Hitler’s secret pact with Stalin to divide up Poland, technically known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Having given the guarantee, Britain was honor-bound to declare war on Germany (fortunately not also on the Soviet Union), which pulled in France because of the British-French alliance against Germany.

Without Britain’s guarantee, the German (September 1, 1939) and Soviet (September 17, 1939) invasions of Poland would have been prevented by the Polish colonels’ acquiescence to Hitler’s demands and would not have resulted in Britain and France starting World War II by declaring war on Germany, resulting in the fall of France, the British driven off the continent, and Roosevelt’s determination to involve the US in a foreign war unrelated in any significant way to Americans’ interests.

Historians write that Hitler's ambitions were in the East, not the West. Without the British and French declaration of war, the war might have been contained, with the two totalitarian powers fighting it out.

Alternatively, Hitler and Stalin might have continued their cooperation and together seized the oil rich Middle East. The British, French, and Americans would have been a poor match for the German and Soviet militaries. General Patton, the best American commander, thought he could take on the Red Army that had crushed the Wehrmacht, but his hubris did not worry Red Army commanders, who defeated the bulk of the German Army, which was deployed on the Eastern Front, while the Americans, aided by German motorized units running out of fuel, struggled to contain a small part of German forces in the Battle of the Bulge. Today we would be buying our oil from a German/Soviet consortium.

This outcome implies a different history for the Middle East, and so does another what if. What if the 9/11 Commission consisted of experts instead of politicians with their fingers in the wind, and what if the commissioners had too much integrity to write a report dictated by the executive branch?

The unlikely and untenable failure of every institution of the American national security state would have been investigated, and the collapse of WTC 7 at free fall speed would have had to have been acknowledged in the report and explained. A totally different story would have emerged, a story unlikely to have locked Americans into permanent war in an expanding number of countries and into a domestic police state.

Americans might still be a free people. And American liberty might still be a beacon to the world.

On the other hand, a finding of government complicity in 9/11 could have threatened powerful interests and resulted in violent conflict and martial law.

What ifs are provocative, and that is what makes them fun. Thinking is America's national disability. I'm all for anything that provokes Americans to think.

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