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(Theme music)
Voiceover: The following is a production of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Bringing citizens and citizen soldiers together through the exploration of military history, topics, and current affairs. This is *Pritzker Military Presents*.
Clarke: Welcome to Pritzker Military Presents with author Robert Gerwarth talking about his book *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End.* I'm your host Ken Clarke, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago, and it's sponsored by the United States World War One Centennial Commission. This program and hundreds more are available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. For the Western Allies, November 11, 1918 has always been a solemn date, marking the end of fighting that had destroyed a generation and also marking victory and vindication of a terrible sacrifice with the total collapse of the Central Powers, the German Empire, Austria Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. But after the Armistice much of the rest of Europe was engulfed in a continuing nightmarish series of conflicts. In large part it was not the fighting on the Western front that proved so ruinous to Europe's future, but the devastating aftermath as violence in Eastern, Central, and Southeastern European countries on both sides of the original conflict, broke out in the form of revolutions, counterrevolutions, civil wars, and interstate wars. The interwar period of 1919 to 1939 is remembered as a time of relative peace and stability in Western culture. However the ongoing conflicts in Europe and Asia that were a direct result of WWI were responsible for more deaths than the combined wartime casualties of Britain, France, and the United States during the Great War. In the ruins of Europe, extreme ideologies such as fascism would take shape and ultimately emerge, tying the atrocities of WWII undeniably back to the fallout of WWI. Robert Gerwarth is professor of modern history at University College Dublin and director of its center for war studies. He is the author of *The Bismarck Myth* and *A Biography of Reinhard Heydrich*. He has studied and taught in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France. Please join me in welcoming to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library Robert Gerwarth.
(Applause)
Gerwarth: Thank you so much for this kind introduction and also for the invitation to Chicago, and I'm delighted to be here to talk a little bit about my recent book *The Vanquished*, which in many ways deals with a number of subjects that are very topical at the moment--the power changes that are going on as we speak, the uncertainty about political future, and so on and so forth. And in some ways we can say that the legacies of the First World War are still with us today, at least in certain parts of the world. So let me begin this talk with a seemingly rhetorical question, namely whether the First World War ended on the 11th of November 1918. This must seem like a rhetorical question, because of course these images that you see behind me are so familiar; images of jubilant groups, masses, victory parades in many of the capitals of Europe and indeed the United States. What we see here is a celebration of victory--a celebration of a victorious outcome of what was, up until that point, the most devastating conflict in human history. My book contends that the 11th of November 1918, however, has relatively little meaning for most of the combatant states of the First World War--that this is in some ways a narrative which makes a lot more sense for the principle victor states of the First World War, namely Britain, France, and the United States, than it does for most of the combatant states that participated in the First World War. Just to illustrate

my point here, let me talk a little bit about chronology. We're all quite familiar with the idea that the First World War started in 1914 and that it ended in November 1918. Again for most of the combatant states of the First World War this chronology doesn't make any sense at all. If you think of the United States for example, the United States did not even enter that conflict until 1917. For some of the states of the Balkans, the war actually started much earlier with the Balkan Wars two years earlier. In Turkey today, many historians are referring, when they are talking about the First World War, as--they are referring to it as the Ten Years War, because it's a conflict that starts with the Balkan Wars of 1912 all the way until 1923. Russia of course, one of the principle Allied States, actually de facto exited the war in 1917 with the Bolshevik Revolution, whose centenary was remembered in Russia and other parts of the world two days ago. And therefore one of my arguments is that the rhetorical question that I posed in the beginning very much depends on geography; it depends on where we find ourselves in November 1918. In large parts of Europe--and this particularly applies to the defeated states of Europe--the war actually continued in different guises for many years, hence the focus of my book on the years 1917 to 1923. During those years, and this is a very conservative estimate, at least four and a half million people died deaths--violent deaths--as a result of revolutions, counterrevolutions, civil wars, as well as interstate war. Four and a half million people, and that's a very conservative estimate. That is more than the combined wartime casualties of Britain, France, and the United States in the Great War. Yet for some reason we like to think of this period as a period of peace. So I am--what I'm contesting here is the notion that we can box history very neatly, that we can say the First World War lasted from 1914 to 1918 and that afterwards between 1918--November 1918 and September 1939 Europe was at peace. If you find yourself in November 1918 in Eastern European cities--Riga, for example, or Kiev--but also in parts of western Anatolia, parts of the Ottoman Empire, the concept of peace quite simply doesn't apply to the reality in which you live. Also, and this is quite important I think in the context of trying to contextualize this particular period, between 1917 and 1920, Europe witnesses close to thirty violent transfers of power--revolutions. Which--of which Russia is of course the most important case, but this does not only apply to Russia. Russia is the most extreme case and one that features particularly prominently in the history books, but it is only one case of a revolutionary situation, which escalates into a particularly violent civil war. And this civil war and the Russian revolution of course plays a major role in international politics at the time, either for those who feel oppressed by the political system as a beacon of hope, something that people want to replicate in their own societies, or indeed as a wakeup call for these counterrevolutionaries who want to avoid a political and social revolution in their own countries at any price. So the Russia revolution and the subsequent civil war do not only matter for the former territories of the Romanov Empire, they have a much larger impact on international relations, but also on social politics and fantasies about political utopias. So the case of Russia has, I think, in many ways overshadowed our understanding of the complexity of the situation and has also overshadowed the memory of other very extreme cases, such as for example Finland. Finland is a country that was not a participate in the First World War, which became independent in 1918, and here you have an extremely bloody civil war in which within three months more than one percent of the overall population is killed, many of whom are actually killed after being arrested by their White opponents. So they are shot. And this is just indicative of the various civil wars that are happening in Europe at the time. Another country that is often seen as peculiar, although it is part of a much broader European pattern in this period, is Ireland, a country in which I live and teach at the moment. Ireland is of course much less extreme in terms of the numbers of victims of the civil war, yet the civil war remains perhaps the central event in Irish history that

determines political life until the present today. So in Ireland for example you have two conservative parties. This is quite unique--two conservative parties, which are quite similar in their political program. The only reason why they have never worked together is because they were on opposing sides in the civil war. So this period actually matters in a number of ways until the present day. It shapes political realities, in the same way that it does in the Ukraine, another case where of course the civil war was extraordinarily violent, where Ukraine experiences a very brief moment of political independence from Russia. And without an understanding of this period and what is going on in Ukraine and between Ukraine and Russia and the current history wars that are dominating political discourse in that part of the world are very, very difficult to understand. I mentioned Ireland just then because Ireland is an interesting case. It is one of the very few Western European countries that, at least during the Irish Civil War between 1919 and '21--sorry, the war of independence and the Irish Civil War of '22,'23 seemed to follow a similar path as most Eastern European countries in this period. And I'm saying this quite consciously because I'm trying to avoid a sort of determinism where you say, "Well, Eastern Europe has always been violent and remains violent." I think it is important to look at the causes for the eruption of a specific violence immediately after the end of the Great War. And I'll talk a little bit about the different forms of violence that we are encountering in this period in a minute. But the similarities between this situation Ireland and central eastern Europe did not escape astute observers in Ireland at the time who actually viewed Ireland's predicament as part of a much larger European malaise, an ongoing conflict that originated in the Great War but was actually distinct from it in some ways. As the Nobel laureate, W.B. Yeats put it in one of his most famous poems, “The Second Coming” of 1919, which he originally had been thinking about calling “Reflections on the State of Europe”, he writes, and this is the most famous line. I quote: "Things fall apart. The center cannot hold. What rough beast, its outcome at last slouches towards Bethlehem to be born." This is a very iconic poem, very famous line, and it's been often been applied in interpretations to Ireland, when in reality he is of course thinking of Europe, particularly about Bolshevism at the time. This period of violent transition from war to peace and inverted commerce is the subject of my book *The Vanquished*. And what I’m trying to do in this book is move beyond the familiar narratives of the First World War, which in many ways is, or has been for a very long time, a narrative of the Western front. It’s basically a story that has been dominated by the Western front powers, notably by Britain, France, and the UK as well as Germany. Germany of course features prominently in this narrative as well because the German question is so central to both world wars, and because the rise of the Nazis has for a long time prompted a search for the origins of Nazism, which many people located in this period of the First World War. I'll return to that in a minute. But what I was aiming to do in the book is to kind of move beyond this familiar history of the Western front, which indeed ends on the 11th of November 1918. So in some ways the book kind of flips the familiar story and looks at the story and the life experiences of people who lived in countries that were on the losing side of the war, notably those living in the Hapsburg, Romanov, Hohenzollern, and Ottoman empires, as well as Bulgaria, which doesn’t feature very prominently in most history textbooks on the First World War. Yes, and this might be controversial, my book also includes the history of Greece and Italy for different reasons. If you extend the period of the First World War--what I would call the greater war, which ends in 1923, with what can rightly be considered the last Paris Peace Treaty, even though it's singed in Lausanne, it's the last treaty connected to the First World War in 1923--then we will see an interesting change. Greece is actually one of the victor states of the First World War in 1918, but because of its military intervention on Anatolia against the Ottoman Empire backed by London, it actually becomes a loser

state of the First World War by 1923. So Greece intervenes, sends troops into Anatolia, the military mission fails disastrously culminating in the burning of Smyrna in 1922 and the Treaty of Lausanne. So here is a clear case where one of the victor states of the First World War becomes one of the defeated. Italy should also be included in this narrative about *The Vanquished*, although in a different way. Here we are dealing with a state that is clearly one of the victor states in 1918. Yet at the same time, most Italians feel quite quickly during the peace negotiations in Paris that Italy is not sufficiently rewarded for its wartime sacrifices. Italy, just to return to the point of chronologies, only enters the war in 1915 and loses 600,000 troops more than Britain. And it feels that some of the promises that were made for Italy actually entering the war against its former allies, Germany and Austria Hungary, are not actually honored. So lots of people in Italy, at the time nationalists in particular, but this goes well beyond the nationalist railleur, talk about the mutilated victory, which does not actually honor many of the promises made in the London Treaty. So Italy very quickly faces a situation where you have general labor unrest, where you have vicious fighting on farms, occupations, labor unrest, revolutionary situation. And it should be remembered that Italy of course becomes the first fascist-governed state in Europe in 1922 when Mussolini becomes prime minister. In that respect one could argue that Italy’s destiny, its trajectory during this period, actually resembles the situation in Central Europe and Eastern Europe much more closely than the fate of Britain and France. So obviously by looking at these defeated states of the First World War I'm primarily dealing with states that have been portrayed in an extremely negative way for a very, very long time in most history books, general history books of the First World War. Now what we should remember though is that many of these negative narratives about the former land empires were actually constructed in 1918 when the newly emerging successor states basically required a demonization of the empires from which they succeeded. So what this led to was a narrative in the West where people could construct the First World War as a conflict between democracy on the one hand and autocratic states on the others. But of course this narrative completely blends out that one of the Allied states, namely Czarist Russia, was the most autocratic state in Europe, which kind of complicates the picture somewhat, and there is a growing literature in--particularly on the Hapsburg Empire but also on imperial Germany which sort of questions this black legend about the state simply being people's prisons. That’s the narrative of the people's prisons is actually in some ways an invention of nationalists of the successor states who were obviously, and for obvious reason, extremely keen to portray the bygone empires in the darkest possible way. And we can return to that question of course in the Q and A. Now while this period of 1917 to 1923, so between the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and the Lausanne Treaty, has been largely forgotten in the west, it still features extremely prominently in the countries that were most affected by this postwar violence. If you think for example of the Middle East, if you think of the Islamic state, they talk about little else other than the Sykes Picot Agreement, other than the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the abolition of the Caliphate, which they want to restore. So how can we understand this rhetoric without looking at this particular period? It doesn’t make any sense. Now interestingly enough these discourses about the reestablishment of the Caliphate, about Sykes Picot, do not require much explanation in the Middle East because there is an obsession with this time period, which people in the West have long forgotten. The First World War actually doesn’t matter very much. What matters is the end of the Ottoman Empire and what the consequences were for the Middle East, the invention of states that did not exist prior to 1918. I also mentioned Ireland early on, where the First World War for a very, very long time was completely forgotten. No one talked about the First World War because in the public perception these soldiers had fought the wrong war. They had

fought a war for the allegedly repressing British colonial power and not for Irish independence. What mattered far more was the war of independence and the subsequent civil war. So what we will see again, and I can predict that with certainty--next year of course is, in Poland for example and in the Baltic States, a celebration of the end of the war, not the war itself. The war itself doesn't play any role whatsoever, for obvious reasons. Poland for example, obviously after the partitions did not exist during the First World War, and Poles fought in three defeated armies--in the German army, the Austro-Hungarian army, or the Russian army. So if you try to remember the First World War, this is a deeply divisive memory. What do you remember? Defeat? Do you remember the reconstruction of a nation, which is actually healing in terms of the power of memory? So the memory activities next year will very much focus on 1918, but not its prehistory, without which of course national independence cannot be explained. I will talk a little bit about the different types of conflicts that we are witnessing during this period, and then I'll try to explain its origins and why this kind of violence that we are seeing post-1917,'18 actually matters, why it tells us a great deal more about the type of violence that we are encountering in the Second World War than the First World War itself. So essentially during this period we are encountering three distinct types of violence, even though in reality they very often overlap. First we have interstate wars, notably the Polish Russian War and the already mentioned Greco Turkish War. These are extremely violent interstate conflicts, which are essentially fought about borders, determining the borders of these new states that are emerging. Each of them kills roughly 250,000 people, and they're featured very prominently in the collective memory of those regions but not necessarily in the history textbooks on the First World War. Secondly we are looking at civil wars, extremely violent civil wars, which are different from the kind of violence we encounter during the First World War because here it's not combatant states fighting each other, but actually this is inter-communal violence, which always tends to be particularly drastic, particularly rough, and also there's kind of a new logic to violence in the sense that, while in the First World War the conflict is primarily fought to force the opponent to accept certain conditions of peace however harsh, this is not the case in civil wars. So to illustrate this point, on the 11th of November 1918, the generals tell the soldiers that the war is over, and the war is over, at least on the Western front. They go home. Millions of soldiers go home. Now this situation is very difficult to replicate two years later in Russia, where the question, is who can actually call the conflict off? Is it the local peasants in the peasant wars? Is it the Red Army? Is it the various White warlords? There's no one who actually has the authority to call the war off. So it's a very different situation altogether. And these civil wars happen in various--to various degrees of intensity. Also in Central Europe, parts of Germany--Munich, Berlin--are experiencing extraordinary levels of civil unrest and violence, a very heavy crackdown of the government against revolutionaries who are often associated with Bolshevism, rightly or wrongly. Thirdly, and this is also a central characteristic of this period, we're looking at revolutions and counterrevolutions. I already mentioned that we are witnessing a particular density of changes, violent changes of power--about thirty violent changes of power in this period in Europe alone. And these revolutions are unique in the sense that we're seeing two types of revolution. On the one hand, socio-political revolutions that basically aim at changing the regime or the way in which the economy is run, and at the same time we also see national revolutions--national revolutions in the sense that these are revolutions that aim to create nation-states on what is left of the empires. Right, this is one of the most radical changes, actually, that is happening in Europe at the time. Up until 1914 and indeed up until 1918 Europe is actually a continent that is dominated by empires, land empires and blue-water empires. This is quite often forgotten. The age of the nation-state in Europe begins quite late. It

begins really in 1918. And in that respect this is an extraordinarily revolutionary period, perhaps more so than the 19th century, which we often call the age of revolution. The actual age of revolution in Europe I would argue is actually between 1917 and 1923 when we see successful revolutions, unlike in 1848. So there are dramatic changes, which affect even the victorious states of Europe. If you look for example at Britain, Britain actually loses, relative to its size, more territory in the aftermath of the First World War than Germany. Ireland succeeds, basically becomes a free state and then an independent republic. So the territorial losses of Britain are actually greater than those of Germany as a result of the Paris Peace Treaty, which I think is something that people often overlook because the history of this period is very often written in the context of national history; so people either look at the history of Germany or they look at the history of Russia or they look at the history of Ireland, but they never kind of connect the dots. And up until very recently there were very few histories that tried to connect these individual national histories in an attempt to kind of make sense of this period. So the big question then is, how can we explain this extraordinary proliferation of violence? I already mentioned the conservative estimate of four and a half million people who die as a result of these conflicts, and this very rough estimate does not even include the hundreds of thousands of refugees who are roaming Europe at the time. Statelessness is a major problem. Obviously the Spanish flu kills another umpteen number of people. And so there's the question of whether what we're witnessing in this period is simply continuation of the violence of the Great War --kind of an overspill if you like--or whether we're actually looking at something genuinely new. So the sort of classic explanation, if you look, is the so-called brutalization thesis, which has been articulated by a number of very important historians and political scientist over the years in different forms and guises. George Kennan of course very famously coined the term that the First World War is basically the catastrophe of the 20th century that explains all the violence that followed--the various upheavals. And there's very little reason to argue with that, even though Kennan's argument is quite unspecific as to what exactly triggered the proliferation of violence in subsequent years. A similar argument can be found in the hugely important work of the British Marxist-ist historian Erik Hobsbawm, who also of course starts his explanation of the short 20th century, as he calls it, with the First World War, and the results of that terrible conflict. One of the historians who was more specific--somewhat more specific about the effects of the first world war was the German Jewish American historian George Mosse, who wrote a quite detailed and very fascinating account of the First World War and its consequences, mainly focusing on Germany in particular. So his question--and this question was of course asked by many other historians as well—was, how can we explain the rise of Nazism in Germany? And his answer was of course it had to do a lot with the First World War. So in a nutshell the brutalization thesis said, stated, that the particular forms of violence that soldiers experienced in the First World War--the trench experience, the brutalization of norms but also of morals--essentially created a willingness to use violence also in other circumstances, and that many of the men who returned from the trenches in 1918 became susceptible to the ideology of fascism. Now this of course initially sounds very, very convincing, and I'm generally a great fan of Mosse's work who has contributed so much to the historiography of the early 20th century. But there is one big question. If the First World War brutalized the soldiers who experienced it, then why does fascism experience a breakthrough in Germany after 1929 and in Italy somewhat earlier, but not in the other combatant states in Europe? If it's the trench experience, which is not fundamentally different for British, French, and German soldiers, then why is it the German soldiers that return home and become susceptible to Nazism? Now since Mosse's work was published, we also have more detailed stories of the soldiers'

experiences and their experiences of the homecoming, which indicate quite clearly that the vast majority of soldiers returning home were actually becoming pacifists. Which if you think about it actually makes perfect sense. If you are sitting in some rainy dump somewhere in Flanders for four years with shells raining on you and people dying, being pulverized by artillery around you, then it is very unlikely that you have a strong desire to return to that experience any time soon. So it's actually not the veterans that play a major role in the Nazi movement, although of course Hitler was arguably the most famous veteran of that conflict. But if we look at the leadership, both within the Nazi party and also within the SS as the most notorious organization of Nazi Germany, it's actually people who were too young to fight in that war--the so-called war youth generation--that becomes much more significant as a radicalizing power within that organization. And the reason for that is relatively simple. These people glorify the war experience. They experienced the war on the home front. They have very romanticized notions of what fighting wars actually means, and they also firmly believe that if they had had the opportunity to participate in that conflict, the outcome would have been very different. So as opposed to Mosse, I would propose something slightly different. My argument would be that three factors explain the proliferation of violence post-1917, '18 and also the geography of that violence. As I said before, there is a danger that we see Eastern Europe as this sort of genuinely endemically violent space that we essentialize this as a space of violence, when really there are clear reasons how we can explain why violence proliferates in certain parts of Europe but not in others. One factor very clearly is revolution. Not the revolution itself--and I'm talking about the Bolshevik revolution of 1917--but the revolution as a fantasy. I mentioned that earlier on, the revolution plays a hugely important role in the minds of contemporaries. People are fantasizing about when the revolution will come to their country, both in a good way and in a bad way. So already during the later stages of the First World War, there had been work stoppages in most of the European combatant societies. Obviously there is war weariness. People are sick and tired of the conflict. It's a conflict that is ripe for revolution. And so the message that Lenin is spreading, both in Russia but also of course with an international audience in mind, the promise of peace, bread, and land is extraordinarily appealing to many people in East Central Europe as an alternative to continuation of war. So when the Bolshevik revolution happens--the second Bolshevik revolution--the second Russian revolution of 1917, it immediately inspires people on the left and also people on the far right who are willing to do anything--anything at all--to prevent such a revolution from happening, which is why you see in certain countries that, where a Bolshevik takeover is very unlikely, such as Germany, and extraordinarily violent crackdown on those people who are suspected of being carriers of that revolutionary virus, as people called it quite frequently at the time. The second factor that I think is very important that has often been underestimated, even though it's a fairly obvious one, is that the outcome of the war--victory or defeat--is actually far more important than the war experience itself. Even during the First World War, many contemporaries reflected on what a war of that scale and that intensity and that nature would do to the combatants. We have to bear in mind is that this is a war, which is mainly an artillery war. Many people have this kind of romanticized notion of the First World War as one that is sort of fought by infantry soldiers charging forward with their bayonets, when actually the vast majority of people who die in the First World War--the vast majority--die as a result of artillery. They are pulverized. They will never know who actually killed them, and this is a kind of war that helps us I think to explain both the way in which people perceive modernity in this period and also that notions of chivalry--sort of outdated notions of chivalry--simply were overcome by the reality of how that war was fought. But the war experience itself--people like Freud for example reflect on this in 1914--say that people can actually

contextualize the experience of war, can contextualize the brutalization that comes with industrial warfare, and that when they go home they can leave war behind them, notwithstanding of course psychological trauma, etcetera. But most of these people know that they have to behave differently when they come home and that war is very much dependent on context and location. So what matters more than the experience of industrial warfare is the experience of homecoming. Do you come home to a country that is victorious and therefore victory legitimizes the--at least seemingly--the efforts that were made in the previous four years, or do you come--very often come home to a country that no longer exists? For example, when Hitler famously awakens his hospital bed in the Prussian town of Pasewalk, the country of which he is a citizen, Austria Hungary, no longer exists. The army for which he had fought in the previous years as a volunteer had just been defeated. So this is a very radical change of life trajectories. Now I'm not suggesting that it's only the experience of defeat that radicalizes people, but it clearly plays a very important role. And if you look at the countries that are--experience the greatest degree of violence in this period, then they are all among the defeated states of the First World War, and this of course includes Russia. Now we very often think that Lenin's calculation to sign the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the very beginning of 1918, is a sort of masterful maneuver, but it is a masterful maneuver only because he acknowledges that the alternative to it is that the Germans will take the Russian capital within two weeks and that they will terminate the revolution. So Russia is actually the first defeated state of the major powers of the First World War and experiences a complete collapse of state authority and of the monopoly of violence with devastating consequences. The third point I think is imperial collapse, and that point cannot be overstated. As I said before we have to bear in mind that up until 1918 Europe is a continent dominated by centuries-old empires--blue seas empires and land empires. And while the blue water empires actually emerge from the war strengthened both in terms of the territory--they enlarge, notably in the Middle East through the League of Nations mandates--but also strengthened in terms of legitimacy. The same cannot be said about the imperial--about the land empires. So the land empires--notably the Ottoman Empire, Austria Hungary, but also to a certain extent Germany, which became a major land empire with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which gave Berlin the control of much of East Central Europe--these states are now crumbling. They have lost all legitimacy. And within these kind of ungovernable spaces emerge various parties that claim for themselves to be the emerging state. So you have lots of emerging national armies even where states do not yet exist or where the frontiers are not entirely clear. And much of the violence can be explained by these emerging states trying to define their borders. And we very often think that these borders are decided in Paris during the peace conference of 1919, when in reality many of the borders are actually decided on the ground before the peacemakers actually convene in Paris in 1919. So all of this I think is quite important in terms of the long-term legacies of these conflicts. If we look at the violence that Europe is experiencing during this very brief period between 1917 and 1923 we notice that the vast majority of victims are actually civilians. They are no longer soldiers, and herein lies I think the major difference to the First World War. During the First World War of course noncombatants are also killed in very large numbers. But unlike in the Second World War the numbers of soldiers killed still by far outweighs the number of civilians. One big exception is the Armenian genocide, and I'm very happy to take questions about that later on. But as a general rule, most of the combatants--most of the people who are killed in the First World War are actual soldiers. So what changes? And I think what changes is the perception of the enemy, the perception that civilians are now fair game. In fact, that in these existential conflicts that are fought immediately after the First World War, the enemy becomes fair game, and in fact to

eradicate them becomes a precondition for creating these new utopias, be they Bolshevik utopias or fascist utopias. Which is why many of the conflicts that we are encountering here in this period are actually civil wars, some of them pan-European, some of them specific to certain regions. And herein I think lies a very, very important key to understanding the cycles of violence that haunt Europe until the mid-1940s in large parts of Europe. Because for many of the defeated states of the First World War, it becomes a priority to revise the results of the First World War, defeat but also the peace treaties, of bringing the lost minorities of people who are now living under the rule of states which hadn't existed up until 1918 back into the fold. So Hitler's very famous notion of bringing his people, the Germans, back into the Reich is something that cannot be understood properly without the redrawing of boundaries in 1918-19, which is actually the most radical reconfiguration of the European map and of course also of the Middle East in modern history. So looking forward--and this is kind of where I'm coming to the end of my talk--this period of 1917 to 1923, which I would argue has been forgotten in large parts of the West, remained eminently prominent, featured very prominently on the minds of contemporaries who also experienced the Second World War. And I'd like to kind of illustrate that with this particular image, as we are very close now to the ninety-ninth anniversary of the 11th of November 1918. What you see here is the train wagon in which in November 1918 the Germans signed the Armistice in the forest of Compiegne. This picture is actually taken in 1940 immediately after the fall of France. So what's the first thing the Germans do after France has been militarily defeated? They take this train carriage out of the museum and force the French to sign the armistice in the very same carriage. And this picture here is shown in German newspapers without commentary, because it doesn't need a commentary. Everyone understands what is happening here. In the perception of many nationalists at the time, Hitler is rewriting history. He is undoing the wrongs of 1918. He's returning German history to where it had been interrupted in 1918. And this is not an exception. If you look for example at the first speech that General Mannerheim, who is brought back from retirement--he had been the victor of the Finnish Civil War in 1918 against the Reds. So he takes command after the situation with Russia escalates. And in his first speech, he appeals to the Finnish citizens and says, "What we're witnessing here at the moment is nothing other than a continuation of the conflict which we fought before. It's a conflict for Finnish independence and against Russian interference." So when he thinks about how he can rally his troops and national opinion, his natural reference point is 1918. And you see that in most other European states at the time. In Hungary of course, where the flag of St. Stephen is at half-mast and all of the countless monuments dedicated to the Treaty of Trianon, and they go up on the day that the Hungarians plunge into the Soviet Union alongside their German allies in 1941. So the contemporary understanding is that there is a connection, not so much between the First World War and the Second World War, but actually these postwar conflicts and the beginning of that second round of fighting in 1940-41. And which does not of course mean that I want to separate the First World War from its outcomes altogether. But I think for a very long time historians have not paid sufficient attention to the way in which the First World War ended, if it ended. And I think we need to bring that brief period back into focus in order to understand the cycles of violence that have dominated large parts of Europe but also the wider world for a very long time, and in parts of the world--notably in the Middle East I think we can conclude that the First World War is still ongoing, or at least the legacies are still activating violence until the present day. Thank you very much.
(Applause)

1: Would you care to comment a little bit on the Sykes Picot Agreement and how it was made without any consideration of the people on the ground, and the problems we are still having with it today?
Gerwarth: Well, the intention here very clearly was short-term. This was never intended to be a promise that the powers would deliver on. The--well, on the one hand the notion that the Middle East, that the Ottoman Empire would be broken up into various parts, was relatively clear from the start, unlike in the case of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where the disintegration of that empire only becomes an Allied war aim very late in early 1918. This is not the case in the Ottoman Empire, where particularly Britain is quite keen on dismantling that empire in the first place. So while France and Britain are quite clear on the overall objective, postwar objective, in terms of sharing particularly the oil-rich areas of the Middle East between them, both also of course simultaneously make promises both to the Arabs and to the Jews, right. Very contradictory promises about Arab independence, the possibility of some kind of statehood, while simultaneously of course with the Balfour Declaration promising not a Jewish state but some kind of Jewish home in that space. So Sykes Picot and these various promises are highly contradictory, but they are reflect--basically reflecting a wartime strategy. Right, to basically encourage the Arab subjects of the Ottoman Empire to rise against rule from Constantinople in the same way that many of the first leaders of the Jewish resistance in that part of the world originally started as relatively loyal subjects of the Ottoman Empire in 1914. Many people actually rallied to the defense of the empire, of course hoping not quite dissimilar to the way in which the Irish, basically many Irish people, supported the British war effort in the hope for home rule--were hoping for autonomy rights in the empire. Very few people actually in that--generally within the empires demanded a disillusion of the empire if at all. Also in the Austro-Hungarian case, most people were arguing for autonomy rights, not for disillusion. So after 1918 we have become used to this nationalist narrative that everyone in 1914 wanted an end of these empires, which is very clearly not the case.
Clarke: Thank you.
(Applause)
Clarke: Thank you to Robert Gerwarth for a sobering discussion about the aftermath of WWI, and also thank you to the United States World War One Centennial Commission for sponsoring this program. The book is *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End,* and it's published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. To learn more about the United States World War One Centennial Commission, visit WorldWar1Centennial.org. To learn more about the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, visit in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.
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(Theme music)
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