

OPINION: MONICA LOWENBERG

You can't praise Hitler's troops *and* champion human rights

IT'S NOT every day that one sees William Hague courting photo shoots with Hollywood starlet Angelina Jolie or a Premier League football club appoints a new manager who has complained about how Mussolini was misunderstood. A third far less reported, but no less relevant, incident also took place last month.

It was a reply from Mr Hague's Foreign Office to my letter asking if Britain would speak up about its EU and NATO partner Latvia continuing to promote events glorifying the country's Waffen SS that served Hitler. Last year, the Latvian president said his country should "bow down" to the Waffen SS.

Like its Baltic neighbours, Lithuania and Estonia, Latvia honours local Nazi collaborators on the grounds they were "freedom fighters" against the Soviets. Less than a year ago, Lithuania reburied and glorified the country's 1941 Holocaust-collaborating prime minister.

The letter from the Foreign Office, signed by Minister for Europe David Lidington, states: "I understand this is an emotive issue for all those involved. The history of these events is complex and one which historians are best placed fully to understand. When I have visited the Baltic states, ministers there have told me how their countries are still coming to terms with an appalling period of their history in which their countries were invaded and fought over by both the Soviet and the Nazi tyrannies.

I am pleased to note that this year's events passed off safely. The history of the Latvian Legion is complex. The UK believes the future treatment of these marches is essentially a matter for the respective governments in Latvia and Lithuania. I hope Ms Lowenberg understands that this is not a matter in which the UK government has any locus to become involved."

This issue goes back to 2009 when David Cameron, then opposition leader, ditched his moderate conservative alliance in the European Parliament (where the Tories were aligned with centre-right parties), and linked up with East European sympathisers of Hitler's collaborators.

What goes around comes around. David Miliband, who resigned as a director of Sunderland FC last month, as foreign secretary had told Cameron in 2009 that this was "not leadership but pandering, not judgment but dogma, not patriotic defence of national interest but the white flag of surrender to... extremists".

Incidentally, this year's march was not as "safe" as Lidington thinks. There were scuffles. Peaceful protesters, including Joel Rubinfeld, co-president of the European Jewish Parliament were harassed by police and fascists alike.

A Riga city council member who opposes Nazism was assaulted. These events reek with a racist, neo-Nazi atmosphere.

As Hague contemplates his joint campaign with Jolie for international action against mass

rape in conflicts, and his glamorous photo-ops, he will hopefully not forget some other photos: the infamous images of Latvian Jewish women, forced to undress, being shot right into the death pits, many of them raped beforehand.

Many of the perpetrators were Latvian "patriots" who went on to join the Waffen SS, to which today's Latvia pays homage, with Hague's Foreign Office explaining, with shameless abdication of moral responsibility, that "this is not a matter in which the UK government has any locus to become involved."

No, Hague and Lidington, politics is about taking responsibility, *not* saying resurgent evil should be left for historians to debate. The banalisation and trivialisation of the Holocaust, its reduction to an event so minor that it should not be invoked to spoil an orgy of glorification of Nazi collaborators and perpetrators, has gone too far.

It has nothing to do with a political party. It was people of *all* parties, inspiringly led by Winston Churchill, who made such enormous sacrifices for the freedom of Britain, Europe and ultimately the entire free world.

I am certain Angelina Jolie understands one cannot be committed to human rights and adulate Hitler's forces at the same time. It is very sad for our nation that Hague and Lidington do not.

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