

accusing Jews of being anti-Polish and Jews censuring Poles for being anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist.

Jews and Poles have periodically quarreled about the status of the concentration camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau as a memorial site because it is a symbol of Nazi Germany's crimes against Jews (for Jews) and Poles (for Poles), and the commemoration in late January 1995 of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the camp by the Red Army was overshadowed by misunderstandings, accusations, and self-righteousness. Norman Davies has made the following observation about the Polish-Jewish problem of interpretation: "Jewish investigators tend to count Jewish victims. Polish investigators tend to count Polish victims. Neither side wishes to stress the fact that the largest category of victims was both Polish and Jewish."<sup>28</sup>

The quantification of suffering—history as a body count—inevitably leads to misunderstandings and controversies. For example, Stalin was responsible for the deaths of an estimated 20 million Soviet citizens, and the Soviet *gulag* predated the Nazi concentration camps. These facts can be interpreted in any number of ways. Is it an explicit or implicit attempt to relativize the Holocaust? Does placing the Holocaust in a historical context lessen its political and moral implications or entail questioning its singularity? What is the significance or intention of comparing the number of victims here and there? Does it make any sense to ask and answer questions like "Was Stalin a bigger criminal than Hitler?"

Interpreting the Holocaust is extremely difficult. The victims of the Holocaust are long dead, and the generation of survivors, perpetrators, accomplices, and bystanders is slowly dying. The inevitable expiration of eye-witnesses will contribute to making the Holocaust a historical event: perhaps one of the best-documented historical events in history, but a historical event nonetheless. This will not in the least diminish the relevance or the gravity of the admonition "Never forget!" If there are two lessons the Holocaust taught, they are remembrance and vigilance. People do disagree, nonetheless, on which form of remembrance is most appropriate and which form of vigilance is necessary or legitimate, and they most likely will continue to disagree long into the future.



## Spheres of Influence II

### East and West, or "Yalta Europe"

"Yalta Europe" has two relatively distinct sets of meaning. Among many East Central European intellectuals and dissidents, it is a pejorative reference to a summit meeting of the "Big Three"—Winston Churchill, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin—held at Yalta, a resort in the Crimea on the Black Sea, on February 4 to 11, 1945. During one week of negotiations, as this version of the story goes, the two most important leaders of the Western democratic world abandoned more than 100 million people to an expanded Soviet version of the east, or the "Soviet empire." Ever since then, the word "Yalta" has evoked feelings of contempt for the sheer stupidity of the West in its dealings with Stalin as well as sentiments ranging from moral indignation to betrayal.

In a more dispassionate vein, "Yalta Europe" refers to the complicated process of multilateral negotiations among the Allies during and after World War II, on the one hand, and the gradual division of Europe into two ideologically opposed military and economic blocs, on the other. In this respect, Yalta Europe began at the first major summit of the Big Three in Teheran in 1943, was more or less complete with the division of Germany in 1949, and assumed its final shape in May 1955 when the finishing touches were put on the East and West blocs. The Federal Republic of Germany joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); the Warsaw Pact was established; and the signature of the Austrian State Treaty ended the Allied occupation of Austria, which then declared its permanent neutrality after occupational troops evacuated the country in October.

The defeat of Nazi Germany led to the division of Europe, and any number of events can be used to mark the turning point of the war. From the American point of view, the landing of the Western Allies in Normandy in June 1944 signaled the beginning of the end of the war in Europe. The encirclement and destruction of the German Sixth Army at the Battle of Stalingrad during the winter of 1942/1943 is generally recognized as the psychological turning point of the war. From a military point of view, Operation Zitadelle, the failure of the German offensive on the central section of the eastern front in the late spring and summer of 1943 appears decisive, because the Germans exhausted their offensive capacity in a gigantic



battle that involved more than 2,000 tanks and 2 million men. Even this date is relatively late, however, because by the end of 1941, members of the German high command recognized that the war against the Soviet Union on the eastern front could not be won.

The objective of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, was to "annihilate" the Soviet Union with a blitzkrieg of unprecedented dimensions. Despite massive territorial gains, the German offensive stalled at the gates of Moscow and Leningrad. Some military historians maintain that Stalin pursued a simple "space for time" strategy. Territory lost was time gained, which allowed the Soviet Union to marshal its forces for defense and then for counteroffensives. But others maintain that Stalin was responsible for enormous losses on the eastern front, which almost led to the defeat of the Soviet Union, because he did not withdraw Soviet troops fast enough or prematurely ordered them to hold positions. In any event, the sheer size of the Soviet Union led to an overextension of the German army. Winter is usually called one of Russia's most important allies, and the German troops undoubtedly were ill equipped for it. Rain in the fall and the spring were equally trying for the Germans, as the instruments of blitzkrieg, tanks and other heavy motorized vehicles, literally bogged down in the soft ground and on poorly maintained Russian roads.

In late 1941, the Soviet East and the British and American West forged an alliance. The German invasion of the Soviet Union eventually provided Great Britain with a needed ally, and vice versa, and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, brought the United States into the Anglo-Soviet alliance. The Soviet Union switched allies in 1941 without changing some of the policy objectives articulated in the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939, such as the consolidation of control over the Baltic states and eastern Poland.

Although the United States' vast reservoirs of human and material resources played an indisputably important role in winning the war in Europe and ultimately expedited its outcome, the most important European theater of military conflict was the eastern front, where Nazi Germany lost its war. The German losses of men and matériel on the eastern front between 1941 and the Normandy invasion in June 1944 were enormous. An estimated 26 million Soviet citizens died during World War II; 8.6 million of them were in the Soviet armed forces. Soviet combat dead outnumbered those of the United States in the Atlantic theater of war approximately 50 to 1 or, including civilians, around 150 to 1.<sup>1</sup> Given the enormity of Soviet losses, it is easy to understand why western allies and a western European front were so important to Stalin. The fact that his Anglo-American allies promised to open a western European front in 1942 but did not deliver on a grand scale until 1944 made him both impatient and suspicious.

The evolution of Allied policy in Europe was a long and complicated process of bi- and multilateral negotiations on many levels. The common objective of defeating Nazi Germany was the basis of the "anti-Hitler coalition," and the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany became one of the cornerstones of Allied policy in early 1943. Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt also recognized that the defeat of Nazi Germany would necessarily mean reorganizing Europe so as to prevent the possibility of German aggression in the future.

Allied plans also were complicated by the fact that the alliance's common denominator of anti-Nazism was not great enough to overcome the principal ideological differences between the Anglo-American democratic West and the Soviet East. However, ideological antagonisms were played down because they could weaken the alliance and the war effort, and there were fears among the Western democracies that the Soviet Union might negotiate a separate peace with Nazi Germany, and vice versa. Therefore, the priority of maintaining East-West collaboration demanded that concessions be made on issues that the Western powers considered secondary. Negotiations among the Allies also were guided by the realistic assumption that regional "spheres of influence" would exist in Europe after the defeat of Nazi Germany.

As a matter of principle, the Western democracies agreed not to recognize territorial acquisitions made by force; this was one of the principles of the Atlantic Charter formulated by Churchill and Roosevelt in August 1941. But as a matter of fact, they did. The Western Allies disapproved of the territorial gains the Soviet Union had made under the auspices of the initial "spheres of influence" agreement between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, Hitler's and Stalin's nonaggression pact of 1939. Stalin had every intention of reestablishing Soviet control over the Baltic republics and territories that the Soviet Union had annexed in Finland, eastern Poland, and Romania between 1939 and 1941, areas that had been lost for the time being because of the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany and its allies, and he made this clear to his Western allies early on in the alliance. Stalin also was intent on expanding the Soviet sphere of influence beyond these frontiers to ensure Soviet national security in the future.

If Yalta is thus understood as the democratic West's subordination of political principle to the imperial interests of the Soviet Union in East Central Europe (or, in a less moralistic vein, the compromises necessary to maintain East-West cooperation), then the evolution of Allied policy toward Poland provides the best example of how the idea of Yalta Europe developed before the Yalta conference.

### THE POLISH PROBLEM, 1939-1945

A brief survey of the diplomatic situation in Central Europe during World War II is necessary to appreciate the exceptional role Poland played in inter-Allied negotiations. Austria had been incorporated into the Third Reich in March 1938; Finland, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria were allies of Nazi Germany; and Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia had established governments in exile in London. The status of the states that collaborated with Nazi Germany obviously was different from the status of those that had governments in exile. The former had to be defeated along with Nazi Germany, and the latter had to be liberated from Nazi Germany.<sup>2</sup> The importance of the Yugoslav government in exile in London decreased as the significance of Tito and his Communist partisan movement increased in Yugoslavia and Yugoslavia assumed an increasingly "eastern," or Communist, course during the war.

Eduard Beneš, the president of the Czechoslovak Republic, who had resigned after the Munich agreement in 1938, initially was an embarrassing political



exile for the Western democracies, because he reminded them that they had left Czechoslovakia in the lurch with their "policy of appeasement." Beneš's experience with Western democracies eroded his confidence in the West and led to his recognition that it also would be necessary for Czechoslovakia to reach some kind of accommodation with the Soviet Union. He therefore developed a close working relationship with Stalin, and, as many Czechs in times of duress had done in the past, saw Russia as a patron of the smaller Slavic nations.

Poland, the only country of this trio that depended completely on the support of the Western democracies, was in the least advantageous position of all. Its national interests conflicted directly with those of the Soviet Union, and this bilateral confrontation threatened the harmony of the British-American-Soviet alliance.

Britain and France had entered the war in 1939 to maintain the European status quo, which required, among other things, fighting for the reestablishment of Polish independence. The Soviet Union's participation in the invasion and occupation of Poland in 1939 made it an enemy of the Polish government in exile, but the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 made the Soviet Union an ally of the United Kingdom, Poland's most important ally and advocate. The United Kingdom, in turn, pressured Poland to develop an accommodating relationship with the Soviet Union, but for obvious reasons Polish-Soviet relations were characterized by mutual suspicion instead of reciprocal trust. The Soviet Union had invaded and occupied that part of Poland it wanted to keep, and it justified this acquisition by pointing out that the region was inhabited predominantly by Belarussian's and Ukrainians.

The renegotiation of the Polish-Soviet frontier is a long, complicated, and sad story. At the end of 1941, Churchill had branded the Soviet acquisitions in East Central Europe as a "shameless aggression," but in 1942 he indicated to the Soviets that he was willing to make concessions on this issue. Roosevelt secretly followed suit at the Teheran conference at the end of 1943, but he wanted to avoid making any public statements on the border issue until after the U.S. presidential elections in the fall of 1944, for fear of losing the Polish American vote. Plans for compensating Poland for the territory it was to lose in the east with German territory in the west were discussed and agreed on in principle at a summit meeting in Teheran in 1943. Churchill demonstrated the idea by putting three matches on the conference table. The ones on the left and the right represented the German-Polish and Polish-Soviet frontiers in 1939, and the one in the middle, the border the Soviets demanded. Then he took the match on the right and moved it to the far left to show how Poland would be compensated for its losses in the east by gains at the expense of Germany in the west. At Teheran, Churchill and Roosevelt also gave the Soviet Union a more or less free hand to administer the territories it was "liberating" on the eastern front.

The Allies also had bigger issues on their agenda in Teheran, such as the articulation of a grand strategy for the war, which included opening up new fronts in western and southern Europe and a Soviet commitment to enter the war against Japan; the establishment of policies for the treatment of Nazi Germany's allies; and the discussion of the framework for a permanent international peacekeeping organization. Churchill was a great proponent of a Western Allied invasion on the

Balkan Peninsula, which would pierce the soft underbelly of Hitler's Europe and have the concomitant benefit of bringing Western troops into the heart of the continent, but this proposal was tabled by the Americans and eventually dismissed in favor of the Allied invasion in Normandy.

The fact that Stalin had broken off diplomatic relations with the Polish government in exile in mid-1943 also damaged Poland's prospects. The immediate cause of this rupture in relations was the Polish reaction to the German discovery of a mass grave of more than 4,000 Polish officers in the Katyn Forest (near Smolensk in Belarus) in March 1943. In the process of invading and occupying eastern Poland in 1939, the Soviet Union had taken into custody 15,000 Polish officers, professional soldiers, and reservists. These Polish officers, representatives of a national elite, then disappeared without a trace until the Germans discovered the mass grave in Katyn. The Germans accused the Soviets of having massacred them, but the Soviets reversed the allegation. However, given the evidence and an international investigation, it became clear to the Poles that the Soviets had murdered the Polish prisoners in Katyn, which also indicated that the 11,000 others most likely met similar fates elsewhere. Polish indignation and concern played directly into the hands of Nazi propaganda. The Soviet Union then accused the Polish government in exile of "pro-Hitler" agitation and broke off diplomatic relations.

Soviet authorities adamantly denied responsibility for the Katyn massacre until 1989 when they finally admitted that it was one of the many atrocities committed by the NKVD, the Soviet secret police. The Hitler-Stalin nonaggression pact, the Soviet denial of its secret protocol, and the Soviets' refusal to reveal what had happened to the Polish officers who had been taken into Soviet custody in 1939 strained Polish-Soviet relations not only throughout World War II but also during the entire postwar period of Communist "fraternal cooperation" between the two countries. Katyn, which became a symbol for the crimes the Soviet Union committed against the Polish nation, was subsequently one of the most gaping "blanks" or distortions in the official Soviet and Polish Communist histories. Although the 4,000 officers murdered at Katyn were but a fraction of Poland's total losses of 6 million during World War II, they assumed a prominent place in the Polish historical memory.

The Katyn massacre also is a good example of the type of policy the Soviet Union pursued toward non-Communist political and military organizations throughout east Central Europe. The liberation of countries from Nazi Germany went hand in hand with the persecution of anti-Nazi resisters who also were anti-Communists. They were accused of being "bourgeois," "nationalist," or "reactionary." Poland provides once again a prime example for the manner in which this policy was executed.

There was a considerable military underground organization in Poland, the Home Army, which worked closely with the Polish government in exile in London. In order to establish a political presence in Poland when it was liberated by the Soviet Union, Home Army commanders were instructed to stage local uprisings immediately before the arrival of the Soviet units. They also were advised to offer their assistance to the Red Army while simultaneously declaring their allegiance to



the Polish government in exile, a practice that led in some cases to their immediate arrest or execution.<sup>3</sup>

The situation of the Home Army in Poland was complicated by the fact that once the Red Army reached ethnic Polish territory, Polish Communists from the Soviet Union established the "Committee for National Liberation" in Lublin, the first major city liberated in "ethnic Poland," and the so-called Lublin Committee declared that it was the provisional legal authority for all of liberated Poland. As a result, Poland had two rival governments: one officially recognized by the Western Allies in London and another recognized only by, but fully supported by, the Soviet Union in Poland. The Lublin Committee was the first Communist puppet government in East Central Europe, and its establishment also demonstrated how the Soviet Union intended to deal with anti-Communist governments in the region in the future: They were to be discredited if possible and undermined if not.

The way in which the Soviet Red Army failed to aid an uprising of the Polish Home Army in Warsaw in August and September 1944 is yet another example of the means that the Soviets were prepared to use to eliminate anti-Communist, national opposition. In the summer of 1944, the Red Army advanced rapidly toward Warsaw. The Polish government in London called for an uprising by the Polish Home Army in Warsaw, with the intention of establishing a territorial base of operations for the Polish government. The government also assumed that the Red Army would come to the aid of the Polish forces and "co-liberate" the Polish capital. But then the Red Army halted on the outskirts of Warsaw, and the stalling of the Soviet advance gave the Nazis ample opportunity to put down ruthlessly the Warsaw uprising. The elite of the Polish Home Army and 200,000 civilians died in Warsaw during sixty-three days of fighting.

In military terms, the Warsaw uprising was directed against Nazi Germany. Politically, however, it was explicitly anti-Soviet, and the Soviets let the German forces do their military and political dirty work for them. The Nazis eliminated the Polish nationalists, democrats, and anti-Communists of the Home Army, and they destroyed most of Warsaw in the process. (After the Warsaw uprising, Hitler ordered that the remains of Warsaw be razed. When it finally was "liberated" by the Red Army, the city was a depopulated pile of rubble.) Soviet histories maintained that the Red Army had overextended itself and was in no position to advance, although Poles never accepted this version of the story. Before 1989, Poles used to illustrate Poland's geopolitical predicament and their bitter feelings about Germans and Russians with a caustic joke. Question: "If Poland were to be invaded again by Germany and the Soviet Union, in which direction should one shoot first?" Answer "To the west: first business, then pleasure."

### YALTA: BUNGLING OR BETRAYAL?

The Yalta conference was prefaced by an Anglo-Soviet understanding in regard to southeastern Europe. In October 1944, Churchill and Stalin met in Moscow to discuss British and Soviet interests in the region, and Churchill relayed only partial results of these meetings to Roosevelt. At that time, Churchill and Stalin came up

with a "percentage agreement" that was basically a Soviet recognition of British interests in the Mediterranean (Greece, in particular) and the British acknowledgment of a Soviet sphere of influence in Romania and Bulgaria. Influence in Yugoslavia and Hungary was to be shared equally.<sup>4</sup> This entire agreement was made rather nonchalantly at the dinner table. Churchill jotted down the following East-West percentages on a half sheet of paper: Romania 90:10; Bulgaria 75:25; Hungary and Yugoslavia, 50:50; Greece 10:90. He passed it to Stalin, who looked at it and put a large check on it with a blue pencil and then passed it back to Churchill. (There was a bit of additional dickering on the next day between the Soviet and British foreign ministers, V. M. Molotov and Anthony Eden, and the percentages for Bulgaria and Hungary were revised to 80:20 and 75:25. However, the modalities of measurement never were discussed.)

Stalin also emphasized that he wanted Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary to be "anti-Nazi, pro-Russian" states, and Churchill inconclusively broached one of his favorite ideas with Stalin: the reestablishment of a federation of states along the Danube, with Vienna as its capital. Churchill thought in the terms of the classic European balance of power in this respect, and he was concerned about the expansion of Soviet influence in Central Europe. A Danube confederation could fill the vacuum that the destruction of Austria-Hungary had created in 1918, and various schemes for a multinational cooperation in the region were popular among British planners. Representatives of the Polish and Czechoslovak governments in exile also discussed confederative plans during the war as a means of cooperatively offsetting Russian and German influence. But none of these confederative schemes materialized, and the Soviets viewed them with suspicion because they merely represented Western attempts to erect a new *cordon sanitaire*.

By the time the Big Three met in Yalta at the beginning of 1945, the end of the war in Europe was in sight. The Red Army had occupied almost all of Poland and had overrun Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria. (Romania and Bulgaria switched their allegiances and became belated members of the anti-Hitler coalition.) The Soviets had taken Budapest after three months of siege, and the Western Allies had reached German soil. The big issues on the Yalta agenda were the defeat and treatment of Nazi Germany, the future status of Poland, a hastening of the end of the war with Japan, and the development of a world security organization.

It is important to recall that British-American-Soviet cooperation reached a peak at the beginning of 1945, and there were hopes that the spirit of cooperation established during the war would carry over into the postwar period. However, critics have accused Roosevelt of trusting Stalin and of having misconceptions about Soviet Communism. Roosevelt did not have as good an understanding of Communism and Central European affairs as Churchill did, who was becoming increasingly concerned about the Soviet Union's growing influence. Churchill viewed Soviet policy in East Central Europe as a European problem with global implications for the Western democracies, whereas Roosevelt subordinated East Central European or regional issues to global considerations. He banked on the idea of the United Nations and believed that Stalin and the Soviet Union were prepared to assume the role of one of the guarantors of the free world. Therefore, concessions to the Soviet Union in East Central Europe were a means of ensuring





The Big Three met at Yalta in early 1945 to negotiate a new postwar order: l. to r. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, ailing U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. (AP Photo)

peace on a global scale. But this situation was complicated by the fact that Roosevelt was in some respects more concerned about the gains of the British Empire during the war than those of the Soviet Union and thus was more suspicious of Churchill than of Stalin.

At Yalta, the Allies discussed principles for the treatment of Germany, such as unconditional surrender, dismemberment, denazification, demilitarization, and reparations for the Soviet Union, and they agreed on including France in the occupation and administration of Germany and Berlin, which were to be divided up into four different zones. (This model of quadripartite administration also was applied to Austria and Vienna.) However, there was no agreement on what to do with Germany after the war, no common plan or joint vision.

An important shift in the Western perception of Poland antedated the decisions regarding the borders and the future of Poland that were made at Yalta. Both Churchill and Roosevelt had come to accept the idea that Poland had to be considered in the context of the Soviet Union's national security interests. From this perspective, the purpose of Poland would be to help protect the Soviet Union from future aggression. At Yalta, the Allies agreed to revise the eastern frontier of Poland, and they discussed new northern and western frontiers that would involve the incorporation of substantial German territories into Poland—most of East Prussia in the north and areas reaching as far west as the Oder and Western Neisse Rivers (the so-called Oder–Neisse Line). These acquisitions, in turn, would necessitate the expulsion of millions of Germans. Although the Oder–Neisse frontier

was not sanctioned until the last great summit meeting that the Allies held, in Potsdam in midsummer 1945, the dye was cast in Yalta. The so-called eastern territories—East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia—were placed under the administration of Poland, which referred to them as “recovered territories,” and then were unilaterally annexed after 1947. (The Soviet Union also occupied and then annexed a portion of northern East Prussia around Königsberg.)

At Potsdam, the Allies also formally endorsed the policy of transferring not only Germans from the German territories administered by Poland but also ethnic German minorities, or *Volksdeutsche*, from Czechoslovakia and Hungary, “in a humane and orderly manner.” Finally, the Allies agreed on a “reorganization” of the Communist-dominated Lublin government in Poland, which already had been recognized by Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, to include some representatives of the Polish government in exile, and “the holding of free and unfettered elections as soon as possible.” Long before Yalta, the Western Allies had abandoned Poland's 1939 frontiers; then at Yalta, they effectively abandoned the Polish government in exile. (Although it had lost its diplomatic status, the Polish government in exile maintained an office in London until 1989.)

It is important to distinguish here between the two different planes of Soviet and Anglo-American, or East–West, relations. Democracy and Communism were incompatible on moral, political, and ideological levels, and in this respect, the Cold War started before the hot war. Nonetheless, military cooperation was indispensable, and the overriding importance of an East–West anti-Nazi alliance made Western anti-Communism a secondary issue. At Yalta, Poland was not important enough for the Western Allies to risk a rupture with the Soviet Union, and after World War II, Western anti-Communism was subordinated in many respects to the objective of maintaining peace in Europe. If one is prepared to downplay or ignore the necessity of cooperating for the pragmatic purposes of winning the war against Nazi Germany before 1945 or keeping the peace in Europe between East and West thereafter, it is easy to use moral criteria to criticize the hypocrisy or duplicity of the Western democracies' policies, and many East Central Europeans have perceived “Yalta” or “the West” in exactly these terms.

After defeating Nazi Germany with the Soviet Union, the West was neither willing nor prepared to fight a new war with the Soviet Union in order to liberate East Central Europe. The Cold War was implicit in the dynamics of the British–American–Soviet alliance. The overriding objective of defeating Nazi Germany held the alliance together, and once it had been achieved, conflicting ideological and national interests were free to emerge. Poland was the first victim of World War II in 1939: the Hitler–Stalin pact and Nazi and Soviet aggression. It also was in the ill-fated position of being the first victim of peace in 1945: the collaboration of Western democracies with the Soviet Union that led to the defeat of Nazi Germany.

Although Europe was not divided at Yalta, the process of dividing it began there. Allied policy for the treatment of postwar Germany was fragmentary. The decisions made regarding Poland were both unfortunate and far reaching, but Czechoslovakia and Hungary were barely discussed. Among the concluding documents of the Yalta conference was an Allied “Declaration on Liberated Europe”



affirming the "right of all peoples to choose the form of governments under which they will live," "the restoration of sovereign rights and self-government," and "free elections." The Western allies did not envision the Soviet sphere of influence as a closed bloc, and they hoped that the Soviet Union would respect the rules of democratic fair play in East Central Europe after the war. It did not.

### THE MAKING OF EASTERN EUROPE, 1945-1948

Churchill popularized the term "Iron Curtain" shortly after the war. This vivid metaphor tends to divert attention away from the fact that the Iron Curtain did not fall into place at one theatrical moment. Although the presence of the Red Army from the Baltic to the Balkans gave the Soviet Union massive political leverage in the region, the Communists did not take power all at once. Instead, the establishment of Communist regimes in the region was a successive process that started in 1945 but was not completed until 1948. The amounts of political sympathy and antipathy for the revolutionary program the Soviet Union propagated in the countries it liberated varied from state to state, as did the tactics the Communists employed to gain power.

The political revolutions in East Central Europe went hand-in-hand with massive ethnic and demographic dislocations. Poland is the best example of the type of chaos that World War II produced in the form of armed hostilities, deportation, genocide, settlement and resettlement campaigns, liberation, repatriation, and population exchanges. After 1939, the Soviets deported Poles from eastern Poland. The Nazis expelled Poles from the parts of Poland that had been annexed by the Third Reich into the General Gouvernement, and they "exported" Poles to Germany as forced laborers. Ethnic Germans from throughout East Central Europe were brought in to "resettle" those parts of Poland that Nazi Germany had incorporated. The Holocaust virtually annihilated the Polish Jews. After the war, Poles were repatriated from the Soviet Union and Germany, and the Germans were expelled from those parts of Germany administered by Poland, which in turn had to be "resettled" by Poles.

The expulsion of the Germans from East Central Europe took a number of forms. Many Germans—as well as the members of many other national and ethnic groups that had collaborated with Nazi Germany or merely feared the Red Army—fled to avoid ending up behind the Soviet front. (In the process of honoring repatriation agreements, the Western Allies returned more than 2 million people to the Soviet Union after the war: collaborators, who as anti-Communists and nationalists had fought with the Nazis against the Soviets; prisoners of war; and laborers the Nazis had conscripted by force from occupied territories. Upon their return to the Soviet Union, these people were frequently accused of treason (either real or imagined) prosecuted, and severely punished.) On the one hand, Nazi anti-Soviet propaganda was apocalyptic and atrocious, and it encouraged evacuation or flight. On the other hand, plundering, looting, murder, and the mass rape of German women were characteristic of the conduct of the victorious Red Army. Vengeance and greed played no small role in the initial treatment of German minorities throughout East Central Europe. The first expulsions of Germans and the appropriation

of their property were spontaneous and arbitrary, but these measures evolved into national policies which the Allies sanctioned after the war.

Between 1944 and 1950, more than 11 million Germans fled or were expelled from their homes, and the number who perished in the process is unknown. Estimates range from hundreds of thousands to 2 million. Theft, rape, murder, and death caused by hunger, exposure, and exhaustion were part of the "humane and orderly" transfer of the Germans. They left homes they had inhabited for hundreds of years, and they often fled on foot in large "caravans."

The great majority of those Germans who were expelled, more than 7 million, came from the territories administered by Poland east of the Oder-Neisse Line and Poland and the Soviet Union in east Prussia. Well before the end of the war, Beneš received Stalin's consent to expel Czechoslovakia's German minority of more than 3 million, the *Sudetendeutsche*. They were collectively branded as traitors and banished after the war. Almost 90 percent of the 500,000 "ethnic Germans," or *Volksdeutsche*, from Yugoslavia emigrated during the war, fled, or were killed or deported after the war. The estimated 240,000 Germans who were evacuated, deported, or expelled from Hungary reduced the country's German minority by half. Tens of thousands of the "Transylvania Saxons" also fled their 600-year-old homes in Romania.<sup>5</sup>

Some people explain the treatment of the Germans in terms of biblical justice: an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. The fact that the East Central European victims of Nazi German aggression committed crimes against Germans has been consistently and conveniently ignored. After World War II no one was prepared to let the Germans be the victims of anything, and German-Polish and German-Czech relations were burdened for decades by the fact that millions of Germans in the Federal Republic of Germany who had been expelled from Poland or Czechoslovakia wanted the Poles and the Czechs as well as the Communists to admit to the violence and injustice of these expulsions. An admission of this nature was not nationally feasible for Poles or Czechs, nor was it ideologically possible for Communists. It took a revolution to address this issue. After 1989, for example, Václav Havel raised the question of Czech guilt for the expulsion of the *Sudetendeutsche*, much to the consternation of many Czechs.

If a German and Jewish as well as a German-Jewish presence was one of the distinctive characteristics of Central European culture, and multicultural symbiosis was the source of its dynamism, this culture ceased to exist during and after World War II. If Central European culture was inspired or made by Jews, it either emigrated with them before the Holocaust or died with them during it. The flight or expulsion of the Germans also dramatically diminished their presence in the region.

East Central Europe, historically part of a German "linguistic and cultural space," was de-Germanized, although the Germans' absence is seldom lamented. The combined results of Nazi and Allied policies—genocide for the Jews and population transfers for the Germans—were an "ethnic cleansing" of states that historically had been multi-ethnic, culturally diverse, and religiously heterodox.<sup>6</sup> For the first time in its history, Poland was almost exclusively ethnic Polish and Roman Catholic. The population of Bohemia and Moravia became almost exclusively



## EUROPE DIVIDED, 1945-1949



- The Iron Curtain in 1945
- ▨ Territories occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union, 1939-1941 and 1945-1947
- The "eastern territories" of Germany incorporated into Poland and the Soviet Union, 1945-1947
- ▨ Soviet zones of occupation in Germany and Austria
- ★ 1945 Year Communists came into power

Map 11.1

Czech. In comparison, Hungary still had a considerable number of Jews and Germans, but it became much more homogeneous than it had been in the past.

If the relative absence of Jews and Germans dramatically changed the complexion of Central European culture, then the massive presence of the Russians in the region represented an unprecedented political reorientation. The eastern half of Central Europe, which had historically been oriented toward the West—Catholic Rome, the Paris of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, or London and Washington, D.C. as the capitals of the democratic world—fell under the long shadow of Moscow. "The Second World War, or rather its outcome," Piotr Wandycz observed, "reversed the course of history of East Central Europe. Traditionally a borderland or a semi-periphery of the West, the region became a westward extension of the Soviet East."

Generalizations about how the Communists came to power in East Central Europe are difficult to make. Yugoslavia was an exception because it was liberated by Tito's National Liberation Army, not the Red Army, and it installed a Communist government without Soviet assistance, or interference, in 1945. The Communists' rise to power in other countries in the region followed more or less the same pattern. During the war, Communist parties in these states were divided into "domestic" and "Muscovite" wings. The "domestics" worked in the underground at home, whereas the "Muscovites" were in Soviet exile. (The geographical segregation of the party factions also had ideological implications.) The Muscovites returned home in the wake of the Red Army to assume leading party and governmental positions, which inevitably led to dissatisfaction among those Communists who had done the dangerous work at home.

After the first postwar elections in the region, which were relatively free in Czechoslovakia and Hungary but much less so elsewhere, the Communist parties participated in coalition governments with social democratic, "bourgeois democratic," and agrarian parties. The Communists regularly controlled the Ministry of the Interior, an office that allowed them to misuse the police for political purposes and to manipulate the electoral process. Communists also promoted the idea of the "unity" of the left: an ideological and tactical alliance between Communists, on the one hand, and socialists and social democrats, on the other. This was just a tactical ploy, however. The destruction of independent socialist parties and the creation of "socialist unity" or "socialist workers' parties exclusively under Communist control was one of the Communists' first objectives. The Communists also promoted policies, such as the nationalization of major industries and land reform, that were not only popular with broad sections of the population but also, to a certain extent, necessary. Nationalization was a means of reconstruction, and many East Central European states had a tremendous amount of land on their hands that had to be redistributed: for example, the former German territories in Poland, the properties of the *Sudetendeutsche* in Czechoslovakia, and the assets confiscated from "fascists" and *Volksdeutsche* in Hungary.

The Communists' methods of eliminating their opponents varied. Generally Communists exploited the results of an election, which they manipulated, or a governmental crisis, which they instigated, to undermine their opponents. Their rise to power in Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland in 1946 was straightforward,



heavy-handed, and ruthless. Politicians from the opposition fled or were arrested on trumped up charges of "treason," tried, and executed, and their political parties were banned.

Hungarian Communists used the more sophisticated approach of "salami tactics." They took the whole sausage, but only one thin slice at a time, with a carefully orchestrated combination of defamation, blackmail, coercion, and police terror. In 1947, they eliminated their most formidable political opponent, the agrarian national Smallholders Party which held a majority of seats in the Hungarian parliament and had received an absolute majority (53 percent) of the votes in the 1945 elections, by discovering a "conspiracy" which ended in a gigantic show trial of 220 politicians. By 1948, the Communists had consolidated their control of Hungary. (Nevertheless, it would be technically inaccurate to label the East Central European Communist states as one-party regimes. In order to create the impression of political pluralism, a few agrarian and "liberal" parties were left nominally intact but strictly subordinated to the Communist Party as "bloc parties.")

In Czechoslovakia, the Communists enjoyed a considerable amount of authentic popular support, and they emerged from the first postwar elections with 38 percent of the vote. The Communists' rise to absolute power in February and March 1948 was an ambiguous event, and historians have had trouble deciding whether it was more of a coup by the Communists or more of a capitulation by the democrats. In any event, the Communists terrorized the non-Communist parties and called their supporters into the streets, and the Czechoslovak coalition government buckled under pressure. Eduard Beneš, who had presided over the demise of Czechoslovak democracy in 1938, had the misfortune of experiencing its renewed fall in 1948 and died shortly thereafter. His death also was symbolic, as it severed the link between the first and the second Czechoslovak republics. The democratic West was shocked by the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia, an event that reflected Stalin's strategy for the region. He wanted the Communist parties of the region to consolidate their power, even if this meant rupturing relations with the West.

The Communist seizure of power in the individual countries of East Central Europe was comparable in a number of respects. Whether the similarities are enough to assume that they had a master plan that they all followed or, on the contrary, whether they acted on a more pragmatic and *ad hoc* basis, is difficult to determine. However, the presence of the Red Army and the allegiance of the national Communist parties to Moscow made clear the region's future political orientation. By the end of 1947, the (Moscow) party line also was clear. Communists were not to cooperate with "bourgeois democrats."

Furthermore, the experience of fascist rule had radicalized many people and made them more receptive to socialist ideas, and after the war the shining Soviet vision of a new social order based on peace, justice, equality, and prosperity appealed to many members of the younger generation and to intellectuals, in particular. Traditional political elites had been largely eliminated by the Nazis in Poland and Czechoslovakia or discredited to a significant extent by collaboration in Hungary, and the Communists defamed national traditions and prewar institutions as "feudal, bourgeois, clerical, and fascist."<sup>8</sup>

The new Communist intelligentsia responsible for the propagation and administration of the forthcoming revolution came predominantly out of the working class and had moved up through the party rank and file or consisted of assimilated bourgeois Jewish intellectuals with upper-class backgrounds. (In East Central Europe, both Stalinization in the immediate postwar period and de-Stalinization after 1956 had peculiar national and anti-Semitic twists. In Czechoslovakia, many of the leading party officials accused of conspiracy and executed in 1952 were Jewish. But these roles were reversed in Poland and Hungary, where many of the most ruthless Stalinists were Jewish. Therefore, de-Stalinization in 1956 was explicitly anti-Semitic, as was indigenous anti-Communism thereafter.)

The Communist parties consolidated their power in two phases. Between 1945 and 1948, they purged the non-Communist or national opposition, and then they embarked on resolute programs of Stalinization, destroying democratic institutions and suspending civil rights, oppressing churches, nationalizing commerce and industries, collectivizing agriculture, and purging their own ranks. Yugoslavia was the only Communist country in East Central Europe not sucked into the Soviet bloc. Tito wanted to rule with his own iron fist, had his own ideas about the development of Communism in Yugoslavia, and refused to fall into line with the other Communist parties and states in the region. The fact that the Red Army had not liberated Yugoslavia and the West's explicit approval of Tito's nonalignment also gave him considerable latitude. Differences between Tito and Stalin led to a dramatic split in 1948, and this ideological falling-out raised real and imagined tensions between "nationalists" and "Stalinists" in East Central Europe. After Tito refused to subordinate himself to Moscow, "Titoism" became a crime synonymous with "Trotskyism," "bourgeois nationalism," "revisionism," and the betrayal of "the international proletariat," all various designations for not doing things the way Moscow wanted. Throughout East Central Europe, many alleged Communist "aberrationists" were charged with these transgressions, prosecuted at show trials, and imprisoned or executed.

The fundamental issue at stake was whether there was "one road to socialism" designed and dictated by Moscow or many individual "national paths" leading to the same goal. As long as Stalin lived, "national aberrations" were not tolerated. But after his death in 1953, there was a struggle between Stalinists and reform Communists in many East Central European countries that was fueled by the official beginning of de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union in 1956. The pattern of conflict between Stalinists (or Moscow hard-liners) and East Central European reform Communists (who frequently appealed to national sentiments and hence were called "national Communists") was established early on and proved to be enduring. Each attempt to change the system—Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, Poland in 1980/1981, and in the Soviet Union itself in 1991—provoked a neo-Stalinist backlash.

## DIVIDING GERMANY, 1949

Despite the big summit meetings in Teheran and Yalta, regular diplomatic consultation on a number of subordinate levels, and the establishment of Allied joint



planning commissions during the war, the Allies never managed to agree before the end of the war on how they were going to deal with Germany. Allied planners discussed the idea of dividing Germany into smaller states as one means of diminishing a future German threat. But they never agreed to divide Germany into the two German states that were established in 1949: the Federal Republic of Germany in the west and the German Democratic Republic in the east. The Germans also initially had nothing to say in the whole affair. After Nazi Germany capitulated on May 8, 1945, the Allies disbanded the Nazi government under the leadership of Admiral Karl Dönitz and eventually arrested its members. The *absence* of a jointly articulated Allied policy toward Germany before the end of the war and the *absence* of a German government after the end of the war created a situation that ultimately facilitated the division of the country four years later.

The last great World War II summit meeting was held in Potsdam, outside Berlin, during July and August 1945. The composition of the Big Three had changed considerably. Churchill had won the war for Britain but lost the post-war elections; Clement Attlee was now the British prime minister. Roosevelt died shortly after the Yalta conference and his vice president, Harry Truman, assumed his place. Germany was the central issue at this meeting. The Allies decided on the Oder-Neisse Line as a provisional German-Polish frontier and endorsed the expulsion of Germans east of it as well as from Czechoslovakia and Hungary. They outlawed the Nazi Party and all its suborganizations, introduced denazification programs, and decided to prosecute leading Nazis at Nuremberg for war crimes and crimes against humanity. They also finally agreed on the modalities for the occupation of Germany and Berlin, which were divided into four zones but were to be jointly administrated as a whole.

In theory, a quadripartite body, the Allied Control Council, was to agree unanimously on Allied policy for all of Germany which, in turn, was to be uniformly applied in the four zones by the respective occupational powers. This top-down administration was to be complemented by a bottom-up reorganization of Germany, which involved the reestablishment of political parties, on the one hand, and the rejuvenation of political institutions on local and provincial levels within the four zones, on the other. The political parties and the provinces (*Länder*) were to be the building blocks of a new German state. A high degree of consensus and cooperation among the Allies would have been necessary for the quadripartite administration of Germany to function as envisioned, but the ability of the Allies to agree on fundamental policy issues disintegrated rapidly after the war. The individual occupational powers were also effectively in a position to act as they saw fit in their respective zones.

The dissension among the Allies on how to administer Germany was a manifestation of deeper differences between the Soviet East and the democratic West. Whether the Allied inability to agree on Germany directly contributed to a greater estrangement between East and West or, conversely, whether ideological confrontation caused a political gridlock in Germany has been a hotly debated issue among historians of different political dispositions. This is an important issue because it raises the question of who was ultimately responsible for the division

of Germany—Communists and Russians in the East or anti-Communists and Americans in the West—or if the division of Germany could have been avoided in the course of dividing of Europe.

In any event, the four Allies failed to establish a central administration for Germany. They argued about whether economic unification should precede political unification, or vice versa, and whether or not national elections should be held. It would be unfair to blame all the Allies' problems on the Soviets. The French, initially more anti-German than anti-Soviet, acted obstructively, too. In 1947, the American and the British occupational regimes created a "bizone" to coordinate their economic policies, and the French eventually joined this configuration. Meanwhile, the Soviets pursued their own policies in their zone. In 1948, the failure of Allied cooperation in Germany and the success of the Communists in East Central Europe motivated the Western Allies to abandon the idea of German unity for the time being at least, and they drew up plans for the economic and political integration of western Germany into the European and transatlantic west. The Western Allies proposed that the German political parties in the western zones of occupation work out a provisional constitution, and they introduced a reformed West German currency, the *deutsche Mark*. The Soviets responded by withdrawing from the Allied Control Council, introducing an East German Mark, and blockading Berlin. However, their attempt to drive the Western Allies out of West Berlin by starving the inhabitants in the western half of the city was frustrated by a spectacular airlift.

In September 1948, representatives from the *Länder* in the western zones convened in Bonn to draft a provisional constitution, and the adoption and ratification of the Bonner Grundgesetz, or Bonn Basic Law, led to the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in May 1949. The Western perception of West Germany and the Western German perception of the Allied occupation changed dramatically. The Western powers lost an old enemy and gained a new ally. From the West German perspective, the victors stopped occupying Western Germany and began defending its independence. While democracy was being established in West Germany, full-scale Stalinization commenced in East Germany, and it followed the established Communist patterns of coercion and collectivization. East German Communists also drafted and adopted their own version of a constitution, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), a state of "farmers and workers," was proclaimed in October 1949.

The unwavering allegiance of West Germany to the West and East Germany to the East was extraordinary, and some observers ironically described the Germans' loyalty to their respective states and ideological blocs in terms of the German national psyche: a propensity for order, discipline, and duty under prevailing political circumstances, whatever they may be. After the war, the Germans in the west decided to be the best democrats, and the Germans in the east were resolved to be the best Communists. But, this kind of observation obscures the fact that the political culture that evolved in the FRG represented a break with undesirable German national traditions of authoritarianism, whereas the one that developed in the GDR did not. The GDR was one of the most successful Communist states in the eastern bloc, not because it was Communist, but because



it was "German" in the negative sense of the word. Dutiful deference to authority, Prussian organizational logic, Nazism, and Stalinism were compatible in many respects. Thus, the transition from one form of totalitarianism to another—from "brown fascism" to "red fascism"—involved a change of ideologies more than a departure from previous political structures or attitudes.

The Bonn Basic Law and the relationship between the two German states were unusual in many respects. Although the Bonn Basic Law had the legal status of a constitution in the Federal Republic of Germany, it was a provisional document designed to bridge the gap until a definitive constitution for *all* Germany could be drafted. The FRG assumed the moral and financial responsibilities that came with being the successor state of the Third Reich, whereas the GDR as a "socialist and anti-fascist state" completely dissociated itself from Nazi Germany.

Although the Federal Republic of Germany developed a pragmatic *modus vivendi* with the "second German state" and began to cultivate diplomatic relations with the GDR on several levels in the early 1970s, it never formally recognized the GDR. On the contrary, the FRG considered itself the only legitimate representative of the German people, and it granted FRG citizenship to any German resident of the GDR who was in a position to request it. In this respect, the Germans who were *de facto* citizens of the GDR were *de jure* citizens of the FRG, or potential West Germans. All they had to do was get to the West.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the FRG not only claimed to be the sole legitimate representative of all Germans; as the only successor state of Nazi Germany, it also maintained that any peace settlement with Germany had to be based on a territorial status quo ante bellum: the German frontiers of 1937. The legal reasoning behind this argument is complicated, but it essentially meant that the FRG—as a partial, provisional, and democratic German state—could not definitively accept those changes in the prewar frontiers of Germany that the Allies had made unilaterally after the war, because the preconditions for recognizing those changes—German unification and the conclusion of a peace treaty—had not been fulfilled. In other words, the war was over, but from a legal point of view, peace had not been concluded.

As a result, the FRG did not formally recognize the postwar annexation of the "eastern regions" of prewar German territory by Poland and the Soviet Union. Although the leading politicians of the Federal Republic of Germany recognized that the "eastern regions" were irrevocably lost for Germany and were wise enough never to turn this formal issue into an actual claim, the fact that the Federal Republic of Germany was bound by a cogent legal argument to question the legitimacy of the postwar frontiers on formal grounds burdened the relations between the FRG and Poland. West German claims were a constant source of anxiety for Poles. They also gave Communist propagandists an opportunity to accuse the Federal Republic of Germany of wanting to revise the European order that World War II had established, just as Hitler did after World War I. (The German-Polish border issue was finally settled in a bilateral treaty after the unification of Germany in 1990.)

The division of Europe into East and West was at an advanced stage before the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic were established in 1949. Between 1945 and 1948, the Communists had consolidated their control in Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Hungary, and

Czechoslovakia. The Iron Curtain on the "German-German" frontier and, after 1961, the Berlin Wall were the most poignant symbols for the partition of Europe. Germany was not just a microcosm of the East-West split; it was the key to overcoming the division of Europe. As long as Germany was divided, Europe would stay divided.

There were two completely different best-case scenarios for German unification: "neutrality" on Soviet terms or democracy on Western terms. In 1952, the Soviets transmitted a diplomatic note to the Western Allies in which they proposed resuming quadripartite negotiations on the "German question." The so-called Stalin note envisioned the establishment of a Pan-German government in which "progressive" political forces would be (over)represented, the negotiation of a peace treaty, and the unification of Germany based on the condition that Germany would not participate in any military coalitions or alliances in the future. German neutrality or the neutralization of Germany was the price to be paid for unification. The West German government and the Western Allies viewed this Soviet offer with suspicion and eventually rejected it.

Some historians have argued that this was merely a tactical ploy by the Soviet Union to slow down the process of Western European economic and military integration and that it was aimed at preventing the "drift" of the Federal Republic of Germany into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Others, however, view the West's failure to respond to this Soviet initiative as a tragically missed opportunity, and they blame Western politicians for being shortsighted and intransigent. The interpretation of Stalin's 1952 offer is still a source of controversy. In any event, the best Germany that the Soviet Union could imagine was a neutral one: either not associated with the West or disassociated from the West in military and economic terms.<sup>10</sup> This vision also was similar in many respects to the kind of Germany that many representatives of the West German left in the 1980s wished to see: a neutral, demilitarized, and nuclear-free state.

The Soviet proposal for German unification was based on a big compromise, and one of the reasons that the West rejected it was that it wanted reunification on its own democratic terms. These terms were unrealistic, however, because they presupposed the democratic transformation of East Germany as well as the Soviet willingness to let East Germany go. In principle, West German politicians never questioned the importance of German reunification. It was and remained a long-term policy goal and constitutional obligation of the Federal Republic of Germany. However, the prospects of reunification were so dismal that very few people believed it to be a foreseeable event.

The longer the division of Germany lasted, the more acceptable it became on both sides of the Iron Curtain. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, between 35 and 45 percent of the West Germans surveyed considered reunification to be the most important question in the Federal Republic; after the mid-1970s, however, it was never more than 1 percent.<sup>11</sup> The word "reunification" effectively disappeared from the operative vocabulary of West German politicians and was replaced by other terms reflecting the Western German policy options in German-German relations: *Ostpolitik*, rapprochement, détente, cooperation, normalization. Furthermore, the idea of the unification of Germany or, after 1949, reunification, was a generational



issue. That is, it meant much more to the older generations of Germans than to the younger ones who had grown up in two German states and had been taught not only that the division of Germany was the price that the Germans had to pay for the Third Reich but also that it was indispensable to the maintenance of peace in Europe.

### STARTING THE COLD WAR

As long as the Cold War lasted, there was an ongoing debate among historians and political scientists in the West about who started it and whether it could have been avoided or shortened, and since 1989 they have argued about who won or lost it and why. Neither the time nor the place in which the Cold War began is a source of controversy. It started as a European affair that acquired increasingly clear contours between 1946 and 1949 and assumed global dimensions thereafter. However, historians must establish a hierarchy of causes for the Cold War, and the importance of individual variables such as ideology (or political principle), economics, or national interest can be weighted and combined in various ways. Different interpretations reflect different understandings of the roles played by the Soviet Union and the United States (as well as varying assumptions about the nature of Marxism-Leninism or capitalist democracy).

Theories of the origins of the Cold War can be divided into different schools. The traditional interpretation of the Cold War is the product of an older generation of scholars, many of whom had firsthand experience with Nazism or Stalinism, whereas revisionist interpretations have been proposed by younger generations. "Idealists" and "realists" argue about the motives behind the conflict. The former emphasize the importance of political principle, and the latter underscore the role of economics and national interest. Liberals and conservatives in the United States or representatives of the political left and right in Western Europe also regularly disagree about the Cold War. In conservative terms, the issue at stake is whether or not one was "hard" or "soft" on Communism. Generally speaking, idealists and conservatives support a traditional, pro-American interpretation of the Cold War, whereas realists and representatives of the political left advance various forms of revisionism critical of the United States' role in the initiation and continuation of the conflict.

The initial interpretation of the Cold War took Soviet ideology at face value. It was based on the assumption that the Soviet Union was an expansive and aggressive totalitarian state ruled by a ruthless and unscrupulous dictator and actively pursuing the objective of world domination. The establishment of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Iron Curtain was indicative of Soviet aspirations, and the Western democratic world closed ranks to protect itself and combat the spread of Communism. These issues were not open to interpretation. They were generally recognized as matters of fact.

Revisionists later questioned this version of the story and attempted to invert the logic of the beginning of the Cold War. They maintained, for example, that Soviet policy was more reactive than aggressive, and they contended that the belligerent nature of Western anti-Communism threatened the Soviet Union to

such a great extent that it was forced into a defensive posture that entailed clamping down in Eastern Europe. These two schools of thought have enjoyed varying degrees of popularity among different generations of Western Sovietologists and historians.

The older generation of analysts from the 1940s and 1950s, frequently émigrés from East Central Europe or the Soviet Union, advanced a relatively straightforward theory of totalitarianism developed during World War II to describe both Nazism and Communism. This novel form of government tried to subordinate all forms of social, economic, and political organization in a single hierarchy that in turn was dominated by one party and one individual or dictator. Totalitarian ideology envisioned the radical transformation of humankind and society and sanctioned domestic terror and foreign aggression as legitimate means for achieving these ends. Furthermore, totalitarian rule was comprehensive; it penetrated all realms of society. From this perspective, the Cold War was the logical, moral, political, and military continuation of World War II. Hitler had been defeated. Stalin had not.

The younger generation of revisionists who began their careers in the late 1960s criticized this traditional interpretation of the Cold War for being too ideological, uncritical, and methodologically unsophisticated. Instead, they assumed that the Soviet Union was not as bad as the proponents of the totalitarian theory claimed, made a variety of distinctions between Nazism and Communism, and pointed out that Soviet reality was much more complex than the gross simplifications of totalitarian theory. They also believed that the Soviet system was capable of modernization and reform.

Theories about the Cold War fell into corresponding "right-wing" and "left-wing" categories. On one side, the proponents of the traditional theory criticized as totalitarian the tenets of Marxism, socialism, and Communism. On the other, many revisionists showed a certain sympathy for Marxist or socialist ideals, and in some cases, they felt that the Soviet Union was basically a good idea that had been poorly executed and had massively gone astray, especially under Stalin. From this perspective, the Soviet Union appeared to be inherently capable of developing into a freer and more prosperous system, especially after Stalin's death in 1953.

Different dates can be used to mark the beginning of the American engagement in the Cold War, each illustrating different political, economic, and strategic dimensions of the conflict. On March 5, 1946, Winston Churchill gave a speech in Fulton, Missouri, in which he popularized the metaphor of the Iron Curtain. Just over one year later, President Harry Truman told the U.S. Congress that the world was faced with a struggle between two fundamentally incompatible ways of life. One, which the Americans understood as the American way, was based on the "will of the majority" and was "distinguished by free institutions, representative government, [and] free elections," and the other, which relied on "terror and oppression," was "based upon the will of the minority forcibly imposed upon the majority." The immediate occasion for this speech was Truman's request that the United States provide economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey in order to help their respective governments combat Communist insurgents. However, he also stated that the United States was determined in principle to assist those people elsewhere



whose freedom was threatened by "armed minorities or by outside pressure."<sup>12</sup> The Truman Doctrine was born.

For Harry Truman and most other Americans and Europeans at this time, the Cold War was a straightforward question of political principle (or political ideology). The choice to be made was between freedom, liberty, and democracy or their absence, although subsequent interpretations made this seem less clear and almost hopelessly complicated.<sup>13</sup> The Cold War world-view distinguished between good and evil, or "us" and "them," in a manner that was perhaps naive, simplistic, and self-righteous. It also was responsible for a number of dubious U.S. domestic and foreign policies, vigilantes like the "Commie" hunter Senator Joseph McCarthy at home, and an assortment of politically reprehensible allies and client states in the developing world whose only redeeming value was their anti-Communism. Whether the merit of the ideals to which the United States was committed can be used as an excuse for the excesses of the Cold War or, conversely, whether the excesses were indicative of the shortcomings of the ideals themselves is a point that proponents and critics of U.S. policy during the Cold War will continue to debate. Nevertheless, if the Cold War was about ideas, the fundamental choice was clear.

George F. Kennan, one of the most influential personalities in the American foreign policy establishment after the war, was responsible for the classic formulation of the Strategy that the United States was to pursue in its confrontation with the Soviet Union. In an article, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," which he published under the pseudonym "X" in the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, he outlined the "innate antagonism between capitalism and Socialism" and asserted that "the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies."<sup>14</sup> The Cold War was, in this respect, a confrontation between fundamentally different social, economic, and political systems, each championed by states that emerged from World War II with an unprecedented amount of power: the United States and the Soviet Union.

A "realist" school of international relations would prefer to invert the relationship of political principle to national interest in both the American and Russian cases. The realists maintain that the divergent U.S. and Soviet ideologies merely veiled the real source of conflict: clashes of national interest on a global scale between two hegemonical powers. This interpretation downplays the importance of ideas because they are just an ideological subterfuge for national economic interests. However, it would be unwise to overlook the fact that Soviet confidence in Soviet ideology—and, one might add, American faith in the American way of life—had reached their zeniths after World War II.

It is important not to lose sight of the psychological factors that were at work on both sides. The Cold War was a world historical conflict for the Americans and the Soviets, and each side felt threatened by the other. Whether the mutual perception of these threats ever really matched their actual dimensions or the intentions of the adversaries is a related problem. One may argue that the American fear of Communism at the beginning of the Cold War was commensurate with the Soviet faith in Communism. Certainly one of the peculiarities of the ensuing

conflict was that American anti-Communists steadfastly continued to believe in the threat of Communism long after the Communists had ceased believing in Communism's promise and potential. The manner in which the Cold War ended—the Soviet Union collapsed—seems to indicate that the Soviet Union's political posture changed dramatically somewhere along the way. Nonetheless, ideas and ideologies were important at the beginning of the Cold War, and they helped heighten or, as some critics maintain, exaggerate the conflict. This is a problem that I shall discuss later.

Once the United States had announced its intention to contain Communism, it had to articulate economic and military policies to do so, and they were the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In a commencement speech at Harvard University on June 5, 1947, General George Marshall, the U.S. Secretary of State, announced plans for the largest foreign aid program in history, a plan that would bear his name. Historians have argued about how altruistic or imperialist the Marshall Plan was, as well as to what extent the United States needed the "European Recovery Program" as much as the Europeans did. In his speech, Marshall emphasized the idealism underlying the proposal: "Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos." He also made it clear that "governments, political parties, or groups which seek to perpetuate human misery in order to profit therefrom politically or otherwise will encounter the opposition of the United States." But, he did not technically exclude any one from the start: "The program should be a joint one, agreed to by a number of, if not all, European nations."<sup>15</sup>

Although Poland and Czechoslovakia were sincerely interested in participating in this program, the Soviet Union dismissed as "imperialistic" the idea of the Marshall Plan for itself and its "allies" in East Central Europe. But the Western European states participated enthusiastically, and the initial \$13 billion of aid helped lay the foundations for their postwar recovery and prosperity.

The political logic of the United States for providing economic aid to Europe was relatively simple: If widespread economic hardship had provided a fertile breeding ground for left- and right-wing radicalism and totalitarianism in Europe—the hardships of World War I had directly contributed to the success of the Bolsheviks in Russia and Germany's economic duress helped precipitate the Nazis' rise to power in Germany in 1933—then economic recovery, stability, and prosperity would deprive ideological radicalism of its material basis. They also would enhance the chances of democracy. America, therefore, invested in its allies.

The United States also had concrete economic interests in European reconstruction. World War II had brought the country out of the Depression and had created the most powerful economy in the world. Government analysts recognized that the U.S. economy had to find markets for its productive potential after the war, or otherwise it would experience a dramatic downturn, the consequences of which would be magnified even further by planned cutbacks in federal expenditures related to the war effort. Thus the idea of giving Western European countries grants, credits, and subsidies earmarked for the purchase of U.S. goods and services was born, and it provided a way out of an impending economic dilemma.



In helping Europe, the United States helped itself. Aid created the basis for trade and secured new export markets in a postwar global economy in which the United States enjoyed a dominant position.

Furthermore, the fact that government expenditures in the United States did not recede after the war to the extent many people had anticipated they would greatly benefited the American economy. Although government expenditures dropped sharply from 1945 to 1948, they still were more than twice what they had been in 1940, and between 1948 and the end of the 1950s, they nearly doubled again. The main reason for this remarkable increase in government spending was defense. From an ideological or strategic perspective, the obvious purpose of unprecedented peacetime expenditures on defense was to contain Communism by defending the United States, its allies, and American interests throughout the world.

From a fiscal perspective, the billions and billions of dollars spent on defense during the Cold War also helped stimulate economic growth and maintain domestic prosperity in the United States. In other words, defending the American way of life also financed the American way of life for millions of Americans, not to mention the European way of life for millions of West Europeans, too. It allowed Western European governments to invest less in defense—and more on infrastructure, health, housing, education, and social welfare—than they would have been able to if they had spent more on their own defense.

The establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 put one of the finishing touches on the institutionalization of the Cold War in its initial phase. When World War II ended, American military planners wanted to “get the boys home.” The idea of maintaining a considerable and permanent military presence in Europe and the Pacific did not correspond to the United States’ isolationist traditions, but the Cold War as a European and a global conflict essentially changed the United States’ foreign policy demeanor. As a result of World War II, Western European states had also learned a number of lessons about collective security, and their immediate concern after the war was the German potential for aggression in the future. But the actuality of the Soviet threat in Europe quickly displaced hypothetical considerations about a German one. Western European democracies shared the United States’ perception of the Soviet Union as a threat, and they wanted to maintain a U.S. presence in order to deter it.

From the American perspective, Europe was the most important immediate theater of “containment,” and the defense of the United States did not start on the Atlantic coast but on the Elbe River. The purpose of NATO was relatively straightforward. The idea of a transatlantic pact for collective security was to keep the United States in, Germany down, and the Soviet Union out. The Warsaw Pact also had similar objectives in Eastern Europe, with one important exception. Its purpose was to keep the Soviet Union in, Germany down, and—as the outcome of the Hungarian revolution in 1956 and the end of the Prague Spring in 1968 demonstrated—East Central Europe down, too.

Critics of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War maintain that the anti-Communist rhetoric of containment obscured the United States’ real objectives: the “hegemonic project”<sup>16</sup> of containing not only its enemies but also its friends

and allies. Idealists contend that political principle—“defending the Free World”—was the most important motive of U.S. policy, whereas “realists” and revisionists identify and document less noble and self-serving incentives called “the American national interest.”

There is no point denying that American hegemony in Europe (and elsewhere) developed in the course of the Cold War. However, the hegemony of the “American empire” was qualitatively different from the control the Soviets exercised in their own. The distinction between hegemony “by invitation” and by imposition is an important one:<sup>17</sup> “Ami go home!” belonged to the political vocabulary of many Western Europeans, and the frequency of this exhortation increased in proportion to the development of freedom, prosperity, and security in Western Europe. The reason the United States did not comply with this demand was that it represented a minority opinion in functioning democracies that ultimately identified their national security interests with a continuing U.S. presence.

The consequences of dissidence in East Central Europe were different. Nevertheless, Soviet propaganda always emphasized how “friendly” and “fraternal” the Soviet Union’s relationships were with its allies. Before 1989, East Central Europeans used to ask one another rhetorically whether the Soviets were their friends or their brothers. The answer to this question was telling: “They are our brothers. You can pick your friends.”