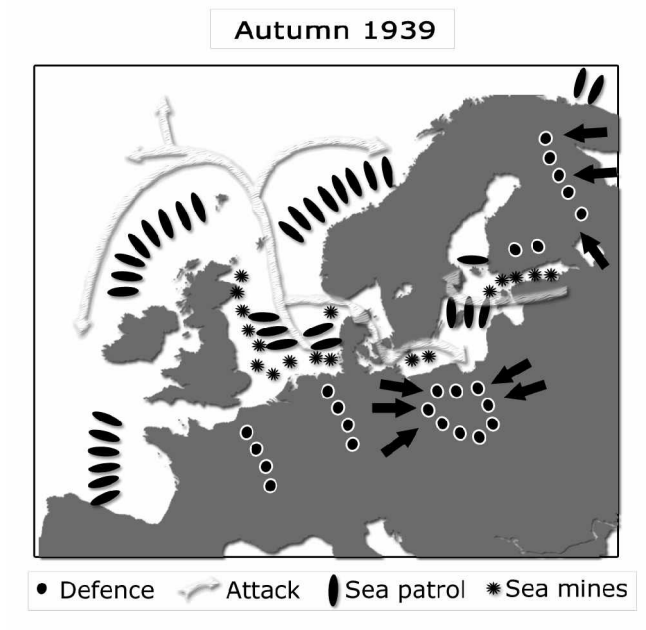


The political factor

If war at sea changes the climate, such an event would have tremendous political implications. If there are significant political implications in 2006, there must have been in 1939 too, but unfortunately no one knew what was at stake at that time.

In the summer of 1939, a major world war was looming. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain tried desperately to persuade the German Chancellor Adolph Hitler not to push the world into another major war. The threat of the climate change was not among the argument list that Chamberlain used to convince his opponent. His efforts were in vain. Hitler wanted a war and he started it in September 1939. The war lasted six years and initiated the longest and biggest climate change of the last century.



This book is about oceans, wars at sea and climate changes. It focuses on two major climate changes, which happened because man abused oceans through naval warfare two times during the last century. The last and most dramatic climate change occurred sixty-five years ago, generated three arctic winters in Northern Europe and cooled the world down for four decades.

Fifty million people were killed and the infrastructure and economy of many countries was ruined during World War II (WWII). But there are more tragic consequences that have not been

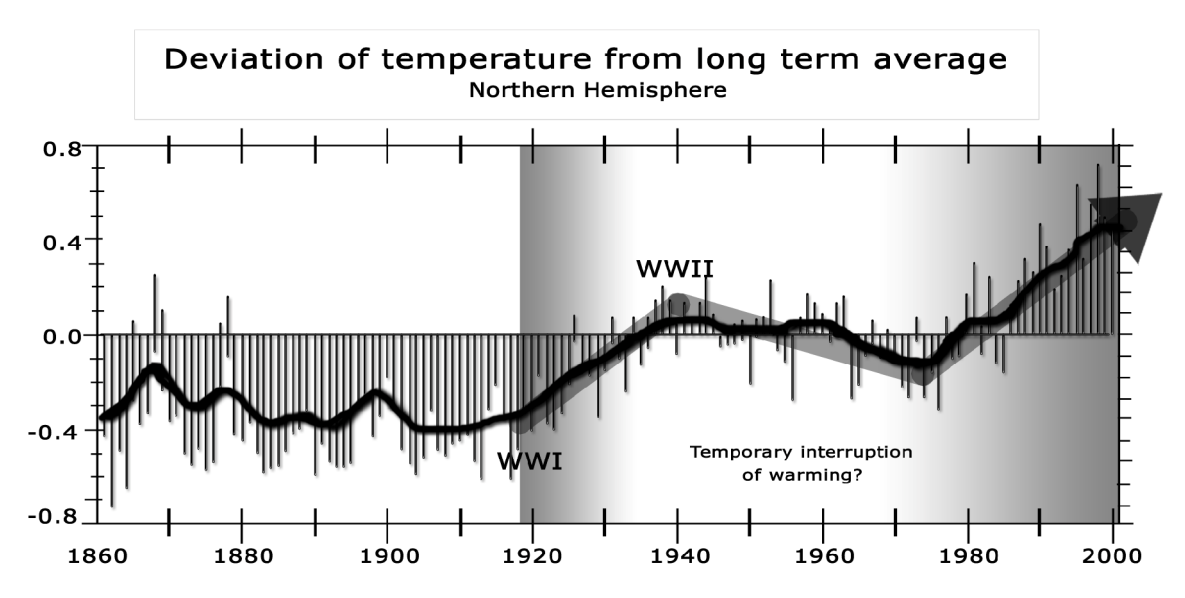
seriously tackled yet. With the beginning of the war, in 1939, the warm climate switched to a cold phase, which lasted four decades. Now, more than half a century later, leading politicians and scientists warn us that climate changes are the greatest threat to the mankind. They claim that the threat is caused by the industrial release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. This works like a greenhouse effect that determines the earth's temperature to rise.

The British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared recently that there was "no bigger long-term question facing the global community" than the threat of a climate change¹.

Unfortunately, the focus is misplaced. It is not the atmosphere which determines the fate of the climate. It is the ocean who does it.

War at sea determined two major climate changes: one in 1918, at the end of World War I, and the other in 1939, at the beginning of World War II. If the oceans, as driving force of the climate, had influenced scientific research since the early days of meteorology, 150 years ago, then it would have been possible to stress that the advent of the two World Wars and the extensive fighting at sea were a real threat for the normal course of the climate.

How could the course of international conflicts have been managed if the world's leading statesmen of the 20th century had been concerned with the climatic changes due to the impact that a war at sea could have had on the ocean and on the climate? Could World War II have been prevented if global climate change had been as much a concern as it is today? Or would the leaders have tried to persuade the navies at war to leave oceans and seas out of the conflict? Would Hitler have reconsidered his war aims if the United States had warned him of their immediate implication in the war in case his decision had been to launch 1000 naval ships out on sea in an attack that risked generating a substantial climatic shift?



But, during the last 150 years, no one alerted the warring nations that going out on sea to fight a war would have an inevitable impact on the oceans status and, consequently, on the climate. No one sent effective diplomatic notes to Hitler, demanding him to cancel all military activities in the oceans, in August 1939.

The inevitable happened. Within four months after the beginning of WWII, Northern Europe was plunged into the coldest winter in more than 100 years. Since December 1939, Europe endured arctic conditions that had not been experienced since

the Little Ice Age, in the 18th/19th century. And neither the scientific community nor the political leaders had any idea about the connection between the war and the arctic temperature conditions.

It is an irony that the deputy and chief of German Armed Forces, Herman Goeringⁱⁱ, in a speech designed to boost the morale of the German population striving to overcome the unbelievable difficulties of a cold and snowy winter, could get away with the statement he made on the 15th of February 1940:

*Nature is still more powerful than man.
I can fight man but I cannot fight nature
when I lack the means to carry out such a battle.
We did not ask for ice, snow and cold –
A higher power sent it to us.ⁱⁱⁱ*

Herman Goering was wrong! Huge naval fleets out on fighting missions can easily turn nature's wheels. Adolf Hitler and the German Reich were responsible for the sudden transformation of both regional and global climate. While the war continued for five more years and the war at sea became global after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour, in December 1941, Hitler's actions did not only generate three extremely cold winters in Europe but also initiated four decades of cold that lasted from 1940 until the early 1980's. All this happened after extensive and devastating naval activities in the Atlantic and Pacific regions.

But this simple fact had not been paid any serious attention. This book focuses on the two wars at sea, from 1914 until 1918 and from 1939 until 1945, when seas and oceans were turned into battlegrounds and huge water areas were turned upside-down by naval vessels and war activities such as shooting, aerial bombing, torpedoing, sea mining, and depth charging of submarines.

i www.bbc.co.uk/climate/policies/uk_policy.shtml Topic: Climate Change from the BBC Weather Centre/Policies/UK Policy; "PM Tony Blair described climate change as 'the most important environmental issue facing the world today'".

ii Hermann Goering was a celebrated pilot which fought on an air fighter in WWI. He joined the Nazi movement in 1923 and became head of Germany's armed forces in 1938. The following year, he officially became Hitler's deputy and legal heir. After WWII started, Goering was named in charge of the Luftwaffe. In 1946, he was found guilty of warcrime during the War Crimes Trial at Nuremberg.

iii Herman Goering in a speech in Berlin on the 15th of February 1940, reported by The New York Times, the 16th of February 1940.