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Una grande Libia: Italy joined World War I ten months after the war began. The deadlock of trench warfare was established, yet the thinking was that Italy's war would be quick and manageable—just a bigger version of Italy's successful 1912 war in Libya. Three and a half years later, WWI ended with about 700,00 Italian war dead and the conditions in place for the rise of Fascism.

The “quick war” is a recurring delusion. Today, two pillars of the nationalist international, Russia and the US, in Ukraine and Iran respectively, have succumbed to it, each convinced that vast superiority in numbers and arms made for a cakewalk, and despite having in living memory both countries' experiences in Afghanistan and the US's experiences in Vietnam and Iraq.

Attacking Iran, Donald Trump brought his old habits to bear. Trump was asked in a 1990 interview: “Is there a master plan to your deal making or is it all improvisational?” His reply: “It's much more improvisational than people might think.” Inadequate attention was paid to strategy, logistics, munitions stockpiles, and Iranian counterstrategy. Instead there was Trump's faith that “it always works out.” Six months in, with alternating bellicose announcements, declarations of victory, and threats of annihilation, Trump soothes himself mounting gold appliqués in the White House and planning a ballroom and other monuments to himself. His Defense Department seems preoccupied with commissioning World War II-era battleships, purging the officer corps, and eradicating “woke” and “low T.”

War in Iran joined with Trump's ongoing economic wars. His campaign documents back in 2016 already declared that economic war existed between the US and China. Now, Trump has taken to slapping on unconstitutional tariffs as both a quack cure-all for the domestic economy and as the weapon of choice in foreign affairs. Here too, consideration of adversaries' economic weapons and counterstrategies was inadequate: China's withholding rare earth minerals parallels Iran's blocking the Strait of Hormuz. Recently, Trump announced a new strategy of economic warfare against Iran—with his stock bellicosity he called for an “economic D-Day.” Along the way, in much the same manner as he has gutted the domestic administrative state, Trump has trampled the international free-trade order that arose after World War II. On September 4, 2026, the UN passed a resolution to correct the Mercator projection, enlarging Africa to proper size on maps. Seeing this as a woke resolution, the US was the only country opposed. The vote was 164 to 1. This, readers, is serious international isolation.

Donald Trump is the highest-ranking far-right public official in US history. And his MAGA movement may be the most successful populist mobilization on the right since the Civil War. But both he and his movement do not come from nowhere. It may be more important than ever to understand the legacy of the earlier movements and values out of which Trumpism emerged. This is the second of two issues of *JRWS* devoted to the history of the far right in the United States, guest edited by Olivier Burtin and Kathryn Olmsted, and we feel it could not be more urgent.

Lawrence Rosenthal
September 7, 2026