

THE POLITICAL AFTERMATH OF MODERN WAR

BY WALTER CONSUELO LANGSAM*



AS a historian, and not a prophet, I shall talk this evening about the past rather than try to foretell the future. This is probably the less interesting course, but the more reliable one. Actually, I doubt that a knowledge of the past can enable anyone accurately to foretell the international future. On the other hand, such a knowledge does help to make the present understandable, for it tells us "how we got this way." And, the better we understand the present, the better prepared we are to face the future.

I should also like to make it clear that in what I say I am not criticizing anyone for past mistakes. Hindsight, we all know, is much clearer than foresight—and I here have the advantage of hindsight. Finally, no matter how impartial one tries to be, there inevitably enters a point of view. Sometimes, unhappily, the point of view enters so strongly that history tends to become "merely that which enables each nation to use all other nations' past record as an alibi."

One of the best examples of such bias came to my attention during the Second World War, when I heard of an Irishman who reportedly said: "Yes, this is quite a war, with everybody mixed up in it except the cowardly Swedes and the peace-loving Irish!" And that from the representative of a people who in early

*Dr. Walter Consuelo Langsam, President of Gettysburg College, has had wide experience as professor of history, radio news commentator, director of the United Lutheran Publication House, and historical editor of Doubleday & Company, New York. He is the author of *The Napoleonic Wars and German Nationalism in Austria* (1930); *The World Since 1914* (1933), 6th edition (1948); *Documents and Readings in the History of Europe Since 1918* (1939), 2nd edition (1951); *In Quest of Empire: The Problem of Colonies* (1939); *Francis the Good, the Education of an Emperor, 1768-1792* (1949), German edition (1954); *The World Since 1919* (1954). The present paper was read at the Annual Dinner of the Pennsylvania Historical Association, October 22, 1954.

medieval times, when immersing a baby for baptism, kept his right arm out of the water so it would remain pagan for fighting!

My specific topic, modern war and its political aftermath, is fairly broad; but it can easily be narrowed: The aftermath of the First World War, I believe, was the Second World War; and the aftermath of the Second World War may be a Third World War.

The delegates of the Allied and Associated Powers who met at Paris in 1918-1919 to frame a peace settlement after the First World War, theoretically had a choice among several alternatives. They might have made the treaty with Germany so crushing that an early and powerful comeback would have been out of the question. Or, had they possessed a superhuman detachment, they might have drafted a settlement so conciliatory as to provide little basis for a future German movement aimed at violent treaty nullification. As it happened, the Allied leaders adopted a middle course. They drew up an instrument that was severe enough to make the Germans vengeful, and moderate enough to enable the Reich to experience a great military revival within twenty years.

The Germans blamed the Versailles Treaty for many of their difficulties that grew out of the war itself, and they promptly made efforts to nullify the document. These efforts were made easier by the circumstance that France and Great Britain, both desirous of maintaining the *status quo* which they had helped to arrange, pursued the same end along divergent paths. As the former allies drifted ever farther apart diplomatically, it became the easier and safer for Germany to revise the treaty terms unilaterally. This was especially true since the peace settlement had largely surrounded Germany with relatively weak neighbors. Versailles needed practical and effective Anglo-French coöperation in the enforcement of most treaty terms and the legal revision of others. Instead, there was an individualistic pursuit of diverse foreign policies conditioned by the differing internal needs and developments of the ex-allies. As a consequence, many of the worst post-war Franco-German quarrels developed into Franco-British quarrels, to the obvious advantage of Germany.

The French, no matter whether the conservatives were in power or the leftists, sought with few exceptions to uphold the settlement of 1919. The Versailles Treaty became for them an object of high esteem. It represented to a harassed nation the only tangi-

ble guarantee of security. Each concession from its terms was looked upon as weakening the whole structure. Its general maintenance came to be regarded as the strongest protection against renewed evil from without. To prevent, or at least minimize, treaty revision, the French until 1935 gave active and directional support to the League of Nations and simultaneously sought military security according to a formula of their own making.

At League and disarmament-conference meetings, the French repeatedly proposed the creation of an international police force. They also regularly maintained that their existing state of armament was the minimum permissible in light of Germany's existing state of disarmament. Great Britain and other states did not agree with these views and so it happened that successive gatherings were devoted chiefly to quibbling. Paris therefore drew tight lines of alliance with Belgium, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia. But, in cementing friendships with these countries through political treaties and financial advances, France apparently did not realize that each of her allies also represented a strategic liability. Every one of these allies was relatively weak and surrounded by numerous past and potential enemies. And when the test at last came, when Czechoslovakia needed French help in 1938, France found it inadvisable to fulfill her alliance pledges. For by that time France had decided to follow the lead of Great Britain in appeasing Germany.

Great Britain had steadfastly refused, from 1919 to 1935, to assume any universal commitments for the preservation of peace. London believed, at least up to the time of Italy's attack on Ethiopia, that imperial considerations imposed special duties on the British, and that they must retain freedom of action in defense matters. And without the support of Great Britain, any plan of collective security had little chance of success.

The British felt safe in the possession of a large fleet and were content to rely on French armed might to shield them from any land attack. They were interested chiefly in the revival of the world trade to which their economy was geared. With the passing of years, British business men came to realize that, whereas Germany had been Great Britain's chief commercial and naval rival before 1914, she had also been one of Britain's best customers. Great Britain therefore not only tolerated but welcomed steps that

might assist German economic recovery. Because the continuing quarrels over reparation, war debts, Rhineland occupation, armaments, and boundaries were harmful to the revival of trade, they were irritating to London. And so the British, feeling relatively secure and anxious to foster world trade, and the French, feeling worried over the warlike activities east of the Rhine and preferring to see Germany weak and disorganized, failed to agree in their foreign relations and often acted at cross purposes.

It was only after the axis had demonstrated its nuisance value and after Italy had invaded Ethiopia that British officialdom seemed to recognize the danger in Britannia's unprepared position. And now that Nazi Germany was vigorously nullifying treaty terms, the British found that they simply dared not interpose what could only be inadequate armed resistance. The Chamberlain Government "stalled" and made concessions until such time as armament could be procured in sufficient quantity to back demands with the necessary force. And the French, unwilling to hurt Italian feelings in the absence of outright British guarantees of help against German aggression, and torn by internal dissension occasioned by recent socialistic legislation, followed where the British led. The Paris Government, retiring behind the imagined impregnability of the Maginot Line, joined the British in appeasing an aggressive Germany.

Meanwhile, in Germany, the Weimar Republic had lost its fight for existence. From its birth to its death, the German Republic had to meet the opposition, often armed, of extremists from both the Right and Left. Because it depended on the conservative Army to do its fighting and because of its own nationalistic bent, the republic dealt more severely with radicals than with reactionaries. Because it upheld democratic forms, the republic extended legal protection to political extremists who themselves were not bothered by legal niceties. Because of its system of proportional representation, with the consequent presence of more than a score of wrangling parties in the Reichstag, the republic found it difficult to act with dispatch in time of emergency. The task of the republic was made the harder, finally, by its inability to achieve thorough treaty revision; thus it was unable to meet the challenge of the extreme nationalists who clamored for ever more international concessions. All these things paved the way for the onward

march of Nazism, a march whose tempo was accelerated by the great depression.

Once in power, the Nazis first concentrated on the "coördination" of Germany's internal life and then embarked upon a vigorous foreign policy. A self-styled "master race" that wished to live on a high level had to have inferior races to work for it. And, in Nazi opinion, Europe was filled with decrepit peoples who must be harnessed to serve the supposedly young master race. For the sake of the nuisance value involved, the Nazis flattered the Italians to the extent of admitting them temporarily into the company of master peoples.

At first the Nazis proceeded with relative caution, taking only one forceful step at a time and following each accomplishment with some form of pledge to make this achievement the last of its type. But as success followed success with only verbal interference from the defenders of the *status quo*, the Nazis became bolder. They saw no point in stopping when it was so easy to go on. Only then, when the ultimate European aims of the Nazis became clear beyond a doubt, did the British and French realize that danger threatened not merely the little states of Central and Eastern Europe but the entire Western way of life.

Although it remained for Hitler to translate the challenge between the totalitarian and democratic ways of life into military action, it was Mussolini who first formulated that challenge. "The struggle between two worlds," he exclaimed, "can permit no compromise. Either we or they." Basically, the distinction between the two ideologies lay in their differing conceptions of the position of the individual in the state. Under the democratic conception, as it was understood in the Western democracies, the individual was regarded as the creator and the rightful beneficiary of all state activity; he might be interfered with only when his doings reacted to the harm of his fellow individuals. The totalitarian conception was wholly anti-individualistic.

The dominant powers of the two camps were divided along economic and territorial as well as spiritual lines. The nations which upheld the political and territorial *status quo* were sometimes, in oversimplification, labeled the "Haves." The axis states were the "Have-nots." For reasons of economics, strategy, and prestige they demanded additional territory, old and new. In Germany

and Japan, moreover, there were the additional incentives of political or religious philosophies which contemplated a world revolution culminating in the final hegemony of the respective "master race." Those who advocated totalitarian control had confidence in the power of a disciplined will to overcome the "spiritually weak" democracies. At last, by the end of 1938, following wholesale German treaty repudiations, the democracies, if spiritually weak, had begun to show a determination to be militarily strong.

In summary, then, the war of 1939 grew out of the aftermath of the First World War through these circumstances: The disillusionment and humiliation following military defeat in the First World War filled many Germans with a desire for revenge. Then, the awkward tactics of the republic, an unhappy policy of alternating intransigence and concession on the part of the former Allies, and the effects of the world depression brought to power in Germany a group whose impelling philosophy it was to establish its hegemony over the continent and eventually beyond the confines of Europe. Meanwhile the British and the French, both intent on maintaining conditions as they were, followed divergent international policies. They drifted apart diplomatically at a time when, from a realistic point of view, they should have coöperated to implement by force of arms the system which they had set up by force of arms. As time went on, there developed a great game of diplomatic bluff, with Germany and Italy on one side and Great Britain and France on the other. The Soviet Union sat by as an interested observer, leaning now to one side and then the other, determined not to be drawn in no matter how the game progressed. And when at last one side called the other's bluff, the consequence was the Second World War.

During this second war, in face of mortal peril from the axis, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States maintained an outward unity that was encouraging to those who looked forward to a postwar world of peace. The Messrs. Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt seemed to like one another personally. The respective chiefs of staff appeared to be in major disagreement only over the question of the timing of the invasion of France. From the many Big Three conferences emerged communiques which reflected seeming unanimity on all major points of discussion. Sometimes there were indications of French or Chinese

displeasure over the triune assumption of world authority. But these were regarded as relatively unimportant since the three biggest powers were so obviously dominant in the job of beating the common enemy. The optimists were certain that future peace would be assured by the continuance, after hostilities ceased, of the unity that characterized the difficult war years.

Disillusion, however, followed close upon victory. Actually, all was not harmony even during the war. There was much, albeit secret, wrangling at the top level conferences. Often the disagreements were resolved only through the adoption of policy statements so broad and general that they could later be given widely differing interpretations. And when the time came for implementing the policies, these widely differing interpretations led to dispute and trouble.

Implementation of the announced policies meant solving the critical postwar international problems. The more important of these aftermaths, most of them political, included: the disposition of the millions of displaced persons moved about by the Nazis; the status of millions of refugees from both the axis countries and the Soviet Union, with its budding satellites; the economic, cultural, and social rehabilitation of Europe and Asia; the capture and trial of war criminals, and the process of denazifying and "reëducating" Central Europe; the creation of an atmosphere conducive to the development of democratic institutions in Germany and the neighboring areas; the drafting of peace treaties with all former enemy states; the question of the atomic bomb and its influence on international relations; reparation; the restoration of world trade; territorial readjustments amidst continuing fear, rampant nationalistic spirits, and revived or newly aroused yearnings for hegemony; the clash of traditional rival national ambitions; the disposition of Italy's colonies and of the mandates of the defunct League of Nations; the problem of how to disarm Germany while enabling her to regain her essential position in Europe's general economy; the rising national spirits in Africa and Asia; and the rapidly diverging definitions in West and East of the concepts of freedom and democracy. The solution of such problems was avoided by the Big Three when, under wartime conditions, they could act in secrecy as virtual dictators. It became much more difficult to seek solutions after the war in public de-

bate and without the restraints imposed by the life-and-death struggle against a common military enemy.

Arrival at generally acceptable solutions soon was made harder by additional complications. There were, at first, clashes between several governments-in-exile and the respective local leaders who had emerged as heroes from the underground resistance movements. The division of Germany and Austria into occupation zones and the requirement of unanimous agreement among the occupying powers where general decisions were involved often resulted in stalemate and a consequent worsening of conditions needing prompt action. On-the-spot proof that the actual atrocities committed under Nazi sponsorship at certain concentration camps surpassed in horror many of the stories circulated during the war, often and understandably made hot blood take precedence over calm judgment. There was a terrible European shortage of coal and fertilizer and a war-bequeathed lassitude and lack of will to work. In the victorious countries there were strong reactions against rationing and other wartime prohibitions and restraints. The fiercer and stronger national spirits that emerged from the conflict made ludicrous some experts' earlier talk regarding the future unimportance of political boundaries.

Finally, the situation was made worse by ideological considerations. Almost everywhere in Europe, but especially in the areas closest to and most readily overawed by Moscow, there was a movement to the political Left. Poland, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Albania, Czechoslovakia, and Finland all came within the Stalinist orbit. In France and Italy the electorate as a whole rejected communism, but the Marxist elements displayed strength and did much to hamper reconstruction. In Great Britain, the Labor Party, successful in the elections of 1945, embarked upon a lusty policy of industrial nationalization. Yet one and all, from Bolshevik Moscow to Laborite London, looked to "capitalist" United States for help on generous terms. And so there developed differences of opinion in the United States itself—among those who wished to help the Reds, those who wished to help only the bulwarks against Sovietism, those who wished to help entirely on the basis of human needs, and those who were disgusted with the "whole mess" and wished to retire into a new isolationism.

Overshadowing all other postwar international considerations was a fundamental disagreement between the United States and Great Britain on the one hand, and the Soviet Union on the other. The disagreement went far deeper than any dispute that alienated Great Britain and France, or those countries and the United States, in the twenty years' armistice of 1919-1939.

Out of the mystery that Russia long had been to western minds, and out of the welter of propaganda that emanated from Moscow, certain Soviet objectives emerged during and after the Second World War. The objectives in large measure were Russian rather than Bolshevik, but the proselyting character of the Soviet ideology made the situation more threatening to the West than in tsarist days.

As late as 1914, after two centuries of effort, tsarist Russia had not yet achieved a goal set for his successors by Peter the Great. This goal was the securing of direct access to a number of warm-water ports. By the time of the First World War, the empire's conquests had brought access to the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Pacific Ocean. But almost ceaseless effort and costly wars had failed to bring control of the straits connecting (and separating) the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, of the Arabian and Iranian areas leading, respectively, to the eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, or of the Chinese territories bordering the Yellow Sea. Regularly, the "bear who walks like a man" had been checked in his attempts to make these gains by one or more among Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Japan. Then, following the Bolshevik Revolution and the Paris Peace Settlement, Russia lost even some of the territories and influence painfully acquired in the years between the reigns of Peter I and Nicholas II.

That diminished, impoverished, and strife-ridden Russia which in 1923 became the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics spent the ensuing years as a virtual outcast from the family of nations. Facing in these early years continuing internal opposition, the Soviet leaders simultaneously were keenly aware of the dislike, fear, and hatred with which they were regarded abroad. This foreign attitude was largely engendered by the Russians themselves—by their dogmatism, their refusal to honor the international commitments of their predecessors, their avowed purpose to bring

about world revolution and overthrow capitalism, and their unwillingness to carry on diplomacy in the generally accepted fashion. Indeed the rise of fascism, to the west and east of the U.S.S.R., was to a considerable degree in direct reaction to communist activities and propaganda. At any rate, the aloofness of the other powers, great and small, in turn developed among Moscow's rulers a deep-seated feeling of fear and insecurity. In view of the control of the Communist Party over all Russians, it was relatively easy for the leaders to imbue the masses with a similar sense of insecurity.

Gradually, with the passing of time, the change in circumstances, and concessions on both sides, the Soviet Union was readmitted to relatively good standing in the family of nations. Meanwhile, through unyielding hardness and successive five-year plans, the U.S.S.R. had become internally stronger and had experienced a revival of Russian nationalism. Indeed, for a time the Third International or Comintern appeared to have become as much an international society for the defense of Holy Russia as an international revolutionary body. Playing it cleverly, the Soviets emerged during the period of axis-democratic rivalry with virtual balance of power. Through temporary coöperation with Nazi Germany, and with the loss of blood only in Finland, they utilized the turbulent days of 1939-1940 to reacquire most of the territory lost as a consequence of the First World War.

Finally, after the Nazi invasion of 1941, the Soviet Union suddenly found itself welcomed once more as an ally by its former "arch-enemies"—Great Britain, (Free) France, and the United States. So affecting was the new happiness that, in May, 1943, the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Third International dissolved the Comintern "as the directing center of the international working-class movement."

After the suffering of the war years 1941-1945 and after the final almost hysterical triumph, no amount of factual proof could make the Soviet leaders (and hence the Soviet people) admit that the victory had been a coöperative affair and not won only by Russian might and sacrifices. Riding high yet filled with suspicion, pugnaciously exuberant yet cynical, stubborn and unyielding yet demanding understanding and concessions on the part of others, powerful yet insecure, carrying on wholesale espionage abroad

yet loudly denouncing any foreign intelligence activities, the Russians seemed to feel that the time at last had come to fulfill the desire of centuries. And what was that desire? To expand to east and west, to erect satellite buffer states on all fronts, to create a new Russian Empire out of the hoped-for ruins of the capitalist empires. But by this time Russian Empire meant Soviet Empire, with its Bolshevik ideology that advocated boring from within, subversion, and violence wherever traditional democracy prevailed.

Opposing the U.S.S.R. in its efforts to establish hegemony over much of Europe and Asia were Great Britain and, especially, because of her strength, the United States. Great Britain strove wherever possible to retain such influence as she had through centuries acquired. London understandably had no more desire to relinquish authority in the Near East than did Moscow in Estonia or Finland or Hungary or Korea. Even the British socialists objected to an aggrandizement-bent Moscow's insistence on the wickedness of an ally's efforts to retain status as a first-rate power. Simultaneously the United States, with ideals and with power, found it hard to "play ball" with Bolshevism triumphant. Having twice within twenty-five years become involved in wars of European origin, and having been caught ill prepared in 1941 because of a traditional dislike of militarism, the United States now expressed, through President Truman, a determination to insist on the implementation of certain "fundamental principles of righteousness and justice."

Obviously the ideals and interests of the United States and the Soviet Union were in disharmony. Any resolution of the differences in calm and reasoned fashion was made the more difficult by untruthful communist propaganda, by Soviet stubbornness, and by the fact that a starving, freezing, confused, lassitude-filled Europe had become the pawn in a battle of titans. Ways of doing things which seemed dishonest and tricky to the Americans, British, and French were looked upon as merely shrewd by the Russians. Similarly, where Westerners regarded compromise as wise and courageous, the Russians looked upon concessions as signs of weakness and stupidity.

All this, then—a new host of confusions, contradictions, and conflicts—was the legacy of the Second World War. Upon humanity's skillful or inept handling of this aftermath depended,

respectively, peace or a Third World War. And the handling of the legacy might well become the supreme political test of the United Nations, in which the Western wartime leaders placed their hope for future peace.

In general summary, finally, the chief aftermaths of modern war would seem to be:

a) an increasingly radical domestic orientation of populations in most of the affected areas coupled with a stronger spirit of nationality in foreign relations;

b) a general economic disturbance growing out of the exigencies of both the war and the peace demands of the victors;

c) a desire on the part of the defeated powers to upset the peace settlement as soon as possible;

d) costly disagreement and rivalry among the larger victorious powers;

e) an apparent need for growing armaments and expanding military commitments despite the existence of international peace machinery.

Perhaps, in reappraising the modern situation, we should add to the nineteenth-century Clausewitz's dictum that "war is . . . a continuation of political relations," the seventeenth-century Dryden's quip that "peace itself is war in masquerade."