

J. M. Roberts

The 20th Century. The History of
the World 1901-2000
Hilting, 1999



I4

Appearance and Reality

EUROPE: AMID THE RUINS

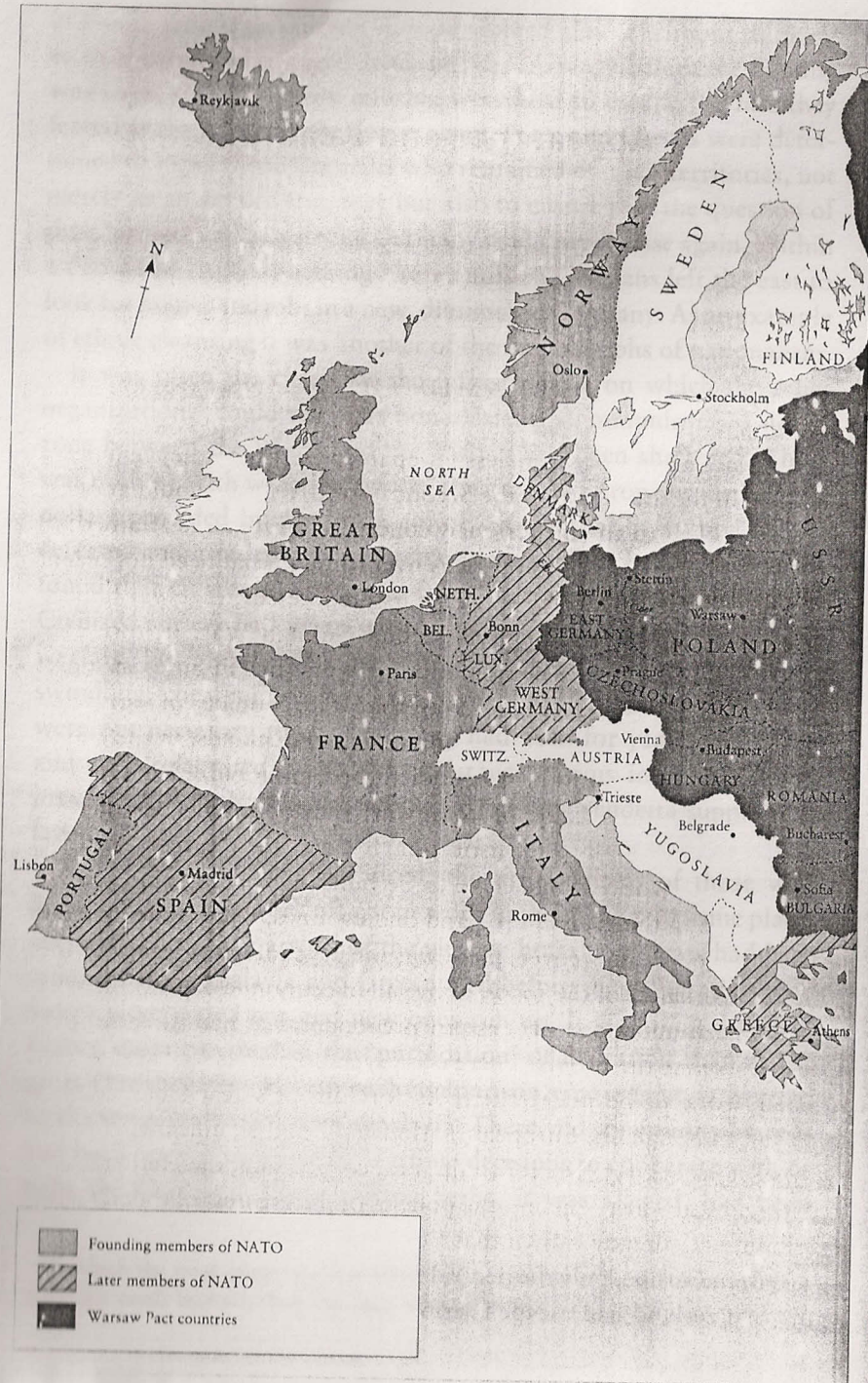
Appearance and reality were less far apart in 1945 than they had been in 1918. In the aftermath of the Second World War, it should at once have been clear to anyone seriously concerned with public affairs that the age of European hegemony was over (though that need not mean they would feel able to say so). Like its predecessor, that war had as its heart a European struggle, a second German War. It, too, had grown from that into a combination of wars, but in an even more spectacular and all-embracing way than the conflicts of 1914-18. Making ever greater and more unprecedented demands, in the end it left little of the world untouched, undisturbed, unmobilized, untainted. People spoke, realistically, of 'total war'. The enormous destruction it wrought, materially and institutionally, was the clearest sign that the post-war world would have to be built anew – in some places, literally, from the ground up – and on new lines. Behind the damage done by the war, moreover, there was the psychological legacy of the bitter experiences of the 1930s, above all of economic depression. The economic foundations of western preponderance had already then been shaken to their roots. There was psychological as well as material repair work to be undertaken. As for Europe's reach beyond her shores, although six European nations still had significant overseas possessions in 1945 (Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal and – just – Spain), the policies of the greatest of them, Great Britain, had already shown that European empire was in retreat.

Within Europe, only the neutral states of Ireland, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland had escaped serious damage. Spain, though neutral

during the war, had been deprived by it of the possibility of economic recovery from her own civil war (which had ended in 1939). She was a poverty-stricken country. The formerly combatant nations, though, faced the most obvious material problems in 1945. Of Europe's farmers, only those of the United Kingdom, Sweden and Switzerland were producing more in 1945 than in 1939. Coal output everywhere – above all in Germany – was far below even the averages of the depression years of the 1930s. Europe had suffered more physical damage than any other continent, and the cost of the war's direct destruction there has never been accurately measured. One estimate is that 7.5 million dwellings had been destroyed in Germany and the USSR alone. Of the unhappy peoples of those two countries it is likely that some 25 million died, half, perhaps, as a direct consequence of fighting or as prisoners of war. The non-Russian populations of the republics of the USSR that had been occupied longest by the German forces had suffered most; Soviet estimates were that 5.4 million civilian deaths took place in the Ukraine alone.¹ In stricken countries those who survived camped amid ruins, while 11 million people wandered among them as refugees – now termed 'displaced persons'. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA, set up in 1943) was looking after 50,000 abandoned children in Germany alone. Disease was a threat and often a reality for months after the fighting ended; it was fortunate that DDT was available to delouse possible typhus carriers and there was no such epidemic of that disease as there had been in the aftermath of 1918. Starvation and lack of shelter had nonetheless left their own grim residues; a majority of Greek children were said to be tubercular after the liberation.

Something of a demographic revolution had occurred, too, as a consequence of the war and its aftermath. It was shaped by movements of peoples as much as by absolute loss. Whereas after 1918 it had been assumed that it should be possible to make arrangements for ethnic minorities to live contentedly among majorities alien to them

¹ Even within large approximations, Soviet figures published after 1945 continued to be misleading. Only in 1959, when the census revealed a huge gap between earlier projections from 1939 figures and actuality, did the figure of approximately 20 million Soviet war dead emerge.



in blood, language, culture, Europe seemed almost without thinking to have rejected such confidence in 1945. Already before the fighting was over, Germans were pouring westward to escape the fate they feared at the hands of the Soviet army. Poles and Czechs were determined to expel those Germans who remained on their territories, not merely as an act of vengeance but also to ensure that the question of their 'protection' by a strong Germany could never arise again. Within a decade of 1945, something like 10 million Germans left the east to look for homes and jobs in a new, diminished Germany. As an example of ethnic cleansing it was another of the sad triumphs of nationalism.

It was often the case that the infrastructure on which the relief organizations² could rely was non-existent. Communications in the zone between the Rhine and the Vistula had been shattered. There was nothing with which to pay for the imports Europe needed except dollars provided by American aid or expenditure in Europe. In the defeated countries currencies had collapsed; Allied occupation forces found that cigarettes, spam and bully beef were better than money. Civilized society had given way not only under the horrors of Nazi warfare, but also because Nazi occupation had transformed lying, swindling, cheating and stealing into acts of virtue; even when they were not necessary to survival, they had been for years legitimized and even celebrated as acts of 'resistance'. Arms in private hands presented in many places the danger of private vendetta supplanting law.

As the Allied armies advanced, the firing squads of those with grudges or fears to work off got to work in their wake. In some places they anticipated the arrival of the victors: brutal civil wars had been going on in Yugoslavia and Greece well before their liberation. Old scores were wiped out and new ones run up. It was alleged that in France more perished in the 'purification' of liberation than in the great Terror of 1793, but any such comparison, true or false, is dwarfed by the vengeance taken in Yugoslavia. There, old community hatreds had been opened up again by wartime decisions to cooperate with or fight the Germans. Three million Serbs, it was alleged, had been

murdered by the Croat *Ustaša* in Bosnia and Croatia. Such massacres had driven old hatreds even deeper into the subsoil. Albanians, annexed to Italy in 1939, did not ignore their opportunities as the war went on, notably when, two years later, the formerly Yugoslav district of Kosovo was transferred to Italian administration. Albanians recruited to the German SS had joined in terrorizing the Serbian partisans' supporters, so creating further bitterness in an already ethnically troubled region.³ In other countries, too, revolution seemed a danger, and on better evidence than in 1918.

Germany had once been the flywheel of industrial Europe: she should have been the engine of continental recovery. But even if her communications and productive capacity had been intact – and they were in ruins – the Allies were at first bent on holding down German industrial production; their aim was to prevent, not to encourage, Germany's resumption of a leading economic role in Europe. They all at first conceived her government as a unity, although she was temporarily split up between four occupation forces. From the start the Soviet occupation forces had been carrying off capital equipment from their zone of occupation as 'reparations' to aid the recovery of their own ravaged lands (as well they might after what the USSR had suffered; the Germans had destroyed 39,000 miles of railway track alone in their retreat).

THE FRAMEWORK OF RECOVERY

Even before the war ended, when Europe's immediate post-war shape had been debated at a conference at Yalta in February 1945, a new set of divisions within the continent was settled. Yet though Yalta produced the nearest thing to a formal peace settlement which Europe was to have for decades, it did so because Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill accepted the realities that lay behind it: as Stalin put it, 'whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system'.⁴

³ Although the 'Skanderbeg' SS division, named after a fifteenth-century Albanian hero, never mustered more than 6,500 and proved of little use to the Germans except during their retreat in 1944.

⁴ Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (London, 1962), p.105.

² Of which the most important was UNRRA. It spent over \$4 billion on refugees and other needs between then and 1947, when it closed.

Yalta's effect was to divide the old central Europe, and, indeed, Europe as a whole into eastern and western halves. A winding line from the Adriatic to the Baltic defined the way in which occupation zones now layered new differences on top of old. By Christmas 1945 all countries east of it except for Greece had communist governments or coalition governments in which communists shared power with others. The Soviet armies had proved far better instruments for the extension of international communism than revolution had ever been.

Bismarck's Germany was now partitioned into zones occupied by the Russians, Americans, British and French. Germany did not exist as a political entity. Austria had been separated from it again and was also divided between occupying forces, though re-established as an independent republic. The other major political units of pre-war Europe, though, had reconstituted themselves after occupation and defeat; all the nation-states of 1919 reappeared except for the three pre-war Baltic republics, which did not re-emerge from the Soviet Union. That country now also absorbed parts of pre-war Poland and Romania, too. Most countries outside the Soviet sphere were much enfeebled; Italy, which had changed sides after Mussolini had been overthrown in 1943, had, like France, a much strengthened and enlarged communist party which still said it was committed to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. In France that seemed a real possibility; the communist party emerged as the strongest party in the constituent assembly set up in October 1945, and all the more so when de Gaulle (elected head of government in November) resigned in January 1946 because of left-wing opposition.

Among the former European great powers other than the USSR, only Great Britain retained her pre-war stature in the world's eyes. For a little while she was recognized still as an equal of the USSR and the United States (formally, France and China were victorious former great powers, too, but the fiction was more obvious in their case). Yet Great Britain's moment was past; her eminence was illusory and temporary, though morally enhanced by recollection of her stand almost alone in 1940 and 1941. She was a nation-state that had not given way under the strain of the war like many others, and by a mobilizing of her resources and people in a way unparalleled outside the USSR, she had been able to survive. But she had been let out of

strategic impasse only by the German attack on Russia, and kept afloat only by American Lend-Lease. That had not been without its costs: the Americans had driven hard bargains, insisting on the sale of British overseas assets to meet the bills before it was forthcoming. The sterling area was now dislocated. It now consisted, too, overwhelmingly of countries where the British had huge debts (tactfully renamed as 'sterling balances'). American capital was about to move on a large scale into the old Dominions, and they had learnt new lessons, some from their new wartime strength and some, paradoxically, from their weakness. Australia and New Zealand, in particular, had looked to the mother country for their defence, and found it not to be forthcoming when needed, whereas American help had been. From 1945, the Dominions more and more acted with full as well as formal independence, though not without regard to old ties (Canada, notably, made a loan of \$1,250 million in 1946 to the United Kingdom to help it through post-war balance of payments difficulties).

In the event, it did not take long for the change in the position of the greatest of the old imperial powers to become clear. Symbolically, even Great Britain's last great military effort in Europe in 1944 had been under overall American command. Though British numbers in Europe for a few months afterwards matched the American, they were by the end of the war fewer. In the Far East, too, though the Indian army and imperial forces from Africa under British command reconquered Burma, the defeat of Japan had been the work of American naval and air power. For all Churchill's efforts, Roosevelt was by the end of the war negotiating over his head with Stalin, with an eye to dismantling the British empire. Great Britain, for all her prestige at the moment of victory, had not escaped the war's shattering impact. In some ways she was the former great power which, together with Germany, best illustrated the revolution in international affairs brought about by it. Subtly and suddenly, the kaleidoscope of world authority had shifted, and it was still shifting as the war came to an end, even if many Europeans still had to make the painful psychological discovery that the European age was over.

RECONSTRUCTION

That reflexion on history can sometimes be useful was shown by some steps taken while the war was in progress to prepare for the world after it. The results of nations seeking their own economic salvation in the 1930s seemed to many influential persons on the United Nations side to have been so awful that they had begun to discuss the likely economic problems of the post-war years. From the urge to make arrangements which would keep the world economy on a more even keel than in the past had come a major conference at Bretton Woods in July 1944. Although the USSR refused to agree to the conference's decisions, it agreed a system of more or less fixed exchange rates in terms of the US dollar, which thus became, in a measure, a new gold standard.⁵ This was part of an attempt to tackle the illiquidity problems that had so hampered recovery in the 1930s, when would-be buyers lacked the appropriate currency to buy from would-be suppliers. It led also to the setting-up of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which were to channel investment by capital-exporting countries into what came to be called the 'developing' world. The IMF was to hold 'deposits' made by participating countries that could then be made available, at fixed parities, to any other participants needing another currency in exchange for its own at fixed rates. Member states bound themselves not to devalue. In 1947 the major victorious nations went on to sign a General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). These arrangements were to prove able to work pretty well until the 1970s.

Like the great shifts in power relationships between countries, such facts further emphasize that while after the First World War it had still been easy to embrace the illusion that an old order might be revived, no one could believe that restoration pure and simple was possible in 1945. This was healthy, and in strong contrast with the circumstances in which inter-war attempts to reorder twentieth-century international life had been made. The victors could not start with a clean sheet, of course. Events had closed off too many

⁵ Haiti, Liberia and New Zealand also stood out.

possibilities. Among the far-sighted decisions already taken during the war, moreover, some by agreement, some not, one of the most important had been to set up an international organization to maintain international peace. The fact that the two greatest powers saw such a step in different ways, the Americans as a beginning to the regulation of international life by law and the rulers of the USSR as a means of maintaining the Grand Alliance of the victors, did not hinder their cooperation.

Thus the United Nations Organization (UNO) came to birth at San Francisco in 1945. Much thought had been given to the reasons why the League of Nations had failed. One of its most obvious defects was to be avoided by the United States and USSR belonging to the UNO from the start. Apart from this, its basic structure in outline somewhat resembled that of the League. Its two essential organs were a small Security Council and a large General Assembly. Permanent representatives of all member states (at the outset, fifty-one nations) were to sit in the General Assembly. The Security Council started with eleven members, five of them permanent: the United States, the USSR, Great Britain, France (included at the insistence of Winston Churchill) and China. Other member nations filled the other places in turn. That the Security Council was given greater power than the old League Council was largely at the insistence of the USSR, whose representatives thought that there was a strong likelihood that they would always be outvoted in the General Assembly because the United States would call not only on the votes of its allies, but also on those of what Moscow regarded as its satellites in Latin America. Naturally, not all the smaller powers liked this. They were uneasy about a body on which at any moment any one of them was unlikely to sit, which would have the last word, and in which the great powers would carry the main weight. Nevertheless, the structure the great powers wanted had to be adopted if any organization was to work at all.

The other constitutional issue much disputed was a veto power given to the permanent members of the Security Council. This, too, was a necessary feature if the great powers were to accept the organization. Its starkness was in the end somewhat qualified, in that a permanent member was not allowed to prevent investigation and discussion of matters which especially affected it unless they were

likely to lead to action inimical to its interests. In theory the Security Council possessed very great powers, but, of course, their use and operation were bound to reflect political reality at any moment. For a long time (and, some might say, still, over a half-century after its foundation) the importance of the United Nations proved to lie less in its power to act than in the forum it provided for discussion. For the first time, a world public linked as never before by radio and film – and later to be linked by television – would hear the cases made at the General Assembly for what sovereign states did. This was something quite new. If the United Nations at once gave a new dimension to international politics, though, it took much longer to provide effective new management of its problems. Sometimes, the new publicity of international argument led to feelings of sterility, as increasingly bitter and unyielding views were set out in debates which changed no one's mind. But even this must have had an educational force outside the UN. It was important, too, that it was soon decided that the permanent seat of the General Assembly should be in New York; this drew the attention of Americans to it and helped to offset historic American ignorance of the rest of the world and to make isolationism a little less likely.

The first ordinary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly took place in London in 1946. Bitter debates at once followed; complaints were made about the continued presence of Soviet soldiers in Iranian Azerbaijan, which had been occupied during the war, and the USSR representatives promptly replied by attacking that of British forces in Greece. Within a few days the Soviet delegation cast the first veto in the Security Council. Many more were to follow. The instrument which the Americans and British had regarded and continued to use as an extraordinary measure for the protection of special interests became almost a regular and certainly an unexpectedly frequent piece of Soviet diplomatic technique. From the start the United Nations was an arena in which the USSR contended with a still inchoate western bloc that its policies did much to solidify.

Though the origins of conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union are sometimes traced back a very long way, in the later years of the war the British government had begun to feel that the Americans were too willing to make concessions to Stalin and were

over-friendly to him. Of course, the fundamental ideological division between the USSR and her western allies had never gone away; if the Soviet leaders had not always had a deep, crudely Marxist preconception about the roots of behaviour of capitalist societies, they would certainly have behaved differently after 1945. It is also true that some Americans had never ceased to distrust the USSR and always saw her as a revolutionary threat. But this did not mean that they had much impact on the making of American foreign policy. In 1945, as the war ended, American distrust of Russian intentions was much less than it later became. Of the two states the more suspicious and wary was the Soviet Union.

GREAT POWER REALITIES

In 1945 thoughtful (and well-read) Europeans might have contemplated with admiration the prescience of the French political philosopher and historian, Alexis de Tocqueville, over a century earlier, about the American and Russian peoples. Each, he noted, seemed marked out 'to sway the destinies of half the globe'.⁶ At the end of a second world war the destinies of the world did, indeed, appear dominated by them, and therefore by two great and very differing political systems, one based in what had been Russia, one in the United States of America, and even by two different cultures. The fate of Europe, the old master of the globe, was for a long time to come to be irresistibly shaped in the last resort by decisions taken in Moscow or Washington. Hitler's decisions of 1941 to go to war with the USSR and USA had been the last taken by a European ruler for many years that can be said to have changed the history of the continent. Whatever the USSR and the USA owed to Europe or reflected of it in their behaviour (and both were at least grounded in ideologies European in origin and shaped by European culture), their concerns were different from those of the old continent. Geography alone settled that. Much of their behaviour towards Europe in the

⁶ The quotation comes at the end of the first part of de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, published in 1835.

next few years can only be understood in a global setting; this is yet another reason why European history becomes inseparable from world history in the years after 1945, besides the entanglements arising from old colonial and economic connexions.

In that year, there were really no other great powers left, for all the legal fictions expressed in the composition of the Security Council. Great Britain was gravely overstrained and breathless; France, barely risen from the living death of occupation, was rent by internal division. Germany was in ruins. Under occupation Italy had discovered new quarrels to add to old; her change of sides during the war still left uncertainties about her treatment in the peace negotiations. Japan was ruined and occupied, and China, never a great power in this century for all her indulgence by her allies, was about to engage in civil war anew. The USA and USSR, immensely stronger than any possible rival, had provided the means of victory. They alone, moreover, had made positive gains from the war. The other victorious states had, at best, won only survival or resurrection, while to the two greatest powers, the war brought new ascendancies.

Though that of the USSR had been won at huge cost, it was stronger than the tsarist empire had ever been. Soviet armies dominated a vast European glacis beyond the USSR of 1939. Much of it was now sovereign Soviet territory; the rest was organized into states that were soon in every sense satellites. One of them, East Germany, contained major industrial resources. All of them were primarily related to Moscow, rather than to one another. Some of them, indeed, would continue to show suspicion of their communist neighbours, even well into the 1980s. Beyond this glacis lay Yugoslavia and Albania, the only communist states to emerge since the war without the help of Soviet occupation;⁷ in 1945 both seemed assured allies of Moscow, but were regarded by it as suspiciously and carefully as all the others. This advantageous Soviet position had been won by the fighting of the Red Army, but also reflected strategic decisions taken by western governments and their commander in Europe from 1943 to the closing

⁷ Though the Red Army had entered Belgrade briefly, they had subsequently withdrawn, leaving the field to Tito's partisans (by then enjoying the formal support of the Yugoslav monarchy-in-exile).

stages of the war, when General Eisenhower had resisted political pressure to get to Prague and Berlin before the Soviet armies.

The Soviet occupation forces (carefully segregated from the local populations) gave the USSR a strategic preponderance in central and eastern Europe which looked all the more menacing to those west of it because the barriers to Russian power which had existed in 1914 – the Habsburg empire and a united Germany – had both now gone. An overtaxed Great Britain and an only slowly reviving and divided France could not be expected to stand up to the Soviet armies, and no other conceivable counterweight on land existed if the Americans went home. Soviet soldiers also stood in 1945 on the borders of Turkey and Greece – where a civil war between communists and monarchists was going on – and occupied northern Iran. In the Far East Soviet power held much of Sinkiang, Mongolia, northern Korea and the old tsarist base of Port Arthur as well as having 'liberated' the rest of Manchuria, though the only territory taken by the USSR from Japan itself was the southern half of the island of Sakhalin and the Kuriles. The rest of Soviet gains had been effectively at China's expense. All this looked very alarming not only to those who feared communism, but to those less ideologically sensitive who read Soviet policy primarily as a continuing steady pursuit of a view of Russian strategic advantage with a long tradition behind it. Another alarming fact soon to add to the misgivings of those worried about the USSR's hegemonic position was that the end of the war in China left communists who could be expected to be friendly to Moscow already in control of much of the country. Stalin might have backed the wrong horse there in the past, but the Chinese communists could not hope for moral and material help from anyone else. It seemed likely, then, that in Asia, too, a Soviet satellite was in the making.

The new world power of the United States rested far less on territorial occupation than did that of the USSR. At the end of the war there was indeed an American garrison in the heart of Europe, in Germany, but American electors wanted it brought home as soon as possible. It was quickly run down. By the beginning of 1948, the United States army's strategic reserve consisted of just over two divisions (at that moment the USSR had 185 divisions in the field). There was reluctance among those electors, too, to spend on defence

other than that provided by air power and the atom bomb. But there were American naval and air bases round much of the Eurasian land mass and although the USSR was a far greater Asian power than ever, the elimination of Japanese naval power, the acquisition of island airfields and technological changes had together turned the Pacific Ocean into something like an American lake. Hiroshima and Nagasaki had demonstrated the power of the atomic bomb which the United States alone appeared to possess (though in fact she had for some time no further available examples of this weapon once the only two which existed had been dropped on Japan). But the deepest roots of American empire lay in industrial and financial strength.

Along with the land-power of the USSR, the industrial might of the United States had been decisive in achieving Allied victory. America equipped both her own huge forces and many of those of her allies in both the European and Pacific wars. Moreover, by comparison with them, victory had cost her little. American casualties were fewer than theirs; even those of the United Kingdom had been heavier, and those of the Soviet Union colossally so. The home base of the United States had been immune to enemy attack in any but the most trivial sense. It was undamaged; America's fixed capital was intact, her resources greater than ever. Her citizens' standards of living had actually risen during the war; the armament programme ended a depression still left unmastered by Roosevelt's New Deal. She was a great creditor country, with capital to invest abroad in a world where no one else could supply it. Finally, America's old commercial and political rivals were staggering under the troubles of recovery in the post-war years. Their economies drifted into the ambit of the American because of their own lack of resources. The result was a worldwide surge of indirect American power, its beginnings visible even before the war ended. Effectively, the United States dollar had already by then become the indispensable source of international liquidity. Through lend-lease, relief channelled through UNRRA, and direct expenditure on services overseas by the American armed services and other governmental agencies, Europe was by 1945 relying on a dangerously contingent source to fund its imports. The United States had become Europe's sole banker, but that went unnoticed by millions of Europeans, however uneasy some of its officials might be.

Something of the future implicit in a great power polarization could thus dimly be seen even before the fighting stopped in Europe. It was by then obvious that Soviet forces would not be allowed to participate in the occupation of Italy or the dismantling of her colonial empire, and that the British and Americans could not impose any Polish settlement unacceptable to Stalin. On the other hand, the British were to have a free hand in Greece, Stalin had agreed, while he had one in Romania. Somewhat oddly (in view of their record in their own hemisphere), the Americans were not happy about explicit spheres of influence as a way round potential conflict; the USSR was readier to accept them as a working basis. There is no need to read back into such divergences assumptions which became current a few years later, when conflict between the two powers was presumed to have been sought from the start by one or other of them. Appearances can be deceptive. For all the power of the United States in 1945, there was little political will to use it; the first concern of the American military after victory was to bring the boys home and achieve as rapid a demobilization as possible. Lend-lease arrangements with allies were cut off even before the Japanese surrender, a step which actually reduced America's international leverage; it weakened friends she would soon be needing, by imposing graver recovery problems upon them at a time when they could not provide a new security system to replace American strength. Nor (even when more of them at last became available) could the use of atomic bombs be envisaged except as a last resort; they were too powerful for use except in extremity.

It is much harder to know what was shaping Stalin's policy or, even now, quite what was going on in the USSR. Her peoples had clearly suffered appallingly from the war, more even than the Germans. With the colossal Soviet losses in the war, Stalin may well in 1945 have been less aware of Soviet strength than of Soviet weakness. True, his governmental methods relieved him of any need, such as faced western countries, to demobilize the armies which gave him supremacy on the spot in Europe. But the USSR had no atomic bomb nor a significant strategic bomber force, while the decision to develop nuclear weapons put a further grave strain on the Soviet economy at a time when economic reconstruction was desperately needed. The years immediately after the war were to prove for Soviet citizens as

grim as had been those of the industrialization race of the 1930s. Yet in September 1949 a nuclear explosion was achieved and in the following March it was officially announced that the USSR had an atomic weapon. By then, though, much else had changed.

FRICTION

Piecemeal, relations between the two major world powers deteriorated badly by 1948. This was largely the result of events in Europe, an area obviously in need of imaginative and coordinated reconstruction. The division between eastern and western Europe established by Soviet victories had soon deepened. The British, in particular, had from the first been alarmed by the fate of Poland, which seemed to show that Stalin would only tolerate subservient governments in eastern Europe, although this was hardly what the Americans had envisaged as freedom for eastern Europeans to choose their own rulers. Until the war was over, though, neither government nor private persons in the United States had expressed much doubt in public that reasonable agreement with the USSR was possible. Broadly speaking, Roosevelt had been sure, even after his last inter-allied conference (at Yalta, in February 1945), that America could get on in peacetime with its wartime ally; they had common ground, he thought, in resisting a revival of German power and supporting anti-colonialism; he showed no awareness of the historic tendencies of Russian policy. Americans disapproved strongly, too, of British action in Greece against the communist revolutionaries seeking to overthrow the monarchy there, and Roosevelt had deep suspicions of anything looking like the restoration of colonial rule in Asia.

President Truman (who had succeeded Roosevelt on his death in April 1945) and his advisers came to change American policies partly as a result of their experience in Germany. At the outset, the three major powers were wholly in agreement that in due course, and under proper safeguards, a disarmed but still united Germany should be their ultimate aim, though the French did not agree with this and opposed from the outset any attempt at a central administration of Germany. The Soviet authorities had been punctilious in carrying out

their agreement to admit British and American (and later French) armed forces to Berlin though they had not fought their way to it as the Red Army had done, and to share the administration of the city they had conquered with their allies. It was clearly a Soviet interest that Germany should be governed as a unit (as envisaged by a meeting of the victorious heads of the American, British and Soviet governments – but not the French – at Potsdam in July 1945), for this would give them a hand in controlling the Ruhr, potentially a treasure house of reparations. Yet the German economy soon bred trouble between West and East. Russian efforts to ensure security against German recovery led in practice to the increasing separation of her zone of occupation from those of the three other occupying powers. Probably this was at first intended to provide a solid and reliable (that is, communist) core for a united Germany, but it led in the end to a *de facto* solution by partition to the German problem which no one had envisaged and which was to last for most of the rest of the century.

The problems of the management of the western zones of occupation soon faced the British, Americans and French with a social crisis. Mass starvation appeared to be in the offing. In May 1946 the reparations delivered to the Soviet Union from the west were halted (as were those previously delivered from the American to the British and French occupation zones), pending new agreement on the economic management of Germany as a whole. This was not something Soviet policy could accept without protest. Meanwhile the social and administrative entrenchment of communism in eastern Germany was going forward and a new 'Socialist Unity Party' was set up to fuse the communists in the old socialist party – whose leaders violently rejected it. This seemed to repeat patterns seen elsewhere. In 1945 there had been communist majorities in elections only in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia; in other east European countries at that moment the communists only shared power in coalition governments. Nonetheless, it increasingly looked as if those governments could, in fact, do little more than behave as Soviet puppets. Something like a communist bloc was already appearing in 1946. In the following year Hungary, Romania and Poland all dropped non-communists from their government. Meanwhile the votes and propaganda of the communist parties of western Europe were evidently being deployed in Soviet interests.

Stalin's calculations remain in doubt; perhaps he was waiting, expecting or even relying upon economic collapse in the capitalist world. There was also always a strong element of opportunism in his undertakings. At bottom, though, Stalin could not accept any reunited Germany except under a government he could control. An independent Germany would always have a potential for aggression which a satellite could not have. Russia had too many experiences and memories of attacks from the west to trust a united Germany. This was likely to have been true whatever the ideology dominant in Moscow; it only made things a little worse that a united Germany might be capitalist. Unsurprisingly, when the foreign ministers of the victorious powers gathered in Moscow in March 1947 they found themselves unable to agree on any basis for a German peace treaty.

Outside Europe, the USSR showed more flexibility. While anxiously organizing eastern Germany safely on the Soviet side of the line slowly hardening across Europe, in China she still formally and officially recognized the KMT government. In Iran, on the other hand, there was an obvious reluctance to withdraw Soviet forces as had been agreed and even when they finally departed they left behind a satellite communist republic in Azerbaijan – to be later obliterated by the Iranians, to whom the Americans were soon giving military aid. In the Security Council the Soviet veto was more and more employed to frustrate her former allies. Yet, there had been and still was much goodwill for the USSR among her former allies for years after the war. When Winston Churchill drew attention to the increasing division of Europe by an 'Iron Curtain' he by no means spoke either for all his countrymen or for the American audience that he was addressing;⁸ some, indeed, strongly condemned him. Yet though a British Labour government that had been elected in 1945 was at first hopeful that 'Left could speak to Left,' it had quickly become more sceptical. British and American policy began to converge during 1946, as it became clear that the British intervention in Greece had in fact made free elections possible there and as American officials had more experience of the tendency of Soviet policy. Nor did President Truman have prejudices in favour of the USSR to shed. The British, moreover, were

by then clearly committed to leaving India; that, too, counted with American official opinion.

THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE AND THE MARSHALL PLAN

Europe was facing a hard winter as 1947 began. Weather conditions were unusually severe. In Great Britain electricity supplies were at times cut off. Meat became unobtainable in France except on the black market (and in April the bread ration was to be further reduced). It was against this background that in February the American president took a momentous decision to change American policy in a radical way. It followed messages from the British government which, perhaps more than any other step it had taken since the end of the war, conceded the long-resisted admission that Great Britain was no longer a world power. The Labour government had inherited a British economy gravely damaged by the effort made during the war; there was an urgent need for investment at home. It wished to reward its supporters by extending the 'welfare state', a costly business. The first stages of decolonization, too, were expensive. A part of this expense reflected imperial defence commitments, but there were others in non-colonial areas which were very burdensome.⁹ A big American loan made in 1945 had soon been used up. Grain had to be paid for in hard currency and bread rationing (not found necessary in Great Britain during the war) had been introduced in the previous July to keep imports down.

By 1947 the British balance of payments could no longer support British forces in Greece, or the cost of aiding Turkey and the American government was told so. Yet if such efforts were not maintained, the security of Greece would be threatened; civil war against a communist

⁸ At Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, 5 March 1946.

⁹ Military expenditure abroad in 1947 was £209 million; the annual average of all British government expenditure abroad 1934–8, including administrative and diplomatic as well as military costs, had been £6 million. A. S. Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe 1945–51* (London, 1984), p. 41. In spite of relief received in the next two years, the British government was forced into a devaluation in 1949 (which was, of course, a breach of its IMF undertakings).

rebellion was still going on there. The country might fall to the communists. The case of Turkey, under diplomatic pressure by the USSR, was less urgent but still dangerous if deprived of foreign aid. President Truman at once decided that the United States must fill the gap. Financial aid was to be given to Greece and to Turkey. In his personal appearance before Congress, though, the President went further by drawing attention to the implication that much more than propping up two countries was involved. 'No government is perfect', he said, (and went on to acknowledge that the Greek, in particular, was not), but nevertheless, he pointed out, it was a virtue of democracy 'that its defects are always visible and under democratic processes can be pointed out and corrected'.¹⁰ The ideological challenge was explicit. 'It must be the policy of the United States,' he said, 'to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.' Although only Turkey and Greece were to receive aid, Truman was offering the 'free peoples' of the world American leadership to resist threats to their independence, with American help, though 'primarily through economic and financial aid'.

This was more than merely a reversal of that turning away from Europe which many Americans had seemed to hanker after in 1945; it was a break with the historic traditions of American foreign policy. The decision to 'contain' Soviet power, as it was soon termed, was possibly the most influential in American diplomacy since the Louisiana Purchase. Behind it lay Soviet behaviour and the growing fears Stalin's policy had aroused over the previous eighteen months, moreover; the British *démarche* had only been a detonator for the new policy. Ultimately, it was to lead to unrealistic assessments of the effective limits of American power (and, critics were to say, to a new American imperialism) as the policy was extended outside Europe, but this could hardly have been envisaged at the time.

Republican though Congress was, its leaders persuaded it to support the president's request for \$400 million, though some congressmen

¹⁰ The President's message was delivered on 12 March (the British had warned that they would shut down their Greek commitment on 31 March). See *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States - Harry S. Truman, 1 January to 31 December 1947* (Washington, 1963), pp.176-80, for the full text.

expressed alarm at the potential for dissipating American strength that the 'Truman doctrine' might imply. The next step, though, went further still in its demands for resources. This was the 'Marshall Plan' to assist European economic recovery, named after the American Secretary of State who announced it. It was the product of fierce debate in the United States about the politics of European reconstruction. The continent appeared in 1947 to be heading towards an exchange crisis (in part because of the vigour of its recovery). Many American officials had by now come to see the survival of democratic and friendly regimes in Europe as an American interest. They may have exaggerated the political dangers facing France and Italy, but theirs was a new perception. The way to secure that interest, it now appeared, was to relieve Europe's chronic balance of payments problems, thus assuring its economic recovery and health, and so help to achieve a non-military, non-aggressive form of containment of the USSR.¹¹

The British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, appears to have been the first European statesman to grasp the possibilities of the Marshall Plan. With the French, he pressed for the acceptance of the offer by western European nations. It was made to all Europe, but the USSR neither wished to participate, nor would it allow its satellites to do so; the plan was instead bitterly attacked in Moscow. The French communists, who had at first welcomed Marshall's proposal, had to eat their words. Soon (though with obvious regret) the Czechoslovakian coalition government also declined to join up; the Czechs, the only people in eastern Europe still left without a fully communist government and one not yet regarded as a Russian satellite, were obviously having to toe the Soviet line. Any residual belief in Czechoslovakia's independence was then removed by a communist *coup* in February 1948 and the installation of a puppet regime in Prague.

An important signal of a move towards a more intransigent Soviet stance had been the revival of the Comintern under the name of 'Cominform' in October 1947. It at once began the denunciation of what it termed 'the imperialist and anti-democratic camp' whose aim (it said) was 'the world domination of American imperialism and the

¹¹ See Milward, *Reconstruction of Western Europe*, for the origins and launch of the Marshall Plan.

smashing of democracy'.¹² Once the Cominform had been set up the Italian and French communist parties at once denounced their own earlier participation in coalition governments in their countries and the 'fetish of coalitionism' was condemned in Moscow.¹³ Finally, when in 1948 western Europe set up an Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) to handle the Marshall Plan, the Russians replied by organizing their own half of Europe in a Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), which was window-dressing for the Soviet domination of the command economies of the east. The first phase of Europe's post-war history can with this step be considered at an end. The next was to be a phase in global history, too. What came to be called 'the Cold War' – an expression whose first recorded use came little more than a month after Truman's message to Congress on Greece and Turkey¹⁴ – had begun. One of the fundamental lines of the history of the next forty years was drawn.

15

The Cold War Unrolls

ROOTS OF CONFLICT

Perhaps too often, the story has been told that the Chinese communist leader Chou-en-Lai, on being asked what he thought was the historical significance of the French Revolution, replied, 'It is too soon to say.' Truly reported or not, it is hard to see why such a prudent response should be thought (as it has been) funny, strange, or as evidence of an extraordinary and exotic viewpoint. What happened in France in 1789 when certain ideas were first launched on a world career is in fact still influencing many countries as the twentieth century draws to a close, even if it is not much invoked by name, or very obvious. It seems sensible not to lose sight of that. It is a long time since the Bastille fell, but the French Revolution is one of those historical facts (like others, older still, such as the establishment of Confucianism in China, the Spanish conquest of South America, or the Ottoman conquest of south-eastern Europe) with whose consequences we live today. All of which is merely preliminary, but suggests that for all the dramatic changes that followed 1945, we ought not to treat that year (nor of course, any other) as a sudden amputation or severance of history. Although long-term trends and forces alone do not explain everything that happens and (as in all previous ages) much of the second half of the twentieth century arises from accident, circumstance, or personality, its explanation must take account of long-term and historical forces, many of which go back far before that year.¹

¹ The whole British cabinet formed by Attlee in August 1945 had been born while Queen Victoria was on the throne, a majority of its members before 1889, and one twenty years earlier than that. One could make not dissimilar observations about contemporary ruling élites in most of the world.

¹² From the 'Declaration on the Formation of the Cominform', 5 October 1947, printed *AR* 1947, pp. 522–5.

¹³ The French communists had left the government a month before General Marshall's speech, in order not to continue sharing responsibility for the privations and rationing that the French people were undergoing; the Italian party had been ejected from government when a new coalition government was formed by the Christian democrat leader Alcide de Gasperi in 1947.

¹⁴ By the American financier, Bernard Baruch, in addressing the legislature of South Carolina, 17 April 1947.