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DESCENT FROM POWER  
British Foreign Policy  
1945-1973

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LONDON

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## PREFACE

In 1962 I published a book called *British Foreign Policy: the process of readjustment, 1945-1961* which covered the story of Britain's external relations from 1945 until the first application to join the European Economic Community in 1961. The present book, besides involving extensive revision of the early chapters of that work, is an account of British policy and experience until the country actually joined the Community in January 1973. New chapters have been added on the Commonwealth as a factor in British foreign policy (Chapter 7), defence and disarmament policies (Chapter 9), the United Nations as a forum for the expression of British policy (Chapter 10) and the ten years of negotiations with the six west European states for membership of the Community (Chapter 11).

Again, as in my earlier book, the main theme is one of decline from the summit of power which Britain occupied, whether rightfully or not, in 1945 to the position of being an equal, and in the economic field perhaps less than an equal, of the major states in west Europe which constitute the Community. The reasons for this decline should be sufficiently obvious; perhaps behind them all lies a failure of the will, a reluctance to face the implications of straightened circumstances and energetically apply them in daily work. Whether membership of the European Community will, as often predicted by its advocates, arouse Britain from lethargy and furnish it with an invigorating stream of fresh air remains to be seen. It must be said, however, that Britain as an organised community has had a long history and it is hard to teach an old dog new tricks. That membership of the Community in the 1970s was inevitable for Britain the present author believes to be uncontravertible, and having at length crossed the European threshold Britain's duty must be to make the change a success. Whether and for how long Britain can continue to have an independent foreign policy within the Community is another speculative question, but what cannot be doubted is that success in conducting one's own policy and in contributing to a common European foreign policy depends alike on success in managing the situation at home. Britain must be solvent before it can hope to affect the shape of things in the outside world.

As in my earlier book, the method used here is to try to reconstruct the successive situations in international affairs confronting British governments since 1945 and to indicate the grounds on which they decided the issue. Naturally, this is an exercise which for the present must do without access to confidential state papers for such

a recent period. But the main facts about any great state's foreign policy (especially the liberal-democratic state's policy) are more open to the public view today than ever before. Research at some future date when all the documents are accessible may add marginally to interpretations of contemporary events. But the author does not believe that the archives when opened up will yield secrets totally at variance with intelligent current interpretations.

F. S. NORTHEDGE

*The London School of Economics and Political Science, January 1974*

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# BRITAIN AND THE WORLD IN 1945

The dominating feature of Britain's world position when first Nazi Germany and then imperial Japan unconditionally surrendered in 1945 was its reduced status in the world scale of power. Of all the belligerents in the Second World War, Germany included, Britain and its Commonwealth partners were the only ones to fight from beginning to end. The war itself, however, had in its course been transformed from an essentially European into a world conflict. In the end it was two largely extra-European Powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, continental in extent, gigantic in population and resources, which sealed the Allied victory and then faced each other as the chief states of the day. After the collapse of western Europe in summer 1940 Britain had been Germany's sole active opponent until the latter attacked Russia in June 1941; but after the entry of the United States into the war in December 1941 Britain increasingly yielded precedence to that country as the leading spokesman of the West. That fact was at once a condition of Britain's policy in the years after the war and the source of some of its main problems.

The decline in British power was brought to a critical point by the Second World War but it had begun some sixty or seventy years earlier. Once the German Empire had been created by Otto von Bismarck in 1871 it was no longer open to Britain to act as a mediator in European politics, leaning always towards the weaker side in continental controversies. For a short time this role of fulcrum in the European balance passed to Bismarck himself, and he performed it at the Berlin Congress in 1878, but almost coincidental with the Chancellor's dismissal from office in 1890 there followed the swift formation of the two European alliances, the Austro-German and the Franco-Russian, which fought the First World War between them. After 1918 many British diplomats thought it was still possible for their country to play a balancing role between France and Germany; this was to some extent confirmed by the Locarno agreements signed on 16 October 1925 by which Britain, with Italy, confirmed the Franco-German and Belgian-German frontiers. But with the remilitarisation of Germany under Hitler and the German reoccupation of the Rhineland on 7 March 1936, it became clear, not only that a mediatory role between France

and Germany was now out of the question for Britain, but that Britain and France together were no match for Germany without the assistance of the United States (which prevailing isolationism ruled out) or of Soviet Russia. Britain and France refused to pay the price named by Stalin for this assistance, namely Soviet freedom to enter eastern Europe with its armed forces, and this refusal, coupled with British and French apparent unpreparedness for war in 1939, persuaded Stalin to join Hitler in the partitioning of Poland by the Nazi-Soviet pact of 23 August 1939. The collapse of France in 1940 left Britain no alternative, should war break out between Germany and Russia, but to accept Stalin's terms for Soviet hegemony in eastern Europe, unless the United States entered the war and threw its might behind the national independence of the smaller states there. The United States did at length enter the war but was unwilling to join with other Western states in forcing Stalin to disgorge his gains in territory on his western borders.

The dramatic reduction in British world power which the closing stages of the war disclosed was part of the general decline of Europe in world politics. As late as the 1930s Europe was still the central hub of diplomacy. At the Munich conference in September 1938 the four Powers, Britain, France, Germany and Italy, determined the future frontiers of a central European state, Czechoslovakia, which was the gateway to eastern Europe, without thinking it necessary to consult Russia. But Munich was the last great European congress. Europe, which from the origins of the international system up until 1939 had been a centre of decisions which had extra-European consequences, became the object of decisions reached outside it. This change in the status of Europe, like that in the status of Britain, had origins preceding the Second World War by many years. In 1902 Britain contracted an alliance with a non-European Power, Japan, for the purpose of protecting itself against a rival in Europe, Russia and later Germany. When it wound up that alliance in 1921 it did so under pressure from another non-European Power, the United States. Moreover, the retirement of the United States from European politics in 1920, after having helped the Entente to re-establish the balance of power in Europe during the war, did not mean its retirement from all European affairs. The economic recovery of Europe in the 1920s was largely under the impetus of American funds; likewise, the Great Depression of the early 1930s, which opened the way to the total collapse of international order, was touched off by the American stock market crisis of 1929 and the withdrawal of American money from Europe. When the war ended in 1945 therefore it was clear that west Europe, or all Europe outside Soviet control, was almost wholly dependent

on the United States for its economic recovery and national security. For the time being Europe, and Britain with it, had become a pensioner of the United States.

The tendency of the Second World War to transcend its original birthplace in Europe was further underlined by the way in which the struggle against Hitler's Germany was increasingly merged with the struggle against Japan in the Far East. On 18 September 1931 the first great challenge to the League system came with the beginning of Japan's subjugation of Manchuria. But east Asia was at that time so remote that this event was never regarded in European capitals as opening the road to the Second World War. By the time the Sino-Japanese war proper broke out in July 1937 Britain and France were fully occupied with problems presented by the revisionist states in Europe and had little time for anything else. The war of 1939 therefore had its real origins in Hitler's challenge to an essentially European arrangement, the Treaty of Versailles. After Hitler's invasion of Russia in June 1941 a moment came when it looked as if Germany and Japan might join hands over a devastated Soviet Union and a Middle East from which all Anglo-American forces had been driven. That danger was averted by the halting of German forces at Stalingrad and the British victory of El Alamein in November 1941. But the defeat of Hitler's Germany still left the formidable problem of Japan; this task, though the British made their contribution in south-east Asia, was mainly an American responsibility after the war in Europe had ended in May 1945. The American Chief of Staff, General Marshall, estimated that an assault on the Japanese home islands would cost at least half a million American lives. Hence the ending of the Japanese war before the effectiveness of the atomic bomb was known necessitated Soviet assistance and the price for this was British and American acquiescence in Stalin's acquisitive aims in eastern Europe, Manchuria and the north-west Pacific. In the agreement between President Roosevelt and Marshal Stalin at the Yalta conference in February 1945 which fixed this price Britain, now virtually a European Power in essence, was to all intents a spectator.

But the immediate cause of the decline of Europe as a theatre of world politics was the total collapse of Germany in 1945, occurring against a background of physical devastation and political chaos in almost every part of Europe. The Nazi destruction of every element of free political life in Germany left the Allies no alternative but to assume sovereignty over the country themselves when German military power was broken; in the words of Churchill, a 'headless trunk had fallen on the table of the conquerors'. This meant that Soviet military power was brought to the banks of the



Elbe and the security of the whole of western Europe was made dependent on the United States' presence in Germany west of the Elbe. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the Unconditional Surrender policy decided by President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill at their Casablanca conference in January 1943, the Nazis had destroyed every coherent political force apart from themselves with which negotiations could be held. Both Churchill and his Cabinet colleagues had misgivings about the Unconditional Surrender policy as encouraging last-minute German resistance and, when that was overcome, leaving a power vacuum in the heart of Europe. But the view of the United States was that the basis of peace in the post-war world must be Great Power co-operation and this implied disarming Soviet suspicions about an Anglo-American separate peace with Germany.

In the last months of Nazi Germany Churchill fell back on the proposal that Anglo-American forces should strike at Trieste and through to Vienna in order to check the spread of Soviet influence in south-east Europe.<sup>1</sup> Again, after the crossing of the Rhine he suggested that American and British forces should race as far ahead as possible, thus hampering the Soviet army's entrance into the German power vacuum and securing pledges for Stalin's fulfilment of the obligations in eastern Europe which he had assumed at the Yalta conference.<sup>2</sup> But this was of no avail; such proposals, the Americans responded, would have reduced forces available for the final assault on Japan and given still further grounds for Soviet suspicions. Once the division of Germany between East and West had been stabilised, however, it became all the more necessary, equally in American and British eyes, to build up the strength of western Europe lest it fall, like the Soviet-occupied zone of Germany, under Communist control.

The qualifications of western Europe in 1945 for playing any further effective role in world affairs were unpromising in the extreme. Transport had in many places come to a standstill; farm products were hoarded in the countryside through mistrust of unstable currencies given for exchange in the towns; raw material stocks for industry had been allowed to run down; shortages of food and clothing kept workers unemployed at home. The sheer problem of dealing with refugees and displaced persons caused organised life to hang by a thread. In August 1945 Field-Marshal Montgomery was reporting to the new British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, that

<sup>1</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. VI, *Triumph and Tragedy*, London, Cassell, 1954, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407.

'So far nearly 1,100,000 displaced persons have been evacuated from the British Zone (of Germany). Over 300,000 were west-bound. Over 600,000 Russians have been transported from our zone to the east and the movement of 200,000 to the south has begun. One and a quarter million displaced persons are still based in camps in our zone and perhaps another 500,000 are still at large.<sup>1</sup>

Italy was convalescing from a war which had passed like a scythe from one end of the peninsula to the other. As for France at this period, 'time and again foreign policy desiderata were based on the image of themselves which the French had proudly created in previous centuries rather than on a realistic evaluation of what kind of policies they could afford'.<sup>2</sup> It was even doubtful whether Europe was viable at all with the impenetrable barrier now shutting it off from middle and east Europe. The only conclusion for Britain was that everything must be done to rouse western Europe from its state of shock and depression if the shape of the post-war world was not to be wholly decided in Washington or Moscow. Primarily that implied the restoration of Britain's closest continental neighbour, France. Churchill told the House of Commons in September 1944: 'I have repeatedly stated that it is the aim, policy and interest of His Majesty's Government, of this country of Great Britain, and of the Commonwealth and Empire to see erected once more, at the earliest moment, a strong, independent and friendly France'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, despite bitter conflicts with de Gaulle over the independence of the old French mandates, Syria and Lebanon, Britain was the foremost advocate of France's restoration to the rank of Great Power. All the more was this so since President Roosevelt had told the British at the Yalta conference in February 1945 that American forces would remain in Europe only two years after VE day. It was on British insistence at Yalta that France was given an occupation zone in Germany, to be formed out of the British and United States zones, a seat on the Allied Control Council for Germany and on the Reparations Commission in Moscow and subsequently on the Security Council of the new United Nations Organisation as a permanent member.

There were two causes of Britain's relative weakness in 1945. One was the vast technical changes in warfare. The First World War, by introducing the submarine and bombing aircraft, had

<sup>1</sup> 413 H.C. Deb. 55. Col. 285 (20 August).

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Tint, *French Foreign Policy since the Second World War*, New York, St Martin's Press, 1972, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> 403 H.C. Deb. 53. Col. 495 (28 September).

struck at Britain's traditional means of national security, sea power. The Second World War and the tensions between the Great Powers which followed it placed a premium on states which possessed either vast potential economic strength or the power to hold down living standards in order to meet a vastly enlarged defence bill. Britain was not well situated in either respect. Moreover, the resort to flying bombs and missiles by Germany towards the end of the war seriously jeopardised a small island, a score of miles from Europe and with crowded cities near the coast. By the time of Germany's surrender in May 1945 Britain had begun to design its own guided missiles and had founded a permanent organisation for that purpose. But all this was dwarfed by the application of nuclear energy to warfare, news of which reached the leaders of the three Powers from the United States at their conference in Potsdam in July 1945. Just as Japan found it impossible to continue fighting against an enemy possessing nuclear weapons, the similar geographical position of Britain gave it an even greater interest in the maintenance of peace than before. For a brief period that interest was belied when Churchill urged the Americans to take greater risks with the atomic weapon than they were willing to run: his view was that it should be used as a threat to force the Russians to accept Anglo-Saxon conceptions of the peace. But the opportunity was short-lived and was never used. It passed and the British interest in cooling international tempers returned.

The other major disability facing British foreign policy when the war ended was the economic plight of the country. Even in the late 1930s Britain was already drawing slightly on its foreign investments in order to pay its way with the rest of the world. By 1941 the bulk of British assets in the New World had been liquidated. At the end of the war more than a half of total foreign investment, which had gone far to pay for imported food and raw materials before the war, had been sold and an external debt of some £3,000 million had been contracted, to be repaid out of unrequited exports after the war. The effect was that after 1948 British exports had to rise some 67.7 per cent over imports in order to be in balance with the rest of the world. 'The scale of the loss and the structured adjustment required', wrote Sir Roy Harrod, 'was greater than that of any other country.'<sup>1</sup> After 1945 Britain escaped the mass unemployment from which it suffered almost from the moment peace was signed in 1919 after the previous war with Germany, but the heavy claims on the British economy during reconversion from war to peace were a serious diplomatic liability.<sup>2</sup> On becoming Foreign Secretary in the Labour

<sup>1</sup> *The British Economy*, New York and London, McGraw Hill, 1963, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> See below, Chapter 2.

Government formed at the end of July 1945, Ernest Bevin discovered that what he chiefly needed was 30 million more tons of coal.

### *Britain and the giant Powers*

Britain in 1945 thus found itself one of the undoubted leaders of the great international coalition against the Axis Powers, but nevertheless a junior partner compared with the two senior leaders, the Soviet Union and the United States. Towards both states British public opinion was almost equally sympathetic, though much Conservative mistrust of Russia remained. The harsh totalitarian character of the Soviet regime had tended to be overlooked during the war and great admiration was felt for Russian patriotism and the achievements of the Red Army under Stalin's leadership. Critics of social inequality prevalent in Britain between the wars saw in Russia an advanced community from which much could be learned about social services and economic planning. The Left in Britain, and many on the Right as well, also believed that Soviet foreign policy in the 1930s had been far more realistic than that of Britain or France and that if the latter had forged links with Russia instead of travelling the Munich road the Second World War might have been avoided.

As far as the United States was concerned, while British opinion feared a return in that country to the isolationism of the 1930s, it was felt that President Roosevelt's leadership was far more subtle than that of his predecessor in 1919, Woodrow Wilson, and that he had done far more than Wilson to educate American opinion in the need for participation in world organisation. No one doubted that in harmony between these two great states, America and Russia, lay the chief hopes for peace, in itself the basic condition of British security and welfare. Then in regard to that other major Power, China, a not dissimilar attitude prevailed as in relations with the Soviet Union, namely that although the Chinese Nationalist regime might fall short of democratic standards as understood in the West, although its corruption and inefficiency were notorious, the war itself had administered to China an impulse towards effective and democratic government, which would be reflected in proper democratic institutions as soon as the struggle against Japan ended. It was thought that the four Great Powers, America, Britain, China, Russia, together with France, would stand together in destroying the last vestiges of militarism in Germany, Italy and Japan, and in safeguarding the world against a return to Fascism.

At the official level the closest co-operation undoubtedly existed

with the United States of all the allies. Besides the obvious racial, linguistic and ideological reasons for this, President Roosevelt's early recognition of the nature of the Fascist threat to peace in Europe, his efforts in the 1930s to educate the American people in the facts of international life and his various suggestions of the principles to inspire international relations after the war, together with the intimacy established between the President and Churchill as early as December 1939, ensured that relations between Britain and the United States would always be close. Anglo-American co-operation in all the issues of the war, whether supply problems, research, military planning or tactical operations, had reached a point in 1940 at which the two countries were often regarded as almost federated. Nevertheless, Anglo-American affairs were rarely without their strains. Many of those arose from the clash between traditional American idealism and the more pragmatic cast of the British mind. Before America's entry into the war, President Roosevelt had met Churchill in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, in August 1941 and had proposed the joint declaration of principles which later became known as the Atlantic Charter. For Churchill the significance of the Charter was psychological and he saw it as an incident in the whole clash of world forces; for the President of the still neutral United States to meet the British Prime Minister and put his name to a document which spoke of 'the final destruction of Nazi tyranny' must, he thought, depress Germany's morale and enhance that of their opponents, while the intimation in the final paragraph that the United States would remain armed along with Britain after the war was an immense factor for good. He told the Deputy Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, to give the Charter the widest publicity; 'let this soak in on its own merits on friend and foe'.<sup>1</sup> The reference in the Charter to the freedom of people to choose the form of government under which they would live applied, he argued, to territories liberated from the Axis; it could not be used to prise open the British Empire.<sup>2</sup> President Roosevelt sharply dissented and attempted to move the British leader to revise this statement. Roosevelt tended to regard the British Empire as a species of the imperialism which he considered it to be an object of the war to end. There was therefore a fear, which Roosevelt's warm attitude to Marshal Stalin at Yalta tended to confirm, that the United States might turn its weight against Britain's imperial position rather than support it. Already in December 1944 there had been sharp criticism in America of British intervention, allegedly for imperialist purposes, in the civil war in Greece. At the Yalta

<sup>1</sup> Churchill, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, 1950, p. 398.

<sup>2</sup> 374 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 69 (9 September 1941).

conference Roosevelt sided with Marshal Stalin in a move to create voluntary trusteeships under the United States for all dependent territories. Churchill's retort was 'never, never, never'.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, American doctrinal idealism clashed with British strategical notions in another way. The Prime Minister would have liked to see a territorial understanding reached with Stalin early, if possible before Soviet forces entered central Europe. This was the course he urged on Roosevelt in March 1942,<sup>2</sup> but the President objected and the Anglo-Soviet treaty was signed in London on 26 May without reference to territorial revisions after the war. Churchill recognised that Stalin would demand the Baltic States, the 'Curzon Line' as the future Soviet-Polish frontier,<sup>3</sup> half of East Prussia, Bessarabia, frontier adjustments with Finland and Hungary and a predominant position in Bulgaria and Rumania. These claims Stalin had revealed to the British wartime Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, in talks in Moscow in December 1941.<sup>4</sup> Churchill himself reached an agreement with Marshal Stalin in Moscow in October 1944 in which Bulgaria and Rumania were recognised as areas of Soviet predominance, while Britain was accorded paramountcy in Greece.<sup>5</sup> Churchill's assumption was that Soviet territorial demands occupied pride of place in Stalin's thinking and that it was wise to reach some understanding about them while Britain and the United States were still fully under arms and Russia still dependent on them for assistance while the grim struggle on the battlefield continued. Against this President Roosevelt firmly set his face. To all intents he believed that when Stalin signed the Declaration on Liberated Areas at Yalta, guaranteeing fundamental rights and freedoms for eastern Europe, and when he agreed that the predominantly Communist committee created by the Soviet authorities in Lublin, Poland, should be broadened by the inclusion of Poles from London and from inside Poland, he was accepting democratic usages as understood in the West. If there was risk in making such assumptions, President Roosevelt seemed to think this was a risk worth running if it meant that in return the Soviet Union would enter the new world organisation, as of course it did.

<sup>1</sup> E. R. Stettinius, *Roosevelt and the Russians*, London, Cape, 1950, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton UP, 1957, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> A Soviet-Polish border suggested by the British in 1919 as a compromise: it was more favourable to Poland than the final border agreed to at Riga in March 1921.

<sup>4</sup> Redvers Opie and others, *The Search for Peace Settlements*, Washington, Brookings Institution, 1951, pp. 32-33.

<sup>5</sup> Churchill, *op cit.*, Vol. VI, 1954, p. 198.

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When Roosevelt died suddenly in Warm Springs, Georgia, on 12 April 1945, there was immediate uncertainty as to whether his successor, Vice-President Harry S. Truman, could adjust quickly enough to his immense task to hold his own with Stalin. This was what Churchill called the 'deadly hiatus'. The main lines, however, of Roosevelt's policy of Great Power co-operation continued. Truman determined to provide no shred of evidence that he was 'ganging-up' with Britain against Russia. He led the way in accepting the slight reconstitution of the Lublin regime before recognising it as the Provisional Government of Poland in July and, while taxing Russia with infringing the Yalta agreements in regard to fundamental rights and freedoms in Bulgaria and Rumania, was as anxious as his predecessor not to drive Stalin into a huff before the defeat of Japan. Although the new President did not take long to acquire a much more hostile posture towards the Soviet partner, the British attitude towards the United States after Roosevelt's death could not be, for some years at least, other than one of anxious watchfulness.

Towards his Soviet colleague Churchill entertained much the same feelings as Stalin seemed to have towards him. The Prime Minister conceived Russia as regarding its ties with the West as a matter of convenience unmixed with gratitude or trust, which would last only so long as it suited Russia's purposes. Friendship between leaders of states, the trust they had in each other as individual persons, was confused by neither statesman with the long-term interests and aims of the countries they respectively led. As in his broadcast on the evening following Hitler's attack on Russia in June 1941, Churchill kept ideology and foreign policy apart; there was no reason, he considered, why Russia's territorial claims on its eastern and western borders should not be frankly recognised for what they were, the rewards of military power, without any feeling of obligation to endorse its internal political or social principles. The question was: where was the opposing military strength to put a limit to those Soviet claims? On his side, Stalin never hesitated to define his claims with scarcely a veil of moral justification. He told the United States that in Poland he must have a regime that was definitely friendly towards Russia; that was far more important than Poland's independence.<sup>1</sup> If an independent Poland was anti-Russian (and the Polish government in exile in London was undoubtedly that) then it must subordinate itself to Russia's security needs. For Churchill, on the other hand, Polish independence was more important than Polish frontiers, for the British guarantee to Poland in March 1939 did not apply to pre-war

<sup>1</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Year of Decisions*, 1945, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1955, p. 174.

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Poland's physical shape.<sup>1</sup> A strong and independent Poland, however, as Clemenceau had realised in 1919, might insulate Europe against Communism. At the same time, seen through Soviet eyes, a Poland as militarily weak as that country was in the 1930s could provide no barrier against another German drive to the east.

Britain was aware of Russia's exhaustion at the end of the war. It had mobilised 12 million men against Germany's 18 million, and had lost 5 million. The British Government sympathised with Stalin's feeling of shock at the abrupt scaling down of Lend-Lease the moment the war in Europe ended; President Truman subsequently amended this decision on the advice of Harry Hopkins, the President's special envoy to Moscow, although by then much of the damage had been done. But it was not known until many years later how damaging the effects of the war on Russia had been. Many of Russia's actions in 1945 which widened the breach between itself and the Western Powers had an understandable basis in the Soviet Government's fear of an attack from the West while Russia was still struggling to its feet. It was not forgotten that in 1919 Winston Churchill had advocated the use of the defeated German army as the spearhead of a western attack on Bolshevism. It was firmly believed that Neville Chamberlain's policy towards Hitler was inspired by anti-Soviet motives and it was suspected throughout the war that Britain and the United States had conspired together, either to leave Russia to defeat Hitler alone while husbanding their strength for a later attack on Russia or to make a separate peace with Nazism with a view to a combined incursion into Russia from the West. At Yalta Stalin frankly admitted his fears of what might happen ten years later, when the West's present leaders had gone and a new mood might have overtaken western capitals. Hence Russia's weakness in 1945 bred fear and fear aroused hostility and the ideologically tinged determination to ensure future security while the going was good.

In the period between the Yalta meetings in February 1945 and the conference of the three heads of government in July at Potsdam, Berlin, harmony between them followed a downward course. This may have been due to a stiffening in the Soviet position after criticism in governing circles in Moscow of the Yalta agreements.<sup>2</sup> The Yalta decisions in themselves, however, were open to differences of interpretation by nations with political mentalities as widely separated as those of Russia on one side and Britain and the United States on the other. First, there was dispute over

<sup>1</sup> Mr Eden confirmed this in the House of Commons on 30 July 1941; 373 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1504.

<sup>2</sup> E. R. Steintinus, *op. cit.*, p. 272.



reparations from Germany. Russia's attitude, like France's in 1919, was brutal and uncomplicated; it wanted as much as possible as soon as possible. The two Western Powers, with memories of the reparations fiasco after the First World War, could see no sense in financing Germany out of their own pockets in order that it should pay reparations to Russia; they, and especially Britain, had nothing to gain from a plundered and starving Germany. Owing to such fundamental differences the Reparations Commission in Moscow never really got down to its work. Secondly, Stalin was little interested in the conception of the United Nations Organisation as the Americans saw it, that is, as an instrument of world-wide co-operation at all levels and as a forum of world opinion. He had to be persuaded to send his Foreign Minister, Molotov, to the San Francisco conference which finalised the United Nations Charter in April-June when Britain and America were refusing to allow the Lublin regime to represent that country at the conference. He wanted the General Assembly of the new organisation to have the minimum of authority and for long insisted that the principle of unanimity between the five permanent members of the Security Council (Britain, China, France, the Soviet Union and the United States) should apply, not merely to decisions involving enforcement action, but even to the initiation of discussions. Thirdly, there was in February a striking example of apparent Soviet indifference towards the Western Powers when Andrei Vystinsky, on Stalin's behalf, arrived in Rumania and imposed on King Michael the National Democratic Government, led by Petru Groza and formed from the Communist Party. On 6 March a Soviet-nominated administration took over in Bucharest. This coup was followed on 21 April by a treaty of alliance between Russia and the Polish Lublin regime, now recognised by Moscow as the Provisional Government, and the arrest of sixteen Polish resistance leaders for 'diversionary activities' against the Red Army; fifteen of them had been invited to Moscow under promise of safe conduct to discuss the broadening of the Lublin regime. Britain and the United States were eventually obliged on 5 July to recognise a new Polish Government, based predominantly on the Lublin group, for it was now clear that Russia meant to have her way in Poland and could only be dissuaded by force.

This was the disturbing context in which Churchill wrote his historic letter to Stalin on 29 April. 'There is not much comfort,' he wrote,

'in looking into a future where you and the countries you dominate plus the Communist parties in many other states are all drawn

up on one side and those who rallied to the English-speaking nations and their associates are on the other. It is quite obvious that their quarrel would tear the world to pieces and all of us leading men on either side who had anything to do with that would be shamed before history.<sup>1</sup>

Such an appeal, however, presupposed that Russia's deeply rooted fears of the West could be dispelled by words. When the Potsdam conference of the three Powers assembled in July it was clear that the high noon of inter-Allied unity had passed away, no one knew for how long. It was hopefully agreed that a Council of Foreign Ministers of the three states, together with those of France, and, when the agenda required, China, should meet 'to do the necessary preparatory work for the peace settlements', including the drawing up of peace treaties with the five smaller ex-enemy states, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Italy and Rumania. Only those states which had signed the terms of surrender accepted by those countries, however, would be represented on the Council in its negotiations on the treaties. The same gesture was made as at Yalta to the principles of democratic rights and freedoms in the former enemy states, while it was tacitly assumed that the interpretation to be given to the word 'democratic' would probably vary with the local facts of power. The city of Königsberg in East Prussia was awarded *en principe* to Russia while the conference 'examined', without having power to approve or disapprove, Russia's proposal to annex the northern half of East Prussia pending the final determination of territorial questions at the peace settlement, which was however never achieved. The same qualification was to apply to the conference's decision to hand over to Polish administration all German territory east of a line drawn from the Baltic due west of Swinemünde, along the Oder and western Neisse rivers and down to the Czech frontier; this agreement was based on the assumption partly that Poland was now a properly constituted state and partly that its territory east of the 'Curzon line', including the city of Lvov, had definitely passed to Russia.

But the centre-piece of the Potsdam meeting was Germany.<sup>2</sup> Difficulties had already arisen in carrying out the plan for dividing Germany into three, later four, zones of occupation which a three-Power Advisory Commission in London had drawn up in the previous autumn. The Commission was therefore dissolved. Supreme authority in Germany pending a peace treaty was henceforward to be exercised by the Commanders-in-Chief of Britain, France,

<sup>1</sup> Churchill, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, p. 433.

<sup>2</sup> The German question is treated in detail in Chapter 3.

the Soviet Union and the United States, each in his own zone of occupation and jointly, in matters affecting Germany as a whole, as members of a Control Council in Berlin. There was to be a uniform political treatment of Germany; it was to be disarmed, demilitarised, de-Nazified and re-educated. The aim was 'to prepare for the eventual reconstruction of German political life on a democratic basis and for eventual peaceful co-operation in international life by Germany'. The economic objective was to convert Germany into a non-military, economically decentralised state, with primary emphasis on agriculture and peaceful domestic industry but with sufficient resources to exist without external assistance. An economic balance in Germany as a whole was to be arrived at. As for reparations, Soviet and Polish claims were to be met from the Soviet zone of occupation and all other claims from the three Western zones. A quarter of all 'usable and complete' industrial equipment in the Western zones which was not required for Germany's peacetime economy was to be removed and handed to Russia: the latter was to pay for two-fifths of this equipment by exports of such products as food, coal and petrol from the Soviet zone. Finally, it was agreed that, as to the proposed trial of major German war criminals, a list should be compiled by 1 September. This last provision echoed a Soviet-American accord reached on the subject at Yalta, while Britain was alone in urging that, instead of the dubious legality of a trial, Germany's highest leaders should be summarily shot.<sup>1</sup>

### *Old principles and new requirements*

The new context of British foreign policy, as its outlines became clear in 1945, called for the rethinking of previous methods and principles. Many of them had already undergone revision. One of the earliest axioms of British policy, the maintenance of naval supremacy over the next two largest naval Powers, had been virtually abandoned by the end of the nineteenth century. It was not possible for Britain to see naval rivalry from Tsarist Russia in the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, to say nothing of the potential hostility of Germany, without the neutrality of Japan, secured by the Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1902. By an arrangement reached with France before 1914 Britain was allowed to concentrate her fleet in home waters and the western approaches from the Atlantic while France assumed chief responsibility for naval defence of its Mediterranean coasts. After the First World War, although Germany for the time being was out of the race as a

<sup>1</sup> The text of the Potsdam agreements is given in *Protocol of the Proceedings of the Berlin Conference*, HMSO, Cmd. 7087 of 1945.

naval competitor and Russia had temporarily withdrawn from all armaments rivalry, Britain was obliged to accept parity with the United States in capital vessels at the Washington conference in 1921-2. The ensuing strategic interdependence between Britain and America at sea was strikingly acknowledged by the then Lord President of the Council, Stanley Baldwin, in a speech in Glasgow in November 1934 when he said that as long as he had any responsibility for governing the country he would never sanction the use of the British navy for a naval blockade without first knowing what the United States was going to do.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the war in 1945 there were two other essential factors in Britain's maritime security. On the one hand, the Soviet Union had begun to revive older Russian pretensions to naval power. By the Yalta agreements, in return for a promise to enter the war against Japan within three months after victory in Europe, it had re-established its naval position in the Pacific to what it was before its defeat by Japan in 1905. The promise given at Yalta of the southern half of Sakhalin, the Kurile islands and a lease of the naval base of Port Arthur in Manchuria gave Russia a footing from which to dominate the waters around northern China and Japan. The United States replied by succeeding Japan as the administrator of the widely scattered mandated islands in the Pacific, the Marshalls, Marianas and Carolines; subsequently America's lease of the great naval and air base of Okinawa from Japan, who remained the 'residual' sovereign, gave it command of vast reaches of the Pacific. The resulting change in the strategic picture in the Far East was strikingly symbolised by the Anzus Pact, concluded in 1951, by which the United States inherited Britain's former role in the defence of Australia and New Zealand and in which Britain was not included. Russia's actions in eastern Europe determined President Truman to give Stalin no share in the occupation of Japan after its surrender and hence, blocked in the Far East, Russia's naval ambitions turned to the Mediterranean. At the San Francisco conference Molotov asked for a share in United Nations trusteeships, with the former Italian colonies in Africa in mind. Later, at the Potsdam meeting, Stalin pressed for a naval base in the Straits connecting the Black Sea with the Aegean or at least a revision of the Montreux Convention of 1936 so as to allow Russia a more secure access to the Mediterranean. This demand was to turn into a virtual war of nerves against Turkey in the following year. The Soviet moves were successfully opposed by the two Western Powers but so long as relations between Stalin and Marshal Tito remained friendly Soviet influence was felt in the Adriatic. At the same time the

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 24 November 1934.

pressure exerted on Greece by its two northern Communist neighbours, Bulgaria and Rumania, added further uncertainties to British communications through the Mediterranean.

The second factor affecting Britain's naval situation was the disturbed political state of the lands lying athwart its central sea route up to and through the Suez Canal to the Far East. At the western end of the Mediterranean, where Gibraltar marked Britain's only land frontier in Europe (after Northern Ireland), British diplomacy had contributed towards keeping Spain neutral during the war; but the powerful movement at the end of the war, which Russia led, for ostracising General Franco placed Britain in a dilemma. There was no wish to provoke Franco into raising questions about Gibraltar and even less interest in stirring up a renewal of the Spanish Civil War, which Churchill, with his eye on Soviet encroachments in the Mediterranean, mostly feared.<sup>1</sup> At the other end of the Mediterranean Egyptian nationalist demands for revision of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936, which afforded Britain its military base in the Suez Canal zone, brought into question its naval position at this nodal point of Commonwealth communications. There were other dangerous factors: the critical situation in the British mandated territory of Palestine which, if Jewish refugees from Europe continued to flood into the country, threatened to plunge the whole Middle East into chaos; the possibility of a Soviet threat to Iran, the northern part of which Russia had occupied by agreement with Britain in 1941, a threat which, if it succeeded, would have imperilled British oil supplies and realised the permanent nightmare of Victorian statesmen, a Russian fleet in the Persian Gulf; and the unsettled state of the Indian sub-continent throughout the war, which left uncertain the future naval situation in the Indian Ocean.

The second principle of policy, the maintenance of the balance of power in Europe, yet without Britain being permanently committed to one side or the other, had been drastically revised in 1942 when Britain committed itself for twenty years by the Anglo-Soviet Treaty. The significance of this was that, in the event of another war with Germany, Russia would have acted as a stone of attrition enabling Britain to muster its forces and attack Germany in the west. This was the role Russia had played in 1812 in the war against France and in 1914 and 1941 in the war against Germany. France herself had acted in that role in the First World War. But now, with the alienation of the Soviet Union from the West and the political weakness in central Europe caused by Germany's collapse, there was no longer a balance in Europe but a void. The heart of that void lay in Europe west of Bohemia; eastern Europe beyond

<sup>1</sup> Truman, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

the void was being rapidly and purposefully filled in by Soviet power, with Berlin an island of inter-Allied occupation in the midst of it. In the 1930s Baldwin had startled the British by arguing that their frontier was not the white cliffs of Dover but the Rhine,<sup>1</sup> though that was not fully appreciated when Hitler's armies marched into the left bank of the river in March 1936. Now, with Germany west of the Elbe inert and dependent, Britain's frontier had moved 200 miles further east into Europe. For a short time after the war many of both the Right and Left wings of British politics toyed with the idea of Britain joining with the states of western Europe to form a strong and prosperous, but uncommitted, third force mediating between the two giant Powers. Western Europe could neither revive nor defend itself without United States assistance; it was therefore inevitably attracted into the American orbit. Moreover, although neutralism might have been a conceivable policy for France, the Low Countries, Italy and even West Germany, when an independent government was formed there, it was hardly possible for Britain with its still wide international connections and still enormous Empire. Britain was now bound to western Europe as long as there was no effective balance against Russia without it; but neither this commitment nor the maintenance of a British position in the world outside Europe was possible without a solid relationship with the United States. The days of a flexible European balance formed between the European states alone and with an uncommitted Britain in the wings were over.

There were, however, two former principles of British foreign policy which had not been weakened: the post-1945 scene seemed rather to have strengthened them. The first was the British interest in pacification and stability and the employment of international organisations for reconciliation and constructive co-operation rather than for enforcement of the law. This had provided the basis for the crucial differences between Britain and France after 1918, the French preferring to see the League of Nations primarily as a means for enforcing the peace settlement, the British wishing it to be used for reconciling Germany with the European comity of nations. Towards the end of the Second World War British opinion tended to side with the American view that the League had been too weak and hence that the new world organisation should be firmly based on the united military strength of the Great Powers. But this view was convincing only so long as Great-Power unity was credible. With the onset of the Cold War between East and West British influence was thrown on the side of moderating this major tension when possible and preventing the UN from being used solely to

<sup>1</sup> 292 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 2339 (30 July 1934).

organise world opinion against Communism. As Clement Attlee put it in describing the British attitude at the San Francisco conference on the UN Charter,

'In the discussion of the powers of the Security Council the British delegation took a foremost part in seeking to make the Security Council something more than a policeman who is called in only when there is a danger of a breach of the peace. We sought, and sought successfully, to make it a place where the policies of the states, and especially the greater states, could be discussed and reconsidered, especially when they showed signs of such divergences as to threaten the harmony of international relations. Collective Security is not merely a promise to act when an emergency occurs but it is active co-operation to prevent emergencies occurring.'<sup>1</sup>

That conception was inherent in Britain's international position as a state with hostages to fortune all over the world and with sufficient experience of world war not to expect anything but loss from it.

Secondly, British foreign policy after the First World War had always to measure the likely effects of decisions taken in London on a Commonwealth and Empire a fundamental rule of which was that its constituent countries should enjoy self-determination at the earliest moment. In August 1914 it had been for Britain alone to decide whether or not it, and the Empire with it, should enter the war against the Central Powers. But thereafter the question was whether Britain should shoulder commitments or embark on courses which might not be supported by the Dominions; they had effectively acquired independence in foreign policy at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, formally at the Imperial Conference in 1926 and legally by the *Statute of Westminster, an Act of the British Parliament, in 1931*. It is true that the Dominions chose not to be parties to the Locarno treaties of 1925 by which the United Kingdom undertook for the first time territorial guarantees in mainland Europe. But the inability of Britain in the 1920s to assume general obligations as a guarantor under the League Covenant, and the nervousness of the Chamberlain Government in the 1930s about challenging the Dictators on issues on which they might not have Dominions' support, showed the interdependence between British policy and Commonwealth opinion. This was no less the position after the Second World War. Consultation with the Commonwealth had been a primary rule of British foreign policy before 1939; it remained a primary rule after 1945. But in one vital respect the situation was different. Self-determination was now being pressed on a war-weary Britain in the non-Europeanised parts of the Empire, especially

<sup>1</sup> 413 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 665 (22 August 1945).

in India, Burma and Ceylon. These countries might still wish to remain in the Commonwealth after independence but it could not be assumed that they would approach international questions with the same intellectual background as Britain or the white Dominions. There was bound to be a decline in the number of issues on which Britain could take a stand and know that Commonwealth countries would respect its point of view even if they did not share it.

To these four principles a fifth had to be added in the changed circumstances of 1945: that of reconsidering from time to time the sum total of British international commitments to see whether they were still bearable in the light of the country's diminished strength. On the side of maintaining the full extent of British interests abroad stood Churchill, supported by the Conservative Party; he had not been made Prime Minister, he said in 1942, to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. He appealed to the national pride of a people who had played a distinguished role in Hitler's defeat, as well as to its less than complete confidence either in the United States, as a relative novice in world affairs, or in the Soviet Union, with its dubious ideology and frank creed of *Realpolitik*. On the other side was the old radical tradition of little England, joined with the demand for better living conditions at home and a quieter and better ordered world, this now having been strengthened by alliances with two super-Powers which, in their different ways, renounced the old order of belligerent imperialism. Britain in 1945 showed none of the thirst for territorial acquisitions at the expense of the defeated which had been so prominent in 1918. The British resignation to the United States of primacy in the coming struggle with Russia was not widely resented. The British people, as their attitude towards the Palestine mandate in 1947-8 showed, had caught something of that mood of withdrawal from the burdens of world politics which was affecting their neighbours in Europe. At first this attitude seemed to favour the drastic downward adjustment of commitments which lowered strength now demanded. But it was almost a quarter of a century before that demand was fully accepted.

#### *Labour in office*

This was all the more remarkable in that Churchill, the champion of maintaining the full range of British interests, fell from power in the general election on 5 July and was succeeded by the first Labour Government with a secure majority in British history. The new Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, had an overall lead of 247 seats in the House of Commons; he was assured by constitutional practice of full authority to decide and implement any foreign policy



of his choice. He had written a book in the 1930s in which he argued that a Socialist foreign policy would be wholly different from that of the Conservatives.<sup>1</sup> Many Labour voters agreed with the statement in the election campaign by Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade in the new Cabinet, that the war had been caused by the failure of the National Government to give effective support to the League of Nations and that a Labour Government was better qualified than a Conservative to co-operate with Russia.<sup>2</sup> In the event, however, Labour's accession to office made scarcely any difference to the main lines of foreign policy which the wartime Coalition Government had already sketched. In fact a significant feature of the Labour Government's foreign policy was its support by the Conservative Opposition and its condemnation by the Labour Left.

This is less surprising when it is remembered how public party conflict, especially in matters of foreign policy, tends to exaggerate the real extent of differences between party leaders on the two sides. To which must be added circumstances which in 1945 especially softened the effect on foreign policy of a change of government. In the first place, the Labour Party's leading figures had had a share in the Coalition Government from its formation in May 1940. They had been privy to the whole course of international diplomacy during the war. Owing to their support several widely unpopular acts of the Government, as for instance the intervention in the civil conflict in Greece in December 1944, had been made acceptable to the country. In the first debate in the Commons after the formation of the Labour Government in 1945 Anthony Eden, the wartime Foreign Secretary, said that there had never been a serious difference of opinion on foreign affairs between Labour and Conservative Ministers in the Coalition Government and Labour's Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, confirmed this.<sup>3</sup> This was in sharpest contrast with experience in the First World War in which a Labour leader entered the wartime Cabinet only in December 1916, after most of the secret international agreements of the war had been made. Hence, the change-over in 1945 was smoothly effected in July at the Potsdam conference at which Churchill led the British delegation at the beginning and Attlee at the end. Moreover, experience of office in the War Cabinet had given Labour leaders, if not necessarily a more realistic, certainly a more orthodox grasp

<sup>1</sup> *The Labour Party in Perspective*, London, Gollancz, 1937, p. 226. This passage was not revised when the book was re-issued after the war.

<sup>2</sup> R. B. McCallum and Alison Readman, *The British General Election of 1945*, London, our, 1947, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> 413 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 312 (20 August 1945).

of foreign policy than was general among opposition spokesmen in the 1930s. The fact that Attlee and Bevin were men of severely practical bent, with no interest in anything more revolutionary than mild social reforms, ensured that British policy would follow traditional courses. This did not mean, however, that the Labour movement as a whole would be happy with the results.

But the most important reason for continuity was the absence of substantial alternatives to the principles laid down by the Coalition: namely, co-operation as far as possible with the two giant Powers, close accord with the United States, the utmost possible contribution to European recovery and support for the new United Nations Organisation. This limitation of choice was partly due to the reduced power of Britain at the end of the war, though the full extent of this was not realised, partly due to the sudden, alarming breach between the wartime allies. But it was also due to the fact that the policy more or less agreed between the two parties at the general election was no more than an outline, to be filled in as events developed. If the Soviet Union and the United States overcame the friction arising from the Yalta accords and remained friendly, Britain stood to gain from the ensuing prospect for the development of the United Nations. But if their rivalry intensified Britain at best might try to use the UN to moderate the conflict while shielding itself from its consequences by strengthening ties with the USA, western Europe and the Commonwealth. On the razor's edge between these two prospects, Britain and the world in 1945 stood poised.

## Chapter 2

### THE BANKRUPT ESTATE

When in 1945 Britain voted into power a Labour Government bent on improving the ordinary person's lot, the country was financially insolvent for the first time in its modern history. This fact influenced almost every act of British diplomacy in every part of the world. The war effort was estimated to have cost about a quarter of the country's national wealth, or some £7,300 million. Physical destruction on land accounted for some £1,500 million of this, the loss of shipping and cargoes for £700 million. Internal disinvestment, through failure to replace plant and machinery, totalled some £900 million. But the most serious inroad into financial strength was the sale of foreign assets valued at £4,200 million as payment for foreign imports and military supplies from abroad during the war.<sup>1</sup> The task of making good this loss in earning capacity was increased by pent-up demand within the country, intensified by demobilisation and the state of full employment, which attracted resources away from the re-establishment of the country's external position. Four million houses alone had been either destroyed or damaged by enemy action; the domestic cupboard was bare, the population down-at-heel and much industrial property superannuated.

The effects in terms of the external economic situation were two. First, an increase in exports of between 50 and 75 per cent above the pre-war level was assumed to be necessary merely for the pre-war scale of imports; it would probably take from three to five years to achieve this. Visible and invisible exports which had financed purchases of food and raw materials before the war had been pared down to the bone. In the export industries the labour force had been reduced from 1.3 million in 1939 to 400,000 in 1945 so as to provide men for the Services and war industries. The merchant marine, earning Britain an eighth of its pre-war imports, was in a severely mauled condition, with less than three-quarters of its 1939 tonnage in use despite wartime building. Above all, the drastic liquidation of foreign securities reduced income from this source to one-half of what it had been in 1939.<sup>2</sup> The result of these losses was that when the Labour Government was formed British income

<sup>1</sup> *Statistical Material presented during the Washington negotiations*, Cmd. 6707 of 1945, Appendix VIII.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 6707, Appendixes I-VII.

from abroad sufficed to pay for scarcely a half of current purchases. Imports of food and raw materials were running at the rate of £2,000 million a year. Visible exports contributed no more than £350 million towards this figure, while income from United States and British Commonwealth spending in Britain and her possessions added a further £450 million. It is true that in 1945 the world constituted a seller's market, but other countries would first have to restore their economies in order to make their demands effective. Hence, as Attlee said in August, 'the initial deficit with which we start the task of re-establishing our own economy and of contracting our overseas commitments is immense'.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, there was, as at the end of the First World War, the burden of debt to other countries. Enormous cash outlays in local currencies had been necessary in India, the Middle East, North Africa and elsewhere to pay for the upkeep of troops, the construction of airfields, harbours and supply bases, the use of local labour and the purchase of local supplies. Even after hostilities had ceased payments continued for the maintenance of British forces beyond their peacetime strength. Only to a limited extent had all this expenditure been covered by Lend-Lease, British earnings abroad or the sale of foreign investments. The balance was entered up on the debit side. The result was that British external liabilities, which totalled £476 million in August 1939, had swollen to the huge figure of £3,355 million by June 1945. By far the greatest proportion of these liabilities was held by Sterling Area countries, that is, the British Commonwealth, excluding Canada and Newfoundland, together with certain Middle Eastern countries; this sterling indebtedness totalled £2,723 million. These liabilities did not have to be, nor could they be, met at once; but their very existence constituted a distinct weakness in the British diplomatic situation.

No sooner had Attlee's Government settled down to digest these unwelcome statistics than a crippling blow was struck in the form of the ending of Lend-Lease and the cancellation of outstanding contracts by a stroke of President Truman's pen on 21 August 1945. Warning had already been given in May, when this 'most unsordid act in history' had been sharply contracted on Germany's surrender. At the Potsdam conference Churchill had proposed talks with the United States Government on post-war finance and accordingly Assistant Secretary of State Clayton had been sent over by the White House to prepare the ground. Now, not only was the lifeline cut, but Britain, the recipient of over two-thirds of all Lend-Lease, was called on to assume liability for supplies in transit or in British hands or waiting to be delivered under existing contracts. The shock

<sup>1</sup> 413 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 956 (24 August).

of this decision, effected without consultation with the British Government, was such that Churchill, now leader of the Opposition, said he could not believe it was the last word of the United States on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador in Washington, at that time at home on leave, was asked to return at once and with him went a strong delegation which included Lord Keynes, Mr Brand, the Treasury representative in America, and Sir Percival Liesching of the Board of Trade. In their talks in Washington, which began on 11 September, their task was to set the economic facts about Britain's plight before the American officials and to try to reach some arrangement about further dollar aid. Without dollar assistance there was a distinct possibility of widespread unemployment in Britain and even scarcity of the basic necessities.

There was a pardonable suspicion in Britain that the United States, with its faith in individual enterprise, had terminated Lend-Lease by way of comment on the verdict Britain had just given in the general election. The lack in the United States of much public enthusiasm for the British Empire, now applying for a subsidy, was also felt to have played its part. Legally, however, the President was bound by the terms of the Lend-Lease Act of 1 March 1941, not to prolong the operation into peacetime.<sup>2</sup> Britain herself in signing the Mutual Aid Agreement with the United States in February 1942 had placed it in the President's hands to determine the date of the end of the emergency and with it the end of the Agreement.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, American opinion was at this time far from alarmed about affairs in Europe and saw no reason for subsidies to allies as though in wartime. James Byrnes, the new Secretary of State, was advocating a twenty-five-year four-Power security pact in Europe, one object of which seemed to be to create conditions for a withdrawal of American forces. Churchill's speech at Fulton, Missouri, in March 1946, pleading for recognition of the dangers facing the western democracies, drew no fervent response. Recollections of Europe's failure to settle its debts after the First World War were more frequent visitors to the American mind. Hence the determination to place relations with Europe on a 'business' footing at the earliest moment, unaffected by sentiment or political considerations.

### *The American loan*

This American mood was reflected in tough bargaining in Washington on the terms of dollar assistance. Extending over three months,

<sup>1</sup> 413 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 957 (24 August 1945).

<sup>2</sup> Truman, *op. cit.*, p. 410.

<sup>3</sup> Cmd. 6341 of 1942.

the talks came more than once within an ace of collapse. Their eventual success was purchased at the cost of the disappointment of most of the hopes of the British side, which had, however, not improved their case by somewhat overstating the severity of the country's position. 'The true financial status of our chief Ally was never agreed upon,' President Truman observed, 'although it was obviously serious.'<sup>1</sup> The British delegates had expected either a grant-in-aid or an interest-free loan. They were offered instead a line of credit at the modest annual rate of 2 per cent or rather 1.62 per cent when account was taken of the fact that repayments would not commence until December 1951. The credit was fixed at \$3,750 million (£930 million), to be drawn upon before the end of 1951, to which was added a further \$672 million (£167 million) to cover outstanding British liabilities on Lend-Lease account and the sale by the United States of certain surplus war properties and installations in Britain. Repayment was to extend over fifty years, each annual instalment being fixed at \$31 million (£8 million) for each \$1,000 million of the line of credit which had been drawn at the terminal date for encashing it. In any one year the element of interest in the sum due for repayment might be waived at the request of the British Government provided the International Monetary Fund certified that the British balance of payments warranted it.<sup>2</sup> Since the proportion of interest to principal would be greater in the early years of repayment, this meant that the burden of reimbursing the loan would be heaviest in the years of immediate post-war recovery.<sup>3</sup>

But the American loan was more than a loan. By the Loan Agreement, which was signed in Washington on 6 December Britain accepted three conditions extending beyond the normal scope of creditor-debtor relations. She undertook to make sterling freely convertible into other currencies not later than twelve months after the Loan Agreement came into force; that meant the end of the Sterling Area dollar pool which limited the freedom of Sterling Area countries to spend dollars earned by their exports. She also agreed not to apply quantitative restrictions discriminatingly against dollar goods, which implied that any British restrictions on purchases from the United States, applied in order to conserve dollars, would have to extend to imports from every part of the world. Thirdly, Britain consented to enter into negotiations with countries holding British sterling liabilities with a view either to scaling them down or refunding them; from the American point of view this would have the

<sup>1</sup> Truman, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

<sup>2</sup> The Fund is referred to below, pp. 37-8.

<sup>3</sup> Financial Agreement between the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom, dated 6 December 1945, Cmd. 6708 of 1945.

effect of diverting to the dollar market the import demands of countries holding sterling balances which they might otherwise liquidate by purchases in Britain. In addition Britain accepted as a basis for discussion at a future world conference the American proposals for an international trade organisation,<sup>1</sup> and agreed to ratify the agreements concluded at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, in July 1944 for the creation of an International Monetary Fund and an International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.<sup>2</sup>

These conditions were steeped in the American philosophy of multilateral world trade unembarrassed by political obstacles or intervention. They were not wholly disadvantageous to Britain as a trading nation. The Monetary Fund, for example, designed to guard against competitive exchange depreciation by providing limited amounts of scarce foreign exchange to countries in debt, promised some easement in cases of temporary shortages of foreign currency, while avoiding the harsh impact on the level of internal demand of the Gold Standard.<sup>3</sup> It allowed depreciation of a member's currency up to 10 per cent of par value without consultation with the Fund authorities and a further 10 per cent with the Fund's consent. The only question was whether the initial value of sterling proposed (4.03 dollars in the £) was realistic in the circumstances. The World Bank also held out advantages for a country with Britain's interest in economic reconstruction abroad; unfortunately only one-fifth of the Bank's capital was to be paid up at the outset, and this was to prevent it from meeting more than a small fraction of post-war needs. Even the American aspiration for a world trade charter embodying the gospel of free trade could hardly jeopardize British interests provided it emphasised, as the British delegation insisted, the precedence of full employment at home over the stability of world trade as a whole and provided also that any reduction in Imperial Preference was conditional on a real expansion of Commonwealth trade with dollar countries. But the most hazardous of the Washington undertakings were the promises to make sterling convertible after only one year's readjustment and to remove discrimination against dollar goods. If it was assumed that British balance of payments difficulties were merely an aftermath of war these promises were not unreasonable. But in the presence of a long-standing lack of balance

<sup>1</sup> Proposals for consideration by an International Conference on Trade and Employment, Cmd. 6709 of 1945.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA, 1 July to 22 July 1944, Final Act, Cmd. 6546 of 1945.

<sup>3</sup> J. M. Keynes had been working out a somewhat similar system for many months during the war; see R. F. Harrod, *The Life of John Maynard Keynes*, London, Macmillan, 1951, Chapter XIII, 'Bretton Woods'.

between the dollar and the pound the attempt to make the British economy freely competitive with the American was positively quixotic. The agreement for an International Monetary Fund by contrast provided for a transitional period of five years before the free exchange of currencies became operative.<sup>1</sup> The United States argued that in view of the support afforded to Britain by the dollar credit these five years could be safely reduced to one. It was on this point that the British delegation most strongly dissented.

In support of their arguments the American officials insisted that Britain was already bound to abandon restrictive commercial practices by the Mutual Aid Agreement signed on 23 February 1942 which provided for the final liquidation of Lend-Lease. Article VII of the Agreement read:

In the final determination of the benefits to be provided to the United States by the Government of the United Kingdom in return for aid furnished under the Act of Congress of 11 March 1941 the terms and conditions shall include provisions for agreed action by the United States and the United Kingdom, open to participation by all other countries of like mind, directed to the expansion, by appropriate international and domestic measures, of production, employment and the exchange and consumption of goods, which are the material foundation of the liberty and welfare of all peoples; to the elimination of all forms of discriminatory treatment in international commerce and to the reduction of tariffs and other trade barriers; and in general to the attainment of all the economic objectives set forth in the Joint Declaration made on 12 August 1941 by the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

The American administration, well aware of the allergy of Congress to the very sound of the words 'Imperial Preference', insisted on making the implementation of this clause a condition of the line of credit. The British reply was that when the Joint Declaration, in other words the Atlantic Charter, was drawn up, the Prime Minister had taken care to see that the reference to freedom of trade should include the phrase 'with due respect to their existing obligations'. In any case, the British delegation argued, any contraction in Imperial Preference would have to be matched with reductions in the American tariff. It was no good, they said, demanding of Britain that she stand on her feet commercially while forbidding her to make trading arrangements with friendly countries to balance the impermeability of the American market. But these protests were without avail.

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 6546. Article XIV.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 6431 of 1943.



The Loan Agreement had a cold reception in Britain. The Foreign Secretary, Bevin, pointed out that it was never agreeable to come away from a money-lender's office and reckon up the cost.<sup>1</sup> The terms were hard enough. The haste with which the United States demanded ratification of the Agreement, together with that of the Bretton Woods agreements, allowing only until 31 December when the Agreement itself was not signed until 6 December seemed indecent to many. The greatest doubt, however, was whether sterling could stand the strain of convertibility after so brief an acclimatisation. The leader of the Opposition, Churchill, described it as a proposition so doubtful and perilous that the best hope was that in practice it would defeat itself.<sup>2</sup> The hope was fulfilled. In the event it was only two years to a day from the ending of Lend-Lease that the experiment in convertibility had to be terminated on 21 August 1947 only a month after sterling had been freed. The reason for this was the rush of foreign holders of sterling proceeds from sales to Britain to convert their balances into scarce dollars in order to buy more readily available American goods. British gold and dollar reserves ran down some \$300 million in the first nine months of 1947, the year in which convertibility was tried and failed. But these unfavourable aspects of the Loan Agreement did not shake the view of responsible people that the bargain was the best obtainable in the circumstances. According to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugh Dalton, 'I was under no illusions as to what would follow if we got no dollar credit. We would go deeper into the dark valley of austerity than at any time during the war.'<sup>3</sup> 'The Labour Government', wrote Harold Macmillan 'were right, in my view, to accept the loan, even on these rough terms.'<sup>4</sup> The feelings aroused by the Agreement, however, were such that ninety-eight MPs voted against it, including many Conservatives who refused to follow their leader's recommendation to abstain in order to avoid any appearance of hostility towards the United States.

#### *The dollar gap and Marshall aid*

The Anglo-American Loan Agreement was based on the assumption that the lack of balance between the economies of the Old World and the New was largely an after-effect of the war. Britain needed dollar support, Dalton explained 'because our national economy has been

<sup>1</sup> 417 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 725 (13 December 1945).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 714 (13 December 1945).

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Dalton, *High Tide and After. Memoirs, 1945-1960*, London, Muller, 1962, p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune, 1945-1955*, London, Macmillan, 1969, p. 78.

distorted and violently twisted out of shape for the sake of our common war effort'.<sup>1</sup> But events were to show that the post-war disequilibrium was merely the climax to trends which had their beginnings long before.

Even in the 1930s a deficit had existed on the British side in commercial dealings with the Western Hemisphere. Its true extent was concealed by three factors: exports to the New World in the form of raw materials from British overseas possessions such as Malaya; favourable terms of trade in pre-1939 times, which enabled Britain to buy a given volume of imports with only two-thirds of the exports it had had to sell before 1914; and the earnings in the United States of the primary-producing colonies of Britain's neighbours in Europe providing a supply of dollars to which Britain had access through its own sales to Europe. All three factors had almost entirely disappeared by 1945. Exports from colonial areas such as south-east Asia had temporarily dried up; there was a sharp decline in the output of primary products owing to the dislocations of war and the rice famine in the Far East, thus turning the terms of trade against the industrial countries; and many overseas possessions of Europe were in process of gaining their independence. Moreover, before the war there had been an average import of \$1,400 million (£290 million) in gold into the United States every year, largely owing to capital movements into that country. So that by 1945 the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe had not only to face the standing problem of an excess of imports in trade with the dollar area, but were denuded of gold and other reserves to tide over the period before a more balanced state of payments had been reached.<sup>2</sup> In their combined effect those factors provided the United States with a surplus on trading account of something like \$10,000 million (£2,500 million) a year shortly after the war ended. Dollars to cover this surplus were distributed through many American schemes of public and private assistance to a less fortunate world outside. But these would not last indefinitely. Only in one or other of two ways could this huge deficit be met. Either the United States would have to supply the missing dollars as a formal act of policy or Europe must cut its imports from the Western Hemisphere, with disastrous effects on European recovery, American export business and all the hopes for a revival of international trade.

A third possibility, that Europe should finance its purchases by its own sales in dollar markets, was ruled out by the prevailing state of

<sup>1</sup> 417 N.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 423 (12 December 1945).

<sup>2</sup> E. A. G. Robinson, 'The United Kingdom's Economic Problems', in *United Kingdom Policy*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1950, pp. 63-7.

the European economy. Production in western Europe was undergoing temporary paralysis caused by physical devastation (though this turned out to be not nearly as severe as was at first thought), the German collapse, the habits of sabotage and disloyalty which had been acquired during the war in the occupied countries, the chaotic state of the transport system and the segregation from western Europe of the principal food and timber-producing areas in the east. Almost every country was affected by monetary disturbance, the by-product of a long war, with its freezing effect on trade and production. Food and industrial raw materials previously obtained from extra-European dependent territories were in short supply. Nevertheless, the population which consumed this diminished production had not decreased; certain areas, such as the western occupation zones of Germany, had experienced abnormal increases owing to the influx of refugees from former German territories in the east now occupied by Russia, Poland or Czechoslovakia.<sup>1</sup> As a crowning misfortune, the exceptionally severe winter of 1946-7, when wood was burned on a large scale owing to the dearth of coal, depleted timber supplies for building and the manufacture of pit props. This was preceded and followed by the exceptionally dry springs of 1946 and 1947.

To a limited extent this sorry state of Europe was alleviated in the months immediately after the war by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), created in 1944. The United States naturally made the largest financial contribution to this agency, which came to be regarded in that country as little more than a department of state. It was therefore exposed to the moody self-criticism which sometimes follows on the heels of American acts of generosity. The feeling in Congress that UNRRA was being used to sustain regimes unfriendly towards the United States, together with the American taxpayer's wish to employ relief with more discrimination, therefore served to bring the agency's work to a close at the end of 1946. UNRRA had in truth been far more active in eastern Europe than in the west, which gave some point to Congressional complaints. But this was due, not to any ideological bias in its officials, but to the reluctance of west European governments to accept what were in effect doles from a relief organisation. UNRRA's demise accordingly left unaffected the conclusion reached by the British Government in the closing months of 1946 that Europe's dollar needs would have to be satisfied, and that soon, or paralysis of unlimited extent and duration would ensue.

The initiative came from the United States in the form of one of

<sup>1</sup> Committee of European Economic Co-operation, Vol. 1, General Report, HMSO, 1947, p. 4.

those massive conceptions which are the natural offspring of the American mind. A hint had been thrown out by Dean Acheson, the Under-Secretary of State, in a speech at Cleveland, Mississippi, on 8 May 1947, when he told a meeting of cotton growers that 'the United States is going to have to undertake further emergency financing of foreign purchases if foreign countries are to continue to buy in 1948 and 1949 the commodities which they need to sustain life and at the same time rebuild their economies'.<sup>1</sup> This was the curtain-raiser to the historic speech by the Secretary of State, George Marshall, at Harvard University on 5 June, when he stated the implications of the economic plight of Europe in the following terms:

'Europe's requirements for the next three or four years of foreign food and other essential products—principally from America—are so much greater than her present ability to pay that she must have substantial additional help or face economic, social and political deterioration of a very grave character. Before, however, the United States can proceed much further in its efforts to alleviate the situation and help start the European world on its way to recovery, there must be some agreement among the countries of Europe as to the requirements of the situation and the part these countries themselves will take in order to give proper effect to whatever action might be undertaken by this Government.'

'The programme', Mr Marshall concluded, 'must be a joint one, agreed to by a number of, if not all, European nations.'<sup>2</sup> A week later the Secretary of State answered the obvious question raised by the speech by saying that he had in mind the entire continent of Europe west of Asia and meant to include both Britain and the Soviet Union. In view of the estrangement already evident in Russo-American affairs it was open to doubt whether the reference to the Soviet Union was serious. The State Department had announced in the previous October the suspension of the remaining four-fifths of a \$50 million credit to Czechoslovakia and had asked the United States Export-Import Bank to hold up negotiations for a further \$50 million rehabilitation loan on the grounds that certain Czech newspapers had echoed Soviet allegations of American 'dollar diplomacy'. It was even more doubtful whether Congress would sanction financial help without demanding the kind of concessions which the Soviet authorities were unlikely to accept. Marshall himself had said in his Harvard speech that 'governments, political

<sup>1</sup> Department of State, *Bulletin*, 18 May 1947, pp. 991-4.

<sup>2</sup> Department of State, *Bulletin*, 15 June 1947, pp. 1159-60.

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'. In the event the question was never put because the Soviet Government, after sending the Foreign Minister, Molotov, to a three-Power meeting on the Marshall offer in Paris at the end of June, refused to join Britain and France in their invitation to the other European states to collaborate in a temporary organisation to study their economic requirements. Subsequently the Soviet Union ensured that the east European countries, including Czechoslovakia, should follow her example and boycott the Anglo-French invitation, or change their minds if they had already accepted it.

The Soviet Union's reasons for dissociating itself from the Marshall offer remain obscure, although it is fairly certain that the objection made public at the three-Power meeting in Paris in June, namely that a recovery programme in any other form than that of a mere shopping-list of requirements 'would inevitably result in the imposition of the will of the stronger European Powers upon other European countries', was not genuine.<sup>1</sup> The Soviet authorities may have feared too close an involvement with the United States' economy, which Marxist Holy Writ represented as being on the verge of collapse. They may have thought that they had more to gain from economic paralysis in western Europe, following upon the anticipated American recession, than from American aid, even if this was given without strings. They may also have concluded that a common European programme, such as appeared to be a condition of American assistance, would probably weaken Russia's grip on the east European countries and draw them into the richer, if moribund, capitalist orbit. The Communist and semi-Communist countries which the Red Army had joined together were not meant to be put asunder by American dollars.

The Soviet withdrawal was not regretted by the British Government. After the negotiations on the peace treaties with the five ex-enemy states the principal fear in London was that the state of Europe, grave almost to the point of despair, would only be lost to sight in further bouts of sterile wrangling which characterised the Council of Foreign Ministers. The United States had already shown itself to be a hard bargainer in the matter of the Loan Agreement; it was possible that it might drop the Marshall offer in a huff if there was too much trouble with the Russians. On the eve of the Paris talks on the offer Bevin told the House of Commons: 'the guiding principle that I shall follow in any talks on this matter

<sup>1</sup> French Yellow Book. Documents of the Conference of Foreign Ministers of France, the United Kingdom and the USSR held in Paris from 27 June to 3 July 1947. Proposal submitted by the Soviet delegate at the Third Meeting, p. 49.

will be speed. I spent six weeks in Moscow trying to get a settlement. I shall not be a party to holding up the economic recovery of Europe by the finesse of procedure or terms of reference or all the paraphernalia which may go with it. There is too much involved.<sup>1</sup> While it may be inaccurate to accuse the Foreign Secretary of having intrigued to keep Russia out, he leapt at the Marshall speech and hastened to hold talks with the French Foreign Minister, Georges Bidault, in Paris on 17 and 18 June in order to arrange a common Anglo-French position of the terms of an approach to Russia. When the two Ministers met Molotov in Paris from 27 June to 3 July and the anticipated dispute did spring up as to the composition and terms of reference of a steering committee for the proposed organ for European recovery, Bevin must have breathed a sigh of relief to hear that Stalin could not go along with the two western Powers.

The Anglo-French invitation led to a conference in Paris which met under Bevin's chairmanship on 12 July to draw up the joint plan for European reconstruction which the US Secretary of State had asked for. The conference appointed the Committee for European Economic Co-operation to which was entrusted the task of surveying Europe's economic needs, the form of co-operation required to fulfil them and the nature of external assistance necessary to complete the plan. In addition to the sponsoring states, Britain and France, the following fourteen countries were represented on the Committee: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. Britain and France assumed responsibility for western Germany's participation in the plan.<sup>2</sup> The Committee adopted a report on the general situation in September which was then forwarded to the United States. By a convention concluded on 16 April 1948 the Committee became the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) for the distribution of the funds appropriated by the United States Congress and for the fulfilment of the four-year recovery programme. While this was happening on one side of the Atlantic, the United States on the other was adopting the necessary legislation in the form of the Economic Co-operation Act, which Congress passed in April 1948. As was to be expected, Congress reduced the total appropriation proposed by the administration for the four-year term and consented only to annual appropriations in preference to sanctioning funds for the whole period of the plan. During the entire programme of the European Recovery Programme (ERP) only one-fifth of the funds

<sup>1</sup> 438 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 2239 (19 June 1947).

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 81.

provided by the United States took the form of loans, the rest being grants carrying no obligation to repay.

The countries participating in ERP had two features in common. They lay outside the Soviet sphere of interest in eastern Europe and they agreed in regarding the Marshall offer as leading to economic integration of a more permanent kind between themselves, though Britain did not accept the French thesis that it was the starting point for European union in a federal sense. The former ensured that ERP should be the first formal stage in the post-war division of Europe into two camps, one having its policy choices increasingly determined in Moscow, the other looking towards the United States as its champion. The Soviet retort to the formation of OEEC was to call a conference of the seven dominant Communist parties of East Europe and Russia, together with Communist delegates from France and Italy, which met on 22 and 23 September 1947 at Wiliza Gora in Silesia and founded the Cominform. The object of this body, which recalled with some differences the old Comintern disbanded by Stalin in the interests of Allied unity in 1943, was at once to aid and succour Communist groups in western Europe in their efforts to impede the recovery programme and to co-ordinate from Moscow the general policies of the Communist-controlled countries. The most striking immediate outcome of the founding of Cominform was the expulsion of the heretical Tito, the President of Yugoslavia, from the Communist camp owing to his failure, in Stalin's eyes, to make the firm choice presented to all Communists by the issue of the Marshall plan. The second characteristic of the ERP countries, their agreement to make a more perfect economic union, was indispensable to the receipt of large-scale dollar aid in that American public opinion was willing to endorse it only if it seemed to expedite European union. The west European countries had reasons of their own for closer integration, but Marshall Aid provided a further stimulus along with the means for translating their plans into reality.

Certain movements towards European union had already begun. The Benelux union, creating a limited economic federation between Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg, had been initiated in London on 5 September 1944; its tariff union came into force on New Year's Day 1948. The Scandinavian countries followed with negotiations in August 1947 on a customs union, to be called 'Danosve', while similar talks commenced early in 1948 between France and Italy. Britain had a clear economic interest in these movements; besides, its prestige in western Europe at the end of the war was such that it rested with Britain to influence the general direction they should take. As Bevin put it in January 1948, 'Britain cannot stand outside Europe and regard her problems as quite

separate from those of her European neighbours'.<sup>1</sup> On 4 March 1947 the British Government had entered into the Treaty of Dunkirk with France; this was a purely defensive arrangement pledging either country for a period of fifty years to give the other all the military and other support in its power in the event of Britain or France becoming again involved in hostilities with Germany.<sup>2</sup> With the incorporation of the western zones of Germany into ERP the Dunkirk Treaty lost much of its significance, but it remained an assurance to France as west Germany was absorbed step by step into western security arrangements. On 22 January 1948, when it had become clear, first, that Russia intended to try to wreck the European recovery programme and, second, that four-Power agreement on Germany had failed to materialise at the meetings of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Moscow in March-April 1947, Mr Bevin came out with the Government's proposals for west European union. 'All these developments', he said, 'point to the conclusion that the free countries of west Europe must draw closely together. . . . I believe the time is ripe for a consolidation of western Europe. First in this context we think of the people of France . . . we are not now preparing a formal political union with France . . . but we shall maintain the closest possible contact. . . . The time has come to find ways and means of developing our relations with the Benelux countries. . . . I hope that treaties will be signed with our near neighbours, the Benelux countries, making our treaty with France an important nucleus in western Europe. We have then to go beyond the circle of our immediate neighbours . . . (to) Italy.'<sup>3</sup>

The enthusiasts for closer British relations with Europe, and especially those who supported the unofficial United Europe Movement of which Churchill had assumed the leadership, heard these words with dismay. They seemed to rule out a common political framework for western Europe with Britain forming a distinct element. What Bevin evidently had in mind was a number of bilateral defensive pacts with the west European countries severally, on the model of the Dunkirk Treaty, rather than a single political and economic complex. The form eventually taken by the Foreign Secretary's gropings, the Treaty of Economic, Social and Cultural Collaboration and Collective Self-Defence, signed at Brussels on 17 March 1948 actually turned out to be a multilateral arrangement uniting Britain with Belgium, France, Luxemburg and the

<sup>1</sup> 446 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 397 (22 January 1948).

<sup>2</sup> Treaty of Alliance and Mutual Assistance between His Majesty in respect of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the President of the French Republic, Cmd. 7217 of 1947.

<sup>3</sup> 446 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 395 (22 January 1948).



Netherlands in economic, social and cultural co-operation as well as defence; it provided for a permanent structure consisting of a Consultative Council of the Foreign Ministers of the five signatories, to meet at least once every three months in the various capitals in turn for continuous consultation on the questions covered by the treaty, and a committee formed from the five Defence Ministers, together with a Permanent Military Committee in London and a nucleus Land, Air and Naval Command.<sup>1</sup> But none of this modified the impression that the Brussels Treaty was essentially a provision for mutual aid in the event of an armed attack in Europe, rather than a step towards federal Europe. The British Government remained firmly opposed to the idea of closer constitutional integration. In the view of Christopher Mayhew, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 'it would be wrong to support a scheme such as this well-known scheme for the United States of Europe merely because it aims at the elimination of sovereignty'. The Cabinet's position from the outset was that 'at present these schemes are premature and more likely to lead to disunity than to unity in Europe'.<sup>2</sup> The Foreign Secretary had sounded the same note a week after Mr Marshall's Harvard speech, when the tide of pan-European feeling was rising. The emphasis in European recovery, he said, should be on severely functional co-operation in food production, coal mining and transport. Bevin repeated that Britain was not solely a European Power. Echoing a standard British theme he continued: 'while the first and most urgent problem is to get Europe right, there must be a wider and more comprehensive plan which will bring greater productivity and an even flow of trade and exchange throughout the world'.<sup>3</sup>

This attitude towards European union was based upon three major considerations. First, it was assumed that west Europe was indefensible against a Soviet military attack and incapable of rising to its feet economically unless a permanent link with the United States was forged. That link, the Government believed, could neither be created nor kept in repair without the exercise in Washington of an independent British influence, derived from the long diplomatic experience of the United Kingdom and its world-wide status, symbolised, though not exclusively, by the Commonwealth. Secondly, there was concern in Labour Party circles lest the post-

<sup>1</sup> Treaty of Economic, Social and Cultural Collaboration and Collective Self-Defence, Brussels, 17 March 1948, Cmd. 7599 of 1948. Collective Defence under the Brussels and North Atlantic Treaties, Cmd. 7883 of 1950.

<sup>2</sup> 443 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 2400 (27 February 1947).

<sup>3</sup> In a speech to the Foreign Press Association, 13 June 1947; *The Times*, 14 June 1947.

war mood in western Europe of revolt against national sovereignty should sweep Britain into supranational arrangements at the moment when the main levers of her economy were being brought, for the first time in peace, under state control at home. Thirdly, the hope still flickered that, despite Communist hostility towards the Marshall plan European recovery would not have the effect of dividing the continent for all time. It could never be wholly consistent with traditional British assumptions, or serviceable to British interests, to agree too readily with the gloomy diagnostics of Zdanov at the inaugural meeting of the Cominform, by which the world was pronounced to be irrevocably split into two camps.

### *The diplomatic consequences*

In the period between the Potsdam conference, the last of the wartime 'summit' meetings with Russia, and the launching of ERP in 1948 the strain of insolvency made its impact at every point in British foreign policy. Problems pressing for solution were assisted neither by the hideously narrow financial margins in which the country moved nor by the pressures at home for some relief from austerity. Although Bevin was somewhat given to dwelling on his burdens, his favourite lament, 'all the world is in trouble, I have to deal with all these troubles at once', not unfairly described his predicament. Calumny from the Soviet Union and her allies was continuous, rising to an intensity which in old diplomacy would have signalled the approach of war. At the United Nations Security Council on 17 January 1946, only four days after its first meeting, the Soviet representative, the hitting and brilliant Vyshinsky, by way of reply to Western attacks on Soviet policy in Iran accused Britain of attempting to impose a Fascist dictatorship on Greece. Bevin's position was not an easy one. The Greek Government, with British consent, had postponed for a period vaguely described as two or three years the national plebiscite on the constitutional future of the country which had been promised in the Varkiza agreement of 12 February 1945, which ended the civil war with the Greek Communists. Trade union leaders in the country had received rough treatment and had their champions in the House of Commons. Moreover the United States delegation at the Security Council feared the injurious effects of public wrangling in the United Nations on an American public opinion which had been induced to regard that organ as the main hope for peace. But this did not deter the Foreign Secretary from making some of his typically trenchant speeches the tone of which alarmed his American colleague almost as much as it surprised the Russians. The speeches, however,

secured acceptance of the view that British troops in Greece did not constitute a threat to peace and security as Vyshinsky alleged. The Security Council therefore divested itself of the subject on 6 May.

Simultaneously with the Greek question British policy in Indonesia came under attack at the Security Council from the Soviet side. Agreement had been reached with the United States Command in the Pacific in 1945 that, as soon as the Imperial Government in Tokyo capitulated, British troops should disembark in the Dutch East Indies in order to accept the surrender of Japanese forces there and to release British and Dutch internees. By a chapter of accidents their arrival was delayed until September. Meanwhile local nationalist forces aiming at the expulsion of European rule had taken advantage of the interregnum to establish control. On 19 August, a month before the British landed in Java, they created an Indonesian Republic under the presidency of Dr Soekarno. The British commander, General Christison, while genuinely reluctant to intervene in political issues, had no alternative but to try to disarm the nationalists if he was to carry out his instructions to restore order. In doing so he somewhat unwisely made use of Japanese troops and this action, when denounced at the Security Council by the Ukrainian delegate, Dimitri Manuilsky, with the support of Vyshinsky, aroused all the anti-colonialist sentiments which were becoming perhaps the strongest single force in the United Nations. The position was hardly made easier for Britain by Bevin's refusal to accept the Soviet proposal to send a mission of inquiry to Indonesia. For this seemed to throw doubt on the British contention that the rebels did not represent a genuine nationalist movement; it also served to endorse Soviet tactics of forbidding international commissions of inquiry in areas under Soviet control. The situation was saved by British pressure on the Dutch behind the scenes, which secured an announcement from The Hague that negotiations would shortly begin on the basis of the right of the Indonesian people to determine their own destiny within the framework of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Only the Soviet Union and Poland, then a non-permanent member of the Security Council, supported the Ukrainian resolution in favour of keeping the question on the agenda and accordingly it passed out of the Council's purview. The sequel to the talks between the Netherlands Government and the Indonesian nationalist leaders was the Linggadjati Agreement of 15 November 1946 which gave *de facto* recognition to an independent United States of Indonesia, which was to form part of a Netherlands-Indonesian Union together with the Netherlands, Surinam and Curaçao.

Likewise, in the wearisome negotiations to draw up peace treaties with the five ex-enemy states, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Italy and Rumania, the hard-pressed position of Britain, and the East-West schism which was an integral part of it, came forcefully to light. While Bevin was protesting from the Treasury bench at Westminster that power-politics and spheres of influence were things of the past, the main function of the negotiations, extending from the first meeting of the four-Power Council of Foreign Ministers on 11 September 1945 to the signing of the treaties on 10 February 1947 was to reaffirm the division between the Soviet-dominated Balkan states on one side and western-oriented Italy on the other, with Finland occupying an indeterminate middle ground between. The first two stages of work on the treaties comprised, respectively, the Foreign Ministers' meetings in London in September-October 1945 and in Moscow between 16 and 27 December 1945, and the drafting of the peace treaties at the Foreign Ministers' meeting in Paris from April to June 1946 on the basis of preparations made by their deputies working in London. It was clear in these two phases that the three western Powers were exploring the prospects of relaxing Russia's grip on the Balkan states, while Molotov played a contrary tune in his attempts to weaken Italy, the public opinion of which the western Powers were now endeavouring to win to their own side. At the third stage of the negotiations, represented by the Peace Conference in Paris of the four major Powers together with China and sixteen other countries, which was in continuous session from 29 July to 15 October 1946 the ostensible aim was to allow the smaller members of the United Nations coalition to have their say on the labours of the Council of Foreign Ministers. In reality the conference took the form of a struggle for influence over these minor countries between the United States and the Soviet Union. In this struggle the United States Secretary of State, James Byrnes, learning the new role of spokesman for the western nations, enjoyed on the whole the greater success. Of one hundred recommendations sent forward by the Paris Conference to the Council of Foreign Ministers at their final session on the treaties in New York in November and December 1946 the great majority were endorsements of the British and American positions. The treaties were eventually signed in Paris by representatives of the twenty-one nations and the five ex-enemy states on 10 February 1947.<sup>1</sup>

Three leading British preoccupations were distinguishable in these negotiations. First, while there was no mistaking Russia's determination to have the dominant voice in the politics of the

<sup>1</sup> Commentary on the Treaties of Peace with Italy, Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Finland, Cmd. 7026 of 1947, pp. 3-4.

Balkan states north of Greece, it was hoped to secure terms of peace which might still leave the Danube basin open to influence from the west. In the event this was achieved only in one minor respect and that a temporary one. From the outset Soviet delegates insisted that control of the Danube was a matter for the riparian states alone of which Russia, after her acquisition of Bessarabia from Rumania, was one. In doing so they ignored the British argument that the river had been a matter of general international concern since the Peace of Paris in 1856. At the Foreign Ministers' meeting in New York in December 1946, however, Molotov suddenly agreed to join in a declaration by the four Powers to convene, within six months of the treaties coming into force, a conference to establish a new regime for the Danube based on the freedom of trade and navigation assured by the peace treaties with the three Balkan states. The conference duly met in Belgrade on 30 July 1948 but the three Western Powers failed to prevent a convention being signed by the riparian states on 18 August which placed in their own hands the supervision of the river as far as the Hungarian frontier with Austria. In effect this meant control by Russia.<sup>1</sup>

But the most serious failure of the West to moderate Soviet pressure on the Balkan states was the total ineffectiveness of the obligations to maintain human rights to which Bulgaria, Hungary and Rumania were bound by the peace treaties.<sup>2</sup> These legalisms could do nothing to check the drift to one-party rule by identical stages in the three states. When the peace treaty negotiations opened in September 1945 Britain was still refusing to recognise the governments of these countries; in Bevin's words 'wartime totalitarianism had been succeeded by peacetime totalitarianism'.<sup>3</sup> But by the time Britain ratified the treaties on 29 April 1947 recognition of the Bulgarian, Hungarian and Rumanian regimes could no longer be withheld. The utmost that the western Powers could do was to veto for a brief period their application for admission to the United Nations on the ground that human rights were not assured to their peoples. Nevertheless, the persecution of the Peasant Parties and the Social Democrats continued. In Bulgaria the leader of the Agrarian Party, Petkov, was arrested on 24 July 1947 and indicted on a charge of treason. In September he was executed. After general elections in Bulgaria, which in the opinion of the British Government

<sup>1</sup> Peter Calvocoressi, *Survey of International Affairs 1947-48*, London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1952, pp. 172-3.

<sup>2</sup> Treaty Series No. 55 (1948), Treaty of Peace with Rumania, Cmd. 7486, Part II, Sect. I, Article 3. Treaty Series No. 52 (1948), Treaty of Peace with Bulgaria, Cmd. 7483, Part II, Sect. I, Article 2. Treaty Series No. 54 (1948), Treaty of Peace with Hungary, Cmd. 7485, Part II, Sect. I, Article 2.

<sup>3</sup> 413 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 291 (20 August 1945).

were corrupt, twenty-three Opposition deputies who had been allowed to sit in Parliament were expelled. The same process was taking place in Rumania. The general elections there, in the British Government's view, had been marked by wholesale falsification of the results by the authorities.<sup>1</sup> Maniu, the leader of the Rumanian National Peasant Party, was sentenced to life imprisonment in July 1947 and the Social Democratic and Communist Parties were forcibly united in February 1948. But the most serious turn of events occurred in Hungary, where the Secretary-General of the ruling party, the Smallholders, was arrested by the Soviet military authorities on 26 February 1947 on a charge of espionage against the Red Army. All British and American efforts to obtain information about his fate were unsuccessful. The final blow was the dismissal of Prime Minister Nagy, the leader of the Smallholders' Party on 29 May. Further protests by Britain and the United States only had the effect of tightening Communist control.

A circumstance which helped the Communists in these three countries, apart from the geographical proximity of the USSR, was the refusal of Russia to discuss a peace treaty with Austria at the Council of Foreign Ministers. For so long as there was no progress on the Austrian question the Soviet Union retained the right by the peace treaties with Hungary and Rumania to keep forces in those countries in order to protect lines of communication with her occupation zone in Austria. Even Austria, although it had, unlike Germany, retained an independent government, was not immune from Communist pressure. While the consolidation of Communist power in east Europe was going forward the leader of the Austrian Communist Party, Herr Fischer, was bullying the Chancellor, Dr Figl, to admit more Communists into his Cabinet, even though the Communists, after elections supervised by a Four-Power commission, held only four out of the 165 seats in the Austrian Chamber. When a peace treaty was finally signed with Austria in May 1955, however, it was still a non-Communist state. The peace treaties therefore, so far from shaking Soviet dominance in east Europe, to all appearances had placed the final seal upon it. Moreover, what was happening in the three Balkan states had its parallels in other parts of Europe accessible to Soviet influence. In Poland contrived elections in January 1947 secured the mastery over the country of the Democratic Bloc, consisting mainly of the Communists and their allies. In the course of 1947 the Polish Peasant Party and the Social Democrats were gradually reduced to impotence. There followed in February 1948 a textbook Communist *coup* in Czechoslovakia which drew

<sup>1</sup> 438 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 2232-4 (19 June 1947).

the only western-oriented state in east Europe behind the Iron Curtain.

The second British object in the peace treaty negotiations had been to establish an economically viable Italy which would be neither a burden to its conquerors nor a victim of excessive reparation obligations, and if possible with its face turned towards the west. 'Our own policy towards Italy,' said Bevin in June 1946, 'is first to enable her to repay what has been supplied as relief; secondly, to help her restore her economy on a peacetime basis and thereafter to remove any surplus war machinery and equipment which is not needed for peacetime economy.'<sup>1</sup> He therefore sought to frustrate the more fantastic reparation claims entered up against Italy by the smaller countries at the Paris Peace Conference and, while endeavouring to limit Russia's claim, tried to compensate it in kind, as for instance, by handing over Italian passenger liners. These efforts were successful in reducing the final reparation obligation in the Italian treaty to \$360 million. Of this Russia was to receive \$100 million, the two western Powers agreeing to waive their reparation claims. This reparation bill, though certain items in the treaty were left for further specification, was well within Italy's capacity to pay. Although the country had suffered extensive damage to its agricultural areas in the south, the industrial north had come through the war relatively unscathed and Italy's industrious working population, now without heavy armaments or unproductive colonies to maintain, was greater than before the war. But Bevin did not succeed in his demand that no reparations should be paid out of current production, although a qualified two-year moratorium was introduced into the clauses of the treaty referring to payments from this source. The effect of this was that the occupying Powers, Britain and the United States, stood very little chance of receiving back any of the \$1,000 million of relief which they had poured into the country after its unconditional surrender until the whole reparation bill had been met.<sup>2</sup>

As to the Italian frontiers, the British desire to keep Italy in much the same physical shape as before the war, with adjustments in the east to correct the excessive territorial gains of 1919, was largely fulfilled. Four minor rectifications in the west, involving less than 5,000 people, were made in France's favour. In the north the frontier with Austria at the Brenner Pass remained unchanged, thus leaving the 300,000 Austrians in the Alto Adige still in Italy. This decision was sharply criticised in the House of Commons as reminiscent of Axis diplomacy, and it was clearly inconsistent with the decision of

<sup>1</sup> 423 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1838 (4 June).

<sup>2</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, *The United States in World Affairs 1945-47*, New York, 1947, p. 53.

the Foreign Ministers at their first meeting in September 1945, when they determined to apply the ethnic principle to Italy's frontiers. In the prevailing balance of power, overshadowing more generous considerations, Italian goodwill was deemed to be more important to the western Powers than Austrian national rights. On Italy's eastern borders, however, the Soviet proposal that the whole of Venezia Giulia, which had been awarded to Italy in 1915 as its price for joining the Entente, should be ceded to Yugoslavia was defeated; it would have meant putting the Italian port and city of Trieste into Slav hands and transferring half a million Italians to foreign rule. The three western Powers adopted the French compromise proposal, the most unfavourable to Italy of the western suggestions, that the new frontier should run from the Austrian border at a point somewhat to the east of Tarvisio, then west of the Isonzo river as far as Gorizia, at which point the boundary would sweep eastwards across the river, leaving Trieste on the Italian side and meeting the sea at Cittanova on the Gulf of Venice.

From the ethnic point of view this proposal was the most acceptable of all those considered by the Foreign Ministers; it was estimated to leave only 60,000 Slavs and 100,000 Italians divided from their countrymen. Opposition naturally came from Belgrade, which gave way only when it became clear that Russia was willing to accept the French line on the tacit understanding that its own ideas should have priority in the settlement with the Balkan states. This bargain was finally made possible through the introduction of the conception of a Free Territory of Trieste, to be placed under the protection of the United Nations Security Council. The Trieste compromise, which endured until 1954, when the territory was divided between Italy and Yugoslavia, ensured that, whatever Communist pressures might be exerted lower down the Dalmatian coast, the outlet of Trieste would not be available as a Communist foothold in the Adriatic.

The third British preoccupation was to place obstacles in the way of any attempted Soviet penetration into the Mediterranean; that, in the Foreign Secretary's words, would be a 'thrust across our throat'. It was achieved by keeping the three ex-Italian colonies in Africa, Italian Somaliland, Eritrea and Libya, temporarily in British hands. Agreement was reached to cede the fourth group, the Dodecanese islands, to Greece after the strongest Soviet opposition in the Council of Foreign Ministers. Thus Molotov's insistent demand for either a Soviet trusteeship or a Soviet share in a joint trusteeship over Tripolitania was fobbed off to the last. Britain itself claimed that it had no interest in any trusteeship over the former Italian colonies, although it would have accepted one for Cyrenaica, the eastern portion of Libya, in order to fulfil the promise given by



Eden to the Scussi tribes in 1942 that they would never be returned to Italian rule. The British Government also proposed a British trusteeship to be formed out of British, French and Italian Somaliland, together with the Somali parts of Kenya and a portion of Ethiopia (which would be otherwise compensated) in order to provide common grazing grounds for the nomadic peoples of these areas. This suggestion was denounced as blatant imperialism by the Soviet Foreign Minister and it was dropped. It remained essential, however, that whichever of the many proposals was finally adopted, no trusteeship should be granted to Russia, or so the Western Powers thought. The different possibilities were discussed at length but no agreement could be reached for insertion into the Italian treaty. The problem was therefore referred back to the Foreign Ministers for a further year's discussion. It was agreed that if the Ministers were still unable to decide, the General Assembly of the United Nations should be left to determine the future of the colonies. In the meantime they continued under British administration.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The restraint of Soviet pressure: from Germany to Japan*

The two features of the post-war scene which had been evident during the interchanges on the peace treaties, that is, the division of forces between East and West and the economic stresses facing Britain, characterised other problems with which London had to deal in this period. It was noted, however, that, as these problems extended outwards from Europe, the effects of the East-West schism tended to be somewhat less marked. But the inclination of the policies of the west European nations, including Britain, to be interfused with that of the United States grew.

The central point of East-West tensions was Germany.<sup>2</sup> It was widely felt that peace had been made too quickly with Germany in 1919 for the more remote consequences to be weighed. Neither Russia or the Western Powers were in a hurry to see peace concluded with a central German Government until more was known of the kind of political forces likely to come to the surface in that country. For Britain the immediate problem was to resuscitate a controlled political life in the zone assigned to it by holding elections first at the local, then at the provincial level, while attempting at all price to make the zone self-supporting. The cost of maintaining the zone, £80 million a year and rising to an estimated £130 million in 1947,

<sup>1</sup> Treaties of Peace with Italy, Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Finland, Cmd. 7022 of 1947, pp. 15, 65.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 3.

most of which had to be paid in dollars, was an unwelcome strain on the British balance of payments. Germany, contrary to the Potsdam agreement, was not being treated by the four Powers as an economic unit; in particular the food-producing areas of the east, now under Soviet occupation, were not furnishing the industrial western regions with the imports necessary to maintain life. But neither were these areas, especially the British-occupied Ruhr, with its traditional dense concentration of population and heavy industry, in a position to purchase food imports on world markets. Their inability to do so was partly due to the four-Power Level of Industry Agreement, which in the opinion of the British Government was too low, partly to the facts that the Ruhr shared the general economic paralysis of western Europe and the future ownership of Germany's heavy industry was still unsettled.

Nevertheless the economic strain of the British zone was making itself felt and it was clear that if the United States was to help with the zonal deficit that country's opinion was bound to influence the disposal of the Ruhr industries. On 2 December 1946 an agreement was reached in New York between the United States and Britain by which the zones these two countries occupied in Germany were fused to form a single economic unit.<sup>1</sup> Although the burden on Britain was not directly lightened by the agreement, its effects were expected to relieve it of further financial liability in Germany in 1949, by which date a start could be made on repaying the costs of occupation. The result in terms of the Government's attitude towards the ownership of the Ruhr industries was striking. On 22 October, before the agreement to create Bizonia, Bevin told the Commons that 'our intention is that those industries should be owned and controlled in future by the public'.<sup>2</sup> When he spoke on the subject again in the House on 15 May 1947 after the Bizone agreement had come into effect on 1 January he was more circumspect. The rights of the allies, he said, must be safeguarded and German opinion had to be taken into account.<sup>3</sup> This foreshadowed the later Anglo-American agreement that the question should be left to the decision of a freely elected German government.

A comparable assimilation of British commitments with American took place in the Near East. British military forces had been in Greece since the outbreak of the civil war in December 1944 in order to prevent an unconstitutional Communist seizure of power. The position was invidious for a Labour Government, all the more so

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 6984 of 1946.

<sup>2</sup> 427 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1516.

<sup>3</sup> 437 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1737.

since Greek leaders followed the Balkan custom of allowing opponents to think out the problems of the day in a quiet cell. Throughout 1946 Bevin was under pressure from his back benches, which condemned the use of British bayonets to support a Greek military dictatorship. The Foreign Secretary's defence was that the Greek elections held in March 1946 had been supervised by British, French and American commissioners and were the fairest in Greek history. The threat to democracy in Greece, he said, came, not from the Government but from the EAM (Communist) faction and from armed incursions across Greece's northern frontiers. To deal with these raids he tried and failed at the Council of Foreign Ministers to secure a frontier readjustment in Greece's favour at the expense of Bulgaria. However, by Article XII of the peace treaty certain demilitarisation measures were imposed on Bulgaria along her borders with Greece. But it was neither criticism from home nor calumny from abroad which compelled Britain to withdraw from Greece; it was the financial crisis. It was this which forced the Government to notify both the Greek and United States Governments that further British assistance to Greece would not be forthcoming after 31 March 1947. The result was that on 3 March the Greek Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Maximos and Tsaldaris, set out in a letter to the American President the expected plight of the country after the British withdrawal. At the same time Britain was obliged to terminate the assistance it was giving to Turkey, the victim of continuous Soviet pressures throughout 1946. In notes to the western allies and Turkey the Soviet Union demanded a new regime of the Straits to which only Black Sea Powers would be parties; it also argued that responsibility for defence of the Straits should not be Turkey's alone, as under the existing Montreux Convention of 1936 on the Straits, but should be shared with Russia. Britain was fully behind Ankara in its refusal to entertain either demand, although Bevin was agreeable to a conference for revising the now out-of-date Montreux Convention.<sup>1</sup> But with the British Government actively contracting their commitments there was a distinct possibility that Turkey, though economically strong, might find it impossible to withstand Soviet demands. V56:19/N73KN45

The answer came from the United States in a revolutionary message to Congress of President Truman on 12 March 1947. The so-called 'Truman Doctrine' which the message expressed differed from the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 in having no defined geographical application. In language which was criticised for its disturbing vagueness it described United States policy as one of support for

<sup>1</sup> 427 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1495 (22 October 1946).

'free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities and by outside pressure'. Although the President asked for a specific sum, \$400 million, for a year's assistance to Greece and Turkey, together with the despatch of civil and military officials to advise on the use of the funds, he ended the message by saying that he would not hesitate to come before Congress again for help if required.<sup>1</sup> It was clearly intended that the Doctrine should not necessarily be restricted to the two states whose appeals had evoked it. It was in fact largely to limit this implication, as well as to amalgamate a number of separate requests for help, that the Marshall offer was put forward in June. For Britain, however, the significance of the Truman Doctrine lay in the fact that it represented, in the clearest possible manner, the abandonment of historic commitments on the southern fringe of Europe. It remained to be seen whether these commitments could be resumed after the economic crisis had passed.

In a sharp dispute between the Soviet Union and Iran which assumed critical proportions during 1946, thus forming a further example of Russia's pressure across her southern borders, it was again the United States which took the lead in upholding Iran's right to be heard at the Security Council and in resisting Soviet designs on the country's northern provinces. This was all the more striking in that the United States had had no share in the treaty signed in 1942 by which Iran consented to an Anglo-Russian military occupation as a wartime measure. At the Council of Foreign Ministers in London in September 1945 Molotov had given an undertaking that Soviet forces would be withdrawn from northern Iran by the following 2 March. The first threat to this undertaking came in November, when the Iranian province under Soviet occupation, Azerbaijan, proclaimed its autonomy at the instance of the left-wing Democratic Party and Russia refused to allow two battalions sent by the Government in Teheran to enter the province to restore their authority. When the four Foreign Ministers met in Moscow in December Bevin proposed the despatch of a commission representing the four Powers to report on the facts. Molotov dissented.<sup>2</sup> Iran therefore decided to take the case to the newly formed United Nations Security Council.

There then intervened one of the twists of Persian politics by which the country traditionally accommodated itself to pressures from the great Powers. A new regime came to power, led by the pro-Soviet Ahmad Ghavam es Saltaneh, and agreed to suspend the appeal to world opinion pending direct negotiations with Moscow. The Soviet

<sup>1</sup> Department of State, *Bulletin*, 23 March 1947, pp. 534-7.

<sup>2</sup> James Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, London, Heinemann, 1947, pp. 120-1.

Government, thinking they had the situation in hand, formulated their demands; they included the right to keep troops in Iran *sine die*, the recognition by Iran of an autonomous Azerbaijan and a Soviet share in the northern oilfields of Iran. Not even the pliant Iranian Premier could satisfy such demands and 2 March came and went without the withdrawal of Soviet forces. The only outcome of the Soviet-Iranian talks was a powerful movement of opinion in the United States towards Iran's side. Despite Russian efforts to prevent the Security Council from discussing the question, including a decision, at that time sufficiently novel to be alarming, by the Soviet representative, Gromyko, to boycott the Council's meeting, the Council continued its hearings, largely owing to the calm insistence of the American Secretary of State, James Byrnes. On 24 March an agreement was reached between Moscow and the Iranian Government by which Soviet troops were to withdraw within six weeks, provided the autonomy of Azerbaijan was recognised and the joint Soviet-Iranian companies to exploit the northern oil wells agreed to. Accordingly, the Soviet military evacuation was completed on 9 May and on 21 May the Iranian Government informed the Security Council that Soviet troops had left the country. It testified to the difficulties faced even by a great Power in forcing a Middle Eastern country to dance to its own tune that, by the end of the year, the Soviet-sponsored regime in Azerbaijan had fallen and the future of the joint oil companies was in doubt. The incident showed that Iran was one of the points where Soviet pressure could be contained, given firmness. It also showed that at Iran's side stood a United States which had so completely inherited Britain's role of policing the southern margins of Russia that, whereas at the beginning of the crisis American opinion tended to regard Iran as under almost equal threat from Britain as from Russia, by May 1946 it was loudly applauding Byrnes for his defence of Iran against its northern neighbour.

At the furthest remove from Europe the United States established at an early stage its primacy in the occupation of Japan. The American administration's Initial Post-Surrender Policy statement of 6 September 1945 provided that, in the event of differences between the allies over policy in Japan, 'the policy of the United States shall govern'. The instrument of this policy, the Olympian General MacArthur, had already embarked upon reforming Japanese life and purging the militarist elements before Washington seriously took up the question of consultation with the allies. Britain joined Russia in voicing resentment at this attitude, especially when Secretary of State Byrnes refused to create an allied control council in Tokyo during the Foreign Ministers' meeting in London

in October 1945.<sup>1</sup> Particular indignation came from Australia, with its bitter recollections of the war against Japan; the Australian Prime Minister, Dr Evatt, acidly reflected on what he called American preferences for theoretical rather than practical international co-operation. In deference to such criticisms Byrnes relented at the Foreign Ministers' conference in Washington in December and consented to an eleven-Power Far Eastern Commission to sit in that city, on which Britain and Russia would be represented, and a Four-Power Control Council to sit in Tokyo, representing the United States, the British Commonwealth, China and the Soviet Union. The Commission was supposed to formulate general principles for the Occupation and review directives issued to the Supreme Commander by his own government, while the Council was authorised to consult with him on the fulfilment of these directives. On basic issues, such as that of the new Japanese constitution, General MacArthur was required to delay his orders, if the Council insisted, until the Far Eastern Commission had given its decision on differences between the General and the Council.<sup>2</sup> In addition, token Commonwealth forces were to take their place in the hitherto wholly American machinery of Occupation.

This machinery of inter-Allied consultation was for all material purposes without effect. The Occupation remained, as it had begun, an American affair. The British Commonwealth representative on the Control Council in Tokyo, Professor MacMahon Ball, an Australian, untiringly wrestled with his United States colleague, Ambassador George Atcheson, jr., objecting not so much to the Supreme Commander's policy as to his patent contempt for the consultative machinery. In reply General MacArthur had his spokesman on the Council say that all major directives to Japan had been issued by January 1946, before the Council met, and that therefore the duties of the Council were superfluous.<sup>3</sup> The United States thus appeared to be adopting in Japan the same principle Britain followed in the ex-Italian colonies in Africa, namely that conquest confers the right to determine the future of the conquered. But Washington also realised that to introduce genuine quadripartite control into Japan meant to open the door to the same failure in international co-operation which was taking place in Germany. Japan itself was not the question; the situation in Japan was merely a function of the state of Russo-American relations.

<sup>1</sup> Byrnes, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> W. MacMahon Ball, *Japan, Enemy or Ally?* London, Cassell, 1948, pp. 27-9.

<sup>3</sup> W. MacMahon Ball, *op. cit.*

*The camps take shape*

In explaining the British Government's approach to the problems of these stressful years Ernest Bevin was never at loss for the misty generality. He abjured 'power politics, spheres of influence and all that kind of approach to world affairs'. He pleaded with other countries to 'put their cards on the table face upwards', in the massive confidence that no aces would be found up Britain's sleeve.<sup>1</sup> He was willing to join with anybody to form a world federation, but said we must be sensible and look upon the United Nations as the 'prelude to further development'.<sup>2</sup> These open-handed gestures were no doubt intended for the benefit of the Labour Party's rank-and-file, disturbed to see their own Minister treading the paths of traditional diplomacy. But Bevin was himself disposed to live on two planes, that of guileless sonority—as though the world would be all sweetness and light if only foreign statesmen were as sincere as himself—and the plane of tough defence of British interests. As for the latter, there were few tricks which the Foreign Secretary missed during these years. British insolvency made itself felt at every point in the hand he could play. Nevertheless the Government continued their efforts to keep the lines open to Russia, refusing to accept the inference from post-war dealings with Moscow that the world was irremediably split.

In December 1945 Bevin saw Marshal Stalin in Moscow and proposed an extension of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty of May 1942 from twenty to fifty years. 'I had at the back of mind,' he said, 'the creation of some permanent link between the two countries which would avoid misunderstanding.'<sup>3</sup> It was not, however, until 29 March 1947 that talks actually began in Moscow between the British Ambassador and Vyshinsky and then only to peter out in May. In June 1946 the Prime Minister was firmly rejecting the notion of crystallised blocs, with Britain's position frozen in the Western bloc. 'We do not want in any way,' Attlee said, 'to get an exclusive friendship . . . I say that it would be a fatal thing to accentuate, in any way, this line of division between east and west Europe, because we have to try to get across the barrier and get a real understanding . . . we have equally to try to understand the Russian mind and Russian history to understand why they take the line they do.'<sup>4</sup> For the United States, still mentally remote from European affairs, the idea of a divided world might seem little more than an

<sup>1</sup> 415 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1337 (7 November 1945).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 416 Col. 786 (23 November 1945).

<sup>3</sup> 423 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1828 (4 June 1946).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 423 Cols. 2037-8 (5 June).

extension of the frontiers of American isolation. For Britain, whose policy had since 1918 been that of reconciliation between the Powers, division could only be the conclusion of despair. The facts which rendered the acceptance of division unavoidable, as stated by Churchill, were bleak: 'it is better to have a world united than a world divided, but it is better to have a world divided than a world destroyed'. What the Marshall plan, the Truman Doctrine and the fusion of the two western zones of Germany had done was to pose the question whether the 'all-inclusive friendship' was at all feasible. The descent into doubt was swift.

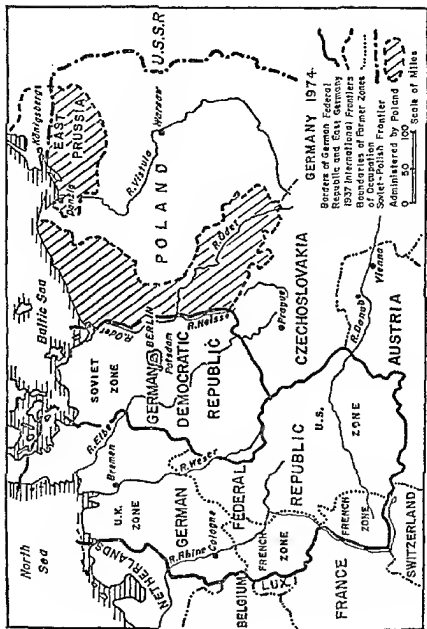


one of determining how they would rule Germany together. The machinery through which this joint government was to function was the military occupation of the country. There had been a military occupation in Germany after 1919. But then it was partial, being confined to the west bank of the Rhine and the main bridge-heads of the river; it was limited to fifteen years, was reduced by five-year periods and its purpose was to ensure that the terms of the treaty were carried out. In 1945 the occupation covered the whole country, was unlimited in time and was meant, not to force a German government to do the Allies' will, but to provide a framework in which the Allies could carry out their separate wills in German territory.

The machinery of Allied occupation was determined before agreement was reached, or seriously attempted, on any four-Power policy for governing Germany within the framework of the occupation. The only notable effort to frame a policy for post-war Germany was the so-called Morgenthau Plan, named after the then United States Secretary for the Treasury, which was provisionally adopted by the President and Mr Churchill at their Quebec meeting in September 1944.<sup>1</sup> This envisaged the extraordinary picture of a Germany reduced to a pastoralised state, with no power to maintain a modern standard of living, much less to make war. The plan was no sooner adopted than it was pigeon-holed. The Prime Minister said he had not had time to consider it in detail. The President remarked six weeks after initialling the plan that he disliked making plans for a country they did not yet occupy.<sup>2</sup> By contrast with this absence of agreement on policy, the occupation machinery was drawn up long before Hitler fell. At the Moscow meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the three Powers in October 1943 a European Advisory Commission had been created to consider, among other matters, the terms of surrender. The Commission was charged by the Teheran conference of the three heads of government in November-December 1943 to consider post-war policy in general towards Germany. This proved to be beyond the Commission's ability and the only important agreement it was able to reach, concluded in September 1944, defined the zones of occupation and provided for a Greater Berlin under joint inter-Allied control. Since Berlin lay some 80 to 100 miles within the projected Soviet occupation zone, provision had to be made for its division into three sectors. In each of these the Commander-in-Chief of one of the occupying Powers would be

<sup>1</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. VI, London, Cassell, 1954, pp. 138-9.

<sup>2</sup> Robert E. Sherwood, *The White House Papers of Harry L. Hopkins*, Vol. II, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1949, p. 810.



the ultimate authority, while a four-Power body, with the Russian name of Kommandatura, consisting of officers appointed by the Commanders-in-Chief, would decide matters affecting Berlin as a whole.

After the liberation of Paris in August 1944 the agreement was modified to make room for French participation; later France was given a sector of her own in Berlin. In May 1945 the four Governments issued a statement summarising the control agreements. This said that

'... supreme authority in Germany will be exercised on instructions from their Governments by the British, United States, Soviet and French Commanders-in-Chief, each in his own zone of occupation, and also jointly in matters affecting Germany as a whole. The four Commanders-in-Chief will together constitute the Control Council. 2. The Control Council, whose decisions shall be unanimous, will ensure approximate uniformity of action by the Commanders-in-Chief in their respective zones of occupation and will reach agreed decisions on the chief questions affecting Germany as a whole.'<sup>1</sup>

This control machinery was reaffirmed at the Potsdam conference in August 1945.<sup>2</sup>

The zones of occupation of Germany were therefore drawn up in anticipation of the ceasefire. They by no means reflected the extent of penetration into Germany from east and west since Anglo-American forces had to retire considerable distances to the agreed occupation boundaries after the surrender. Churchill once said that this retirement was in some places up to 150 miles on a 500-mile front.<sup>3</sup> The effect was to leave Russia with the former German capital deep within its zone; it spared no effort to convince the zone's inhabitants that it considered Berlin as its own prize. On 3 July when British and American forces were at length allowed to enter the city, they were met by the people of Berlin with the words 'Why did you not come sooner? The Russians kept telling us to take no notice of you since you are only here as guests.'<sup>4</sup>

The zones of occupation differed from one another almost as much as the policies the Powers pursued within them. The most

<sup>1</sup> Germany No. 1 (1945), Cmd. 6648.

<sup>2</sup> Miscellaneous No. 6 (1947), Cmd. 7087. See above, Chapter 1, pp. 29-30.

<sup>3</sup> In a speech in the House of Commons on 30 June 1948; 452 H.C. Deb. 5s Col. 2228.

<sup>4</sup> *The World Today*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, August 1948, p. 322.

highly industrialised was the British zone, including as it did the coal and steel centre of the Ruhr. It consisted of some 36,900 square miles with a population of almost 19 million. The territory formed that part of north-west Germany which had been brought under Prussian control, largely through British influence, at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. It extended from Lübeck on the Baltic to the Dutch and Belgian frontiers in the west and reached as far as Bonn on the Rhine in the south. The American zone was slightly larger than the British area but contained a million fewer Germans. Its main components were Bavaria and west central Germany though there was a small enclave of American-occupied territory round Bremen in the British zone. The zone as a whole had a much more balanced economy than that entrusted to Britain and might almost have subsisted as a separate state.

By comparison with the British and American areas, the French zone, having been formed out of the two western zones, was small, being only 21,000 square miles in area and having a population of less than seven million. It comprised two separate triangular areas: Baden and western Württemberg in the south-west and the Saar and the middle Rhineland in the west. The comparative smallness of the French zone, however, did not mean that the French voice in Allied policy on German questions was insignificant. General de Gaulle and his successors saw to that. Coming finally to the Soviet zone, this was more compact and more economically diversified than any of the three western zones. It lay broadly between the Elbe in the west and the Oder and western Neisse in the east (German territory beyond these two rivers having been placed under Polish administration at Potsdam), with a south-western corner reaching to the Weser beyond Erfurt and Weimar. With most of eastern Mecklenburg, western Pomerania and the Mark of Brandenburg included in it, the Soviet zone disposed of rich farming country while possessing the industrial wealth of Saxony, Anhalt and Thuringia. In population (16½ million) and area (41,300 square miles) it was somewhat smaller than the American zone.

In the absence of any agreed specific principles, the occupation policies of the Powers tended to follow separate lines dictated by their own national needs, their traditional attitudes to the German problem and such larger ideological tenets as they had. Britain, having few clear preconceptions, soon went in for reconstructing the political and economic life of its zone with little in the way of a distinct idea of the kind of Germany it wished to see emerging. In practice the distaste of British administrators for the deliberate wrecking of machinery and the agencies of orderly living disposed them to get the wheels running again, industry working, houses

built, schools and hospitals repaired and staffed. Nearest to the British in their methods were the Americans. They placed much greater emphasis on purging German politics (which they did with almost Germanic system) and teaching the ordinary German the ABC of western-type democracy; they did not share British indifference towards the imputed evils of German industrial combines; they suspected any attempt to favour progressive or Left-wing elements on the assumption that these were the natural antidotes to Nazism. Much of this American didacticism soon gave way, however, before the natural friendliness of the American soldier and the belief of the American administrator that the common man, left to himself, strikes out in the right way in the end.<sup>1</sup>

While British and American occupation policies assumed a minimum interference in German life and the creation of a peaceful and democratic Germany on roughly the same lines as before 1933, both France and Russia aimed at fundamental inroads into the shape and spirit of Germany. France was determined to bring the Saar into her own territory, an object she had pursued without success in 1919. In May 1947, when elections were held in the French zone, tacit assent was given by voters in the Saar to its economic annexation to France and the first step was taken forthwith by France by the establishment of a customs barrier between the Saar and the rest of the French zone. During 1946 France was also intensely active on behalf of the separation of the entire Rhineland from Germany and some form of internationalisation of the Ruhr.<sup>2</sup> It was, moreover, entirely in accord with France's traditional dread of German militarism and her sense of cultural mission that her social and educational policy should have aimed at stamping on the German mind her own faith and principles. With equally clear, though different, ideals to serve, the Soviet authorities left no doubt that they proposed to interpret political freedom for Germans as excluding elements hostile to their own creed. Almost from the inception of the occupation there occurred a Sovietisation of almost every aspect of life in the Russian zone. This culminated in the involuntary fusion of the Social Democrats with the Communists to form the Socialist Unity Party in April 1946. In elections held in October 1946 the Party won majorities, though not all absolute ones, in all the provinces of the Soviet zone. In Berlin, however, it suffered a miserable defeat.

<sup>1</sup> US Department of State, *Germany 1947-49*, Washington, US Government Printing Office, 1950, p. 22 ff., giving the text of the basic US occupation policy directive, J.C.S. 1067.

<sup>2</sup> France, Government, *Documents français relatifs à l'Allemagne*, Paris, 1947, p. 24.

This policy was accompanied, as in the French zone, by indifference as to how much of Germany was amputated in the process. East Prussia had been divided at Potsdam into a northern and southern area, the former to be administered by Russia and the latter by Poland. As far as Russia was concerned, the rich industrial area of Germany east of the Oder-Neisse line had been permanently absorbed into Poland at the Potsdam conference.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, while French and Soviet policies thus agreed in the emphasis they laid on indoctrination and control, the question of German unity sharply divided them. France was the strongest opponent of the formation of a central German Government among all four Powers. Russia, at least in the early years of four-Power control, was the leading advocate of centralisation.

#### *Economic disunity and the British zone*

Although it had been expected that the major difference between the Western Powers and Russia in Germany would concern the nature of the political forces to be encouraged there, it was in fact economic issues which presented the first threat to four-Power unity and eventually forced East and West to go their separate ways in Germany. In these issues it was the British Government which at first played the leading role, largely owing to the industrial character of the zone in Germany which had fallen to them. For the latter part of 1945 and during the whole of 1946 the zone constituted a drain, and a heavy drain, on British resources which, as we have already seen, were insufficient to provide a tolerable standard of living for the British people at home. The 19 million Germans in the British zone, swollen by considerable proportions of the German population which had been expelled from territories now incorporated into Poland or Czechoslovakia or had fled from Soviet rule, were a dead weight of dependence. They were unable to provide fully for themselves, either because of their exhausted state at the end of the war or because of the lack of food, clothing, housing and fuel to serve as work incentives or because of the destruction of industrial plant, permanent way and other capital equipment. Even before the war the British zone had produced only slightly more than half its food supplies. The excess food required in the conditions of 1945 could not, however, be purchased from abroad by the sale of exports from the zone. In the first place the inter-Allied Level of Industry agreement of 28 March 1946, based on an estimate of what was required to keep German living standards below those of her neighbours, placed formidable restrictions on industrial out-

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter I, p. 29.

put.<sup>1</sup> In the British zone in 1946 actual industrial production fell far below even the Level of Industry standards owing to shortages of food, accommodation and fuel; the zone produced only 10 per cent of pre-war output. Secondly, the demands for reparations from capital equipment and current production stripped the economic sinews of the zone bare. During 1946 a fifth of the meagre supply of Ruhr coal went to France as reparations and, from the moment of the assumption of British responsibilities in Germany, plant and machinery, by the Potsdam agreement, had to be torn up and shipped to Russia, in all amounting to a quarter of the zone's industrial equipment not deemed to be necessary to Germany's peacetime economy. This Luddite practice was continued until October 1946.

The total effects of these handicaps to the recovery of the British zone were that the zone, so far from making any contribution to the hard-pressed economy of western Europe, was a heavy liability to Britain, which, unlike the other three Powers, had borne the strain of war from beginning to end. During 1946 and 1947, in the midst of the dollar crisis described in the previous chapter, Britain was contributing some £100 million, mostly for supplies of food, to the zone; one-third of this had to be paid for in dollars. There was a small compensation for this in the form of proceeds from exports from the zone, stocks of goods purchased by Britain from German agencies and the acquisition by British manufacturers of German patents and industrial designs.<sup>2</sup>

The British Government argued that this had come about because the Soviet Union, while continuing to demand plant from the western zones under the heading of reparations, had sealed off her own zone from the west, thus preventing the western industrial areas from meeting their food needs in the east. They referred to the principles laid down in the Potsdam agreement to govern the treatment of Germany in the initial control period. In Article 14 of that section of the agreement it was determined that during the occupation 'Germany shall be treated as a single economic unit. To this end common economic policies shall be established in regard to . . . import and export programmes for Germany as a whole'. In the following article it was laid down that 'Allied economic controls should be imposed . . . to ensure in the manner determined by the Control Council the equitable distribution of essential commodities between the several zones so as to produce a balanced economy throughout Germany and reduce the need for imports.'

<sup>1</sup> The text of the agreement is found in US Department of State, *US Economic Policy Towards Germany*, Washington, 1948, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Eighth Report from the Select Committee on Estimates, Session 1946-47. *British Expenditure in Germany*.

But the article chiefly appealed to by Britain in the argument with Russia came at the end of the section of the Potsdam agreement dealing with the initial control period. This said that:

'Payment of reparations should leave enough resources to enable the German people to subsist without external assistance. In working out the economic balance of Germany the necessary means must be provided to pay for imports approved by the Control Council in Germany. The proceeds of exports from current production and stocks shall be available in the first place for payment for such imports.'<sup>1</sup>

So long as these principles were not applied British subsidies to West Germany were compared to the hard-earned food supplied by a farmer to his cow while somebody else milked it at the other end.

During this phase of the argument the Russians did little good to their case by refusing to give the economic statistics relating to their zone and by failing to state exactly what their difficulties were; nor were they ever able to give the western governments the reasons for their German policy. This policy nevertheless had its rational basis. The Russian standard of living was in 1945, and always had been, much lower than that to which Germany and western Europe had been accustomed. The Soviet authorities saw no reason why they should help Germany return to living standards higher than those their own people enjoyed when they had been the victims of German aggression. Moreover, it did not take the Russians long to realise that there was little sense in dismantling plants in Germany and transferring them to Russia to repair the ravages of war; it was far better to set up joint Soviet-German concerns to run the plants in the Soviet zone and draw off the goods as they were produced. This output was needed, not merely to make good war damage, but to supply the consumer's empty shelves and give at long last the promise of better days to come. A loan from the United States for this purpose might at one time have been thought possible, but in the opinion of the Soviet authorities this could never have been arranged except on terms incompatible with Russia's sovereignty. However, since any explanation on these lines would have placed a strain on Soviet national pride it was not given. In its place went abuse of the West and charges against Britain and the United States of breaking 'the historic decisions of Potsdam'.

#### *The Moscow and London conferences*

Throughout 1947 attempts were made to secure four-Power agreement on the German question through the Council of Foreign

<sup>1</sup> Miscellaneous No. 6 (1947). Cmd. 7087, p. 7.



Ministers created at Potsdam. In the course of these negotiations the British Government clarified the stand they were taking in a series of statements. On 5 June, for instance, the Prime Minister, Mr Attlee, said in the House of Commons:

'We desire that Germany should be treated as an economic whole. We have been placed in a terribly difficult position . . . in having an area which was always a deficit area from the point of view of food and, as I see it, in changing what were intended merely to be lines of occupation into rigid divisions of Germany into zones with separate systems of administration. Our endeavour is that Germany should be treated as an economic whole.'

As for the political future of Germany, the Government adopted a federal approach, 'to get rid of that uniformity and over-centralisation which characterised not only the Nazis but also the preceding regime'.<sup>1</sup>

The trouble about the Potsdam agreement, Mr Bevin said in a speech in the House in October, was that only parts of it which were unfavourable to Britain were being carried out. The basic principle of the agreement that Germany should be treated as an economic unit was being evaded so long as Russia's demand for reparations from current production continued. 'There must be no reparations from current production', Bevin said, 'so long as there is a balance of payments deficit in any one zone.' He said he had made clear at the Foreign Ministers' talks in July that Britain could not carry on paying large sums to keep economic life in its zone going; the zone must be put on a sound economic basis so as to prevent the cost falling on the British taxpayer. Hence the favourable British reaction to the American offer, made at the Foreign Ministers' meeting in New York the previous December, to fuse the American zone with the British and thus implement at least part of the Potsdam requirement of German economic unity.<sup>2</sup> But if the eastern and western zones were to remain as watertight compartments, the Level of Industry agreement was called into question. The Armistice and Post-war Committee set up by the British wartime Government had proposed a level of industrial production for Germany based on an annual steel production of 11 million tons. The interim four-Power agreement of March 1946 had laid down the unduly low level of seven and a half million tons. 'We agree, if Germany was treated

<sup>1</sup> 423 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 2036. The British Government did not take this view of the Weimar regime in the 1920s. Mr Lloyd George, for instance, often argued that the German government's authority over such provinces as Bavaria must not be weakened even further by excessive Allied demands.

<sup>2</sup> See above, Chapter 2, pp. 60-1.

as an economic unit,' Bevin said. 'As this had not been done we have the right to revise the plan.' Germany must become self-supporting as soon as possible, while production of war materials in the broadest sense must be absolutely prohibited. Then, when he came to deal with Germany's territorial future, Mr Bevin explained that the Government opposed the French proposal for separating the Rhineland and the Ruhr from Germany, though they approved the incorporation of the Saar in France. They also refused to recognise the cession to Poland of German territory beyond the Oder-Neisse line without some guarantee that free elections in Poland had been carried out.<sup>1</sup>

When the Council of Foreign Ministers met in Moscow on 10 March 1947 to consider the German question it was apparent that Russia and the West were fundamentally divided. The Foreign Ministers' deputies had been meeting in London in January and February to try to clear the ground for the preparation of a peace treaty with Germany, but had been able to do little more than discuss how far other states than the four should share in the negotiations, on which they heard the views of some of the smaller countries. In these hearings it became clear that the minor Western Powers shared the British and American preference for a federal German constitution, while the east European states followed the Soviet view that Germany should be centralised. Moreover, the British-United States agreement to fuse their zones had come into effect on 1 January and there was enough experience of the difficulties of even this operation to cast doubt on the feasibility of treating the four widely different zones on uniform lines, as Britain wished. Above all, the tension in East-West relations had now grown to a point at which the greater part of the Moscow conference was spent in angry recriminations thrown across the table in the full glare of publicity. Of those intimate exchanges which are supposed to oil the diplomatic wheels there was none. Bevin had only one talk with Premier Stalin during a conference lasting from 10 March until 24 April, and his Western colleagues, Mr Marshall and M. Bidault, had no more.

The basic conflict lay between the Soviet determination to derive the maximum profit from current production in the eastern zone and the Western demand that East Germany should help meet the deficit in the west, while West German production should be allowed to rise in order to lift the burden on the Western Powers. Britain and the United States could not accept Molotov's insistence that the Yalta agreement to refer Russia's claim for \$10,000 million in reparations to the Reparation Commission as a basis for discussion

<sup>1</sup> 427 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols. 1513-7 (22 October 1946).

constituted an endorsement of that figure on their part. Nor could they discuss the reparation question as a whole unless Russia gave an account of what she had already taken from her zone, and this she refused to do. The effect of Russia's attitude was to nullify the second, and most important, of Bevin's 'supplementary principles to govern the treatment of Germany' which he submitted to the Council as a memorandum on 31 March. The aim of this principle was:

'To establish economic conditions which will enable Germany to become self-supporting and to repay the expenditure incurred on its behalf by the occupying Powers; which will enable it to make good the damage done by the war; and will further enable Germans and the world outside Germany to benefit from German industry and resources without re-establishing the economic foundations of an aggressive policy.'<sup>1</sup>

The failure to agree on the economic issues was repeated in the discussions on Germany's political future. Apart from a decision to accept the Control Council's recommendation that the state of Prussia should be abolished (its territory had already been dismembered) the Soviet policy of a centralised Germany and the British and American wish for a federal solution remained in conflict. Bevin sought to mediate between the Soviet extreme of centralisation and the French extreme of separatism by a proposal that federal powers be listed in the future German constitution while residual powers were left to the Länder, or provinces. But this proved fruitless.

Nor was progress possible at Moscow on issues peripheral to the main theme of Germany. Molotov attached unacceptable conditions to any Soviet agreement to the four-Power European Security treaty to last twenty-five years, on which Byrnes, the American Secretary of State, had set such hopes. He wanted it made conditional, for instance, on western consent to the \$10,000 million Soviet reparation claim.<sup>2</sup> Although Bevin told the Commons on 15 May that there was still a prospect for the treaty, American hopes of a general European settlement had received a setback. Nor was progress possible at Moscow on a peace treaty with Austria, which Bevin considered to be a minor issue capable of being despatched in a few weeks. The stumbling block was the definition of German assets in Austria which it was agreed at Potsdam should be appropriated as reparations; those in western Austria were to fall to the Western

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 7534, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> James F. Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, pp. 173-6.

Powers and those in the eastern part of the country to Russia. Since Russia was permitted to retain troops in Bulgaria and Rumania in order to safeguard communications with its occupation forces in Austria, it was suspected that what Russia was really seeking through raising difficulties over Austria was the consolidation of its grip on those countries.

There were two further stages in the widening gulf between East and West Germany before the four Foreign Ministers met again, this time in London in December 1947. In May, shortly after the breakdown of the Moscow conference, Britain and the United States created a central economic administration at Frankfurt in the American zone. The object of this was partly to increase the efficiency of the bizonal economic organisation and partly to draw the Germans into the ordering of their own affairs on Bevin's principle that they must increasingly look to themselves for their own recovery. The Economic Council created by this decision was formed from Germans nominated by the various political parties represented in the elected Land Diets. At the same time an Executive Committee composed of heads of the Land governments was created to look after the interests of the Länder and to supervise the German executive departments. As the Foreign Secretary explained in the Commons in January 1948, the Economic Council was regarded as an interim expedient pending the formation of a West German government should agreement with Russia on Germany prove unattainable.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless this step marked a decisive move towards a separate political destiny for Germany west of the Elbe. The British and American military governors in Germany in announcing the decision repeated the invitation to other occupying Powers to join them which had been issued when the bizonal zone was formed; but it was evident that this had become little more than a gesture to four-Power co-operation.

An additional circumstance adversely affecting four-Power relations on Germany was the offer of Marshall Aid in June 1947. The fact that, with the failure of Russia and eastern Europe to participate in the European recovery programme, economic rehabilitation in western Europe was now launched, not merely without the Communists but in the teeth of declared Communist hostility, could not but deepen the void in Germany. The western zones of Germany were not originally included among the countries qualifying for Marshall Aid by the Committee for European Economic Co-operation, but in a statement accompanying the Committee's first report the countries which had been at war with Germany adopted in effect what had now become the Anglo-American view

<sup>1</sup> 446 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 404 (22 January 1948).

on the German question. While avoiding the issues in dispute with Russia, the report said that

'... If European co-operation is to be effective the German economy must be fitted into the European economy so that it may contribute to a general improvement in the standard of living. In particular, the output of the Ruhr coalfield . . . must contribute to the rehabilitation and economic stability of the whole of Europe, including Germany herself. An increased production and export of Ruhr coal is in fact essential for European recovery. . . . The machinery, raw materials, food and other supplies which are required to increase Ruhr coal production deserve high priority in any programme of imports either into Germany or into Europe as a whole.'<sup>1</sup>

These statements in the report, issued in September 1947, plainly anticipated the absorption of the three western zones into the Marshall programme as soon as the final break with Russia had come.

That event occurred after meetings of the Council of Foreign Ministers at Lancaster House, London, which lasted from 25 November to 15 December 1947. Here was witnessed a repeat performance of the Moscow fiasco, the atmosphere of suspicion and the propaganda accompaniment remaining unchanged. The Ministers did succeed in adopting an agenda, which was by no means always the case in discussions with Russia, but they got no further than the third item. The first item, the Austrian treaty, which Britain wished to dispose of before coming to Germany, was in fact dealt with after the failure on Germany had become apparent; it foundered on the same disagreement on the definition of German assets as had blocked progress at Moscow in the spring. No greater success was registered with the second item, 'preparation of the German peace treaty (frontiers and procedure)'. Molotov withheld consent from a British proposal to create a commission to examine the question of Germany's frontiers on the ground that it implied reopening the issue of the Oder-Neisse line assigned to Poland. He could not see eye to eye with the West on the character and time of formation of a central German government. Russia adhered to her view that authority must be handed to a central government before economic principles for Germany had been settled, and that the Government must be unitary, not federal. Britain and the United States wished to settle the economic issues first and were determined, as at Moscow, that the federal pattern must be followed in any

<sup>1</sup> Committee of European Economic Co-operation, July-September 1947, Vol. I, General Report, HMSO, 1947, p. 39.

future German regime. It was, however, on the third item, economic principles, that the London conference met with its most abject, though unsurprising, failure. All four Ministers accepted the general principles of economic unity in Germany and the abolition of zonal barriers, but the breach on their application was such that the principles were no more than words. Russia remained insistent that East Germany must serve exclusively the needs of her own shattered economy and returned to the demand for \$10,000 million reparations as a first charge on Germany's current production. The two Western Powers were no less adamant that they would not shoulder the burden of their occupation zones while Germany's productive capacity was not allowed to meet the bill for food and raw materials imported from the outside world. After an icy prepared statement had been read by Molotov the United States Secretary of State, George Marshall, proposed the adjournment of the Council. It was not to meet again for eighteen months.<sup>1</sup>

Behind these different national interests of Russia and the West in Germany there loomed, as the preliminary talks on the Marshall plan had shown, the much larger antagonisms of East and West in Europe, with Germany as the glittering prize. Each side feared, and with reason, the precipitation of a chain of events in Germany which might bring the whole of that fateful country into the other camp. This fear was particularly evident on the Ruhr question. Britain wished to resuscitate the Ruhr either under some form of international control or on a basis of public ownership, thus ensuring (so it was believed) its exploitation for peaceful purposes only. But Britain thought it intolerable to have to listen to repeated Soviet demands for a share in the administration of the Ruhr when Germany's other great industrial centre, Silesia, was under exclusive Communist control.<sup>2</sup> The Soviet Union, on its side, given its belief in the built-in aggressiveness of the capitalist world, looked with dread on the addition of the Ruhr to the existing resources of Britain and the United States.

### *The parting of the ways*

In the following January, while talks were proceeding in the Western capitals on the conclusions to be drawn from the Moscow and London failures, Mr Bevin was decisive in saying that 'we have to face a new situation . . . all these developments . . . point to the conclusion that the free countries of western Europe must draw closely together'.<sup>3</sup> He admitted that he had resisted pressures,

<sup>1</sup> Lucius D. Clay, *Decision in Germany*, London, Heinemann, 1950, p. 348.

<sup>2</sup> Mr Bevin in the Commons: 452 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 2224 (30 June 1948).

<sup>3</sup> 446 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 395 (22 January 1948).

presumably from Washington, to create a German parliamentary instrument to control the Economic Council of the bi-zone but his insistence that the Germans could not expect others to solve their problems for them implied that before long they would have to govern themselves. 'I must say once again that if the German people are going to rely on us or act as if we are to feed them all the time, they must be suffering from a delusion. Germany must work and produce like other countries.'<sup>1</sup> These words foreshadowed the early creation of a separate West German government within a general scheme of European economic recovery and collective defence.

None of this was achieved, however, without immense difficulty. First, the growing burden of occupation, which Britain could no longer hope to lighten by four-Power agreement, necessitated further arrangements with Washington for dollar assistance. By an agreement signed with Britain on 17 December 1947 the American government assumed the whole of the dollar burden in the bi-zone, which had previously been on a fifty-fifty basis.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, it was evident throughout the series of discussions in London on the constitutional reform of West Germany during 1948 that the position of France would be hard if not impossible to reconcile with those of the Anglo-Saxon Powers. This was not merely owing to French touchiness with respect to her status in relation to the Powers which were largely responsible for her liberation in 1944. Eight years after 1940 were not long for the French to rid themselves of security fears with regard to Germany from which Britain and the United States, with their now largely symbolic detachment from the continent, were still predominantly free.

France's difficulties were fully revealed in the two series of conferences on Germany which were held at ambassadorial level in London from 23 February to 6 March 1948, and from 20 April to 1 June respectively. The Benelux countries were invited to join these talks, the principal subjects of which were the future of the Ruhr, German provincial boundaries and the calling of a constituent assembly to represent the western zones now that the political future of Germany as a united state was obscure. In the discussion on the Ruhr the French gained their point that an international authority should be created before a German constitution came into operation. The Americans would have preferred the Ruhr to remain under the control of the military governors. But the French demand that the Ruhr authority should own, and not merely control, the resources of the Ruhr was more successfully resisted by the United States, who

<sup>1</sup> 446 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 405.

<sup>2</sup> The text of the agreement was published in Cmd. 7301 of 1947.

also ensured that the Ruhr should not be separated from the rest of Germany, as the French wished, and that the Ruhr authority should represent all six Powers and Germany; this made it possible for France to be outvoted in the authority's decisions on the allocation of Ruhr products as between Germany and the Allies.

Nevertheless the swift movement towards the making of a West German state could not fail to cause alarm in France. In Britain the London agreements<sup>1</sup> were principally attacked by Labour MPs who deplored the lack of any provision for public ownership of the Ruhr industries. In France both Gaullists and communists united against them. General de Gaulle feared that the Ruhr authority would work against French interests and that rivalry would develop between the proposed West German state and any state which Russia might form out of its own occupation zone. The French communists had their own reasons for denouncing the agreements. On 20 March the Soviet representative, Marshal Sokolovsky, walked out of the Allied Control Council for Germany on the ground that the London talks of the Western Powers implicitly broke the agreement on which the Council was based. This was a signal to all European communists to anathematise the London agreements. But socialists in France were also fearful. Leon Blum and André Philip urged that further approaches should be made to Russia, which should be asked to hold free elections in its zone, before irrevocable steps were taken. In replying to these criticisms the Foreign Minister, M. Bidault, found little sympathy for his reminder that the Ruhr authority would continue after the end of occupation; that the Allies would retain key points in Germany after their occupation troops had left; and that there would be no Allied withdrawal without consultation. The final Assembly resolution approving the agreements was loaded with reservations. Many French politicians felt that their misgivings had been justified by November, when, on the eve of a three-Power conference on the Ruhr, Generals Clay and Robertson, the American and British commanders in Germany, promulgated laws for the reorganisation of the German coal and steel industries which provided for the ownership of the Ruhr mines to be vested for the time being in German trustees pending a decision on their future by a German government. It was suspected, though wrongly, that this news had taken the French government unawares.

French discontent, however, was not much greater than the resentment felt in West Germany when it was learned that the Ruhr would remain under foreign control even after the occupation had

<sup>1</sup> For the text of the London agreements see 'Memorandum on the Measures Agreed by the UK, US and French Foreign Ministers on the Programme for Germany'. Cmd. 7677 of 1949.



ended. Moreover, many West German politicians were unwilling to be a party to moves towards a separate West German state which might postpone indefinitely the hope of a united Germany. Consequently, the Minister-Presidents of the West German Länder governments, who had talks on the proposed constituent assembly with the three Western military governors during July, decided at a three-day conference of their own at Coblenz in early August not to proceed for the moment with the drafting of a definitive West German constitution. They preferred to create the somewhat more provisional instrument of a Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) for the administration of West Germany.<sup>1</sup> This task was entrusted to a Parliamentary Council, instead of the constituent assembly proposed by the Western Powers, which met at Bonn on 1 September on a basis of representation of the Land Diets. Before the Federal German Government envisaged in the Basic Law could be proclaimed at Bonn in May 1949 still further differences remained to be ironed out between the Christian Democrats (CDU) and the Social Democrats (SPD) on the constitutional issue. The former preferred a federal body and were supported by the United States and France, while the SPD preferred a more centralised regime and were believed to have the backing of Britain. Meanwhile the question of the status and authority to be retained by the Western Powers in the West German state required protracted inter-Allied discussions, in which France continued to hold out against going as fast or as far as her two partners in handing over self-government to the Germans.

These movements in West Germany had their parallels in the east, where the occupying Power, Russia, drew a similar conclusion to that of the Western Powers, namely that in the absence of four-Power agreement on all-German questions the consolidation of its own zone must go forwards. There were, however, certain differences between the processes of reorganisation in East and West Germany. In the east there were no apparent disagreements between allies to overcome at each stage. At a meeting in Warsaw on 23 and 24 June 1948 of eight Foreign and Defence Ministers from central and east Europe and Russia the well-known Soviet positions on four-Power control of the Ruhr, reparations and the 'historic decisions' of Potsdam were reaffirmed with seemingly little dissent from Russia's neighbours.<sup>2</sup> In the second place it was the Western Powers who set the pace towards the two Germanies after the failure of the Council of Foreign Ministers, while Stalin still appeared to hanker after four-Power agreement. Hence the Economic Council created at

<sup>1</sup> Clay, *op. cit.*, pp. 409-II.

<sup>2</sup> Declaration of Warsaw Conference of Foreign Ministers adopted on June 24, 1948 (London, *Soviet News*, 1948).

Frankfurt by Britain and the United States in May 1947 was followed shortly after by a Russian-sponsored German Economic Council representing five provincial governments, five German departments and two workers' organisations. The negotiations in the west for a German constituent assembly were likewise matched by the drafting of a constitution for a People's Republic in the east, which a People's Council for Unity and a Just Peace, dominated by the Socialist United Party (SED), considered in the summer of 1948. The constitution was approved in March 1949 and the German Democratic Republic based on this constitution came into being in October of that year.<sup>1</sup>

The third important difference between developments in East and West Germany was that the Soviet Union went to much greater lengths to appeal to an all-German opinion and to mobilise approval over the whole of Germany for the political structure it was creating in its own zone. The People's Council, for example, which was to approve the constitution for a German Democratic Republic, was established in March 1948 by a People's Congress which was reported to contain over 500 delegates from West Germany, as well as over 1,000 from the Soviet zone. Moreover, the 'plebiscite on questions of unity and a just peace', which the Congress resolved to hold from 23 May to 13 June 1948 was ostensibly an expression of all-German opinion. In the event the American and French authorities refused to allow voting to take place in their zone, while the British disapproved but allowed the voting. There was little doubt that this essay in democracy by acclamation was intended to demonstrate an attitude rather than test opinion. It did, however, show the Soviet Government's concern to reduce the prestige of the Western Powers over both parts of Germany, and not merely to consolidate their own zone. Britain, France and the United States, on the other hand, while announcing that nothing that they were doing precluded German reunification under four-Power sponsorship, had no alternative but to write off East Germany after the failure of the four Foreign Ministers in London in November-December 1947.

### *The Berlin blockade*

The most serious Soviet retort to the western reforms in Germany, however, was not to form an East German state but to attempt to prise the Western Powers out of Berlin. The basic fact in the Berlin crisis of 1948 was the anomalous situation of the former capital

<sup>1</sup> *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-54*, selected and edited by Beate Ruhm von Oppen, RHA, London, 1955, pp. 412-22.

some 100 miles deep within the Soviet zone. So long as hope existed that a central German government might be formed Russia had no interest in disturbing four-Power control in Berlin. When at the end of 1947 that hope had petered out and when Russia followed the West in shaping its zone into a separate state, it was of great moral importance to the future East German Republic to capture Berlin. As long as the western sectors of the city provided a model of free political life, nourished by substantial economic help from the West, Communist power in East Germany could never be wholly secure, nor could the pretension of East Germany to speak for all Germany be serious. The issue was complicated by the wish of all four occupying Powers to reform the currency in their zones; while the money in circulation inspired no confidence it was impossible to eliminate the black market and provide incentives to work. Currency reform was introduced into the western zones by decrees issued on 18, 21 and 27 June, after attempts to agree on a single currency for all Germany had failed. As General Robertson explained to the Soviet military governor, Marshal Sokolovsky, on 18 June, it was not intended, owing to the special position of Berlin, to introduce the new Deutsche Marks into the western sectors of the city.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the Soviet Union affected to believe that the economy of the eastern zone would be disturbed by the new currency system in the west. Hence, two days after Robertson's letter, the Soviet representative on the four-Power Committee of Financial and Economic Advisers in Berlin announced that there could be no currency in the city different from that of the surrounding zone. When the meeting was over the Soviet authorities made known a currency reform to cover Greater Berlin as well as their own zone in Germany. The Western Powers were not unwilling to accept the Ostmark of the eastern zone into their sectors of Berlin, provided that its emission and circulation were under quadripartite control.<sup>2</sup> As this was refused by Russia, the Western Powers forthwith introduced the new Mark into West Berlin over stamped with a 'B'

Russia's method of raising these questions was simply to interrupt communications with the western sectors of Berlin. It was able to do this since, from the moment Anglo-American troops first entered Berlin in July 1945 in fulfilment of the European Advisory Commission's agreement on the zoning of the city, the Soviet authorities instituted an inspection of transit documents. The Western Powers had unmistakable rights to get to and from Berlin; they had practically no documentary title to do so without their movements

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 7534, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> See Bevin's statement in the Commons on 30 June 1948; 452 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 2231.

being checked. As Bevin told MPs in April 1948, 'there is a clear four-Power agreement for the occupation of Berlin, of the validity of which there can be no doubt . . . the regulations for travel to and from Berlin are not so clearly specified. When the arrangements were made a good deal was taken on trust between the Allies.'<sup>1</sup>

The first interference with access to Berlin came on 6 January when Soviet inspectors boarded an American military train running between Frankfurt and Berlin and demanded to check papers carried by German passengers. British communications underwent the first restriction on 24 January, two days after Bevin's speech in the Commons on the uniting of the West; the Berlin to Bielefeld night train carrying British officials and 120 Germans was detained for eleven hours. From then onwards Soviet interference mounted until on 23 June all railroad passenger and freight traffic on the Berlin-Helmstedt line was suspended. Barge traffic was partially stopped until, on 10 July, with the Soviet announcement that the lock at Rathenow was under repair, all communications by water ceased. By that date the blockade of Berlin by road, rail and canal was complete. At first these restrictions were said to be due to technical difficulties. But this pretext was almost at once discarded. In their reply to a British note of 6 July protesting against these infringements of Allied rights (identical notes were sent by the French and United States Governments) the Soviet authorities made clear that their actions were intended as retorts to alleged Western contraventions of four-Power agreements on Germany, especially the Western currency reform.<sup>2</sup>

There now remained only one loophole through which contact with West Berlin could be carried on: the air. Although the Soviet authorities repeatedly complained that 'air discipline' over Berlin and in the air lanes to the city from West Germany was unsatisfactory, and on 5 April a Russian fighter collided in suspicious circumstances with a British passenger plane near Gatow airfield, no attempt was made to seal this passage to Berlin. To do so would have meant throwing down a challenge to the Western Powers which they could not escape taking up short of total surrender. The Russians no doubt believed that the two and a quarter million West Berliners could never be kept supplied by airlift alone when their coal and light had been cut off, and that the Western Powers would either be forced to abandon Berlin or would make some concession over the larger German issues.<sup>3</sup> That these Powers did neither was

<sup>1</sup> 449 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols. 34-5 (6 April 1948).

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 7534, Annex IIIA, pp. 50-2.

<sup>3</sup> Considerable doubt about the practicability of the airlift was also expressed in the British Press. See *Berlin Air Lift*, HMSO, 1949.

due to the remarkable success of the airlift operation. During the ten and a half months until the blockade was lifted on 12 May 1949 more than a million and a half tons of supplies were taken into the city in almost 200,000 flights by British and American planes. The British share of the effort was estimated at 40 per cent and the American 60 per cent.<sup>1</sup> It was the unforeseen success of the airlift, combined with the effects of the counter-blockade on the Soviet zone and the morale of the West Berliners, which ultimately provided the West with a diplomatic victory.

During talks on the situation in Moscow between the three Western representatives and Molotov and Vyshinsky, and in two discussions with Stalin, British policy, like that of the United States and France, was actuated by four main requirements. First, there could be no concession in the matter of Britain's right to a military position in Berlin. This right was denied by Stalin at his first meeting with Western delegates on 2 August. In the Soviet draft agreement presented by Molotov on 9 August reference was made to the 'present agreement' as the legal basis of communications with West Berlin. To accept any such formula would have been to nullify the wartime agreements on Berlin and accept the Soviet contention that the West was no longer in Berlin by right but only by Russia's leave. Molotov did not press the point, however, and in his revised draft of 16 August freedom of access to Berlin appeared to be absolute.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, Britain in common with her two Western partners, refused to abandon her position in relation to West Germany or go back on the London agreements of June. At the start of the discussions in Moscow, Molotov demanded that the formation of a West German government should not be proceeded with until further four-Power discussions on Germany or Berlin had taken place either at the Foreign Ministers' Council or elsewhere. This demand was withdrawn on Western insistence, but Stalin at a second meeting with Western representatives on 23 August asked that the communiqué on the talks should mention that the London agreements had been discussed in Moscow. The British Government refused to agree unless it was clearly stated that the West could not accept any deferment of the London decisions, which did not however exclude an eventual four-Power solution for Germany. As a result of forceful arguments by Frank Roberts, the British representative, Molotov agreed that the matter should not be pursued further until the four military governors in Berlin had carried out the directive for producing a currency agreement which was to be drafted in the Moscow talks.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bevin in the Commons, 22 September 1948; 456 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 903.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 7534, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

But it was on the two other requirements of Britain and her partners that breakdown came in talks between the four military governors in Berlin, which began on 31 August to work out a formula for lifting the restrictions based on the directive agreed to in Moscow on 30 August after such long and hard bargaining. In the first place the Western Powers insisted on the unequivocal removal of all restrictions on communications and transport. This seemed to have been secured in the agreement reached in Moscow on 30 August.<sup>1</sup> But, when the talks began in Berlin, Marshal Sokolovsky at first insisted that only restrictions imposed after 18 June, the date of the currency reform, were meant. At length he gave way on this point but continued to make the lifting of restrictions conditional on the acceptance of still further restrictions, this time on air traffic. The Western Powers read no such meaning into the understanding of 30 August. Marshal Sokolovsky then refused to accede to the fourth requirement of the Western Powers, namely that if the Soviet Mark was to be accepted as the currency for the whole of Berlin there must be adequate arrangements for quadripartite control of its issue and continued use.

Such interpretations were puzzling. They were, however, upheld by the Soviet Foreign Minister in his exchanges of notes and talks with the Western representatives in Moscow towards the end of September. It was evident that on the three points at issue, the raising of the restrictions, the control of the Soviet Mark in Berlin and the control of Berlin's trade, the Soviet military governor was merely echoing his master's voice. Either Stalin had now come to regret any concessions he had made in the shaping of the directive of 30 August or (and this was perhaps more likely) he was dragging out the negotiations in the hope that the onset of winter would make the airlift impossible. The Western Powers did not therefore wait for further talks. On 27 September they referred the dispute to the United Nations Security Council while reserving the right to take the necessary measures to maintain their position on Berlin. Meanwhile the blockade and airlift continued. The Council voted on 5 October by a 9 to 2 majority to consider the matter.<sup>2</sup> But since the western Powers and Russia formed four out of the eleven members of the Council and had got nowhere between themselves, all they could do was to listen to mediatory proposals from the neutral members of the Council. Under the leadership of Dr Bramuglia of Argentina, and later of M. van Langenhove of Belgium, these suggested first one formula then another without satisfying both sides in the dispute

<sup>1</sup> The text of the agreement, forming the directive to the military governors, is given as Annex VI to Cmd. 7534, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Security Council, Official Records, Third Year, No. 114, p. 21.

at the same time. Russia vetoed a resolution proposing that the blockade be lifted simultaneously with the resumption of talks on currency questions.<sup>1</sup> When the neutral members then sought a formula which included reference to further discussions on all-German questions, the Western Powers professed to see little point in going over the same ground again after such conclusive failure at the Foreign Ministers' Council.

By this time it had become clear to both sides that the blockade and counter-blockade were doing more harm than any good they did in the way of changing the mind of the other side. Russia had failed to starve out West Berlin; it had failed to impose its currency unilaterally on Berlin. The Western Powers on their side, seeing that they had argued that the building of a West German state did not preclude four-Power agreement on Germany, could hardly refuse Stalin's persistent wish to have the German question thrashed out again at the Council of Foreign Ministers. Whether Stalin still hoped for agreement on the German question or whether he wanted further use of the Council as a platform for Russia's voice in Germany, it was unnecessary to inquire. For the Western Powers, provided the currency question did not have to be settled in Russia's favour as a price for lifting the blockade, another round of Foreign Ministers' talks was not a bad exchange for an airlift which was costing Britain alone £6,000 a day. Hope appeared in Stalin's answers to an American journalist's questions on 27 January, when, amongst egregious replies to egregious inquiries as to Russia's desire for peace, the Premier said he was willing to lift the blockade, if the counter-blockade ended at the same time, provided the establishment of a West German government was postponed pending a further meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers. The remarkable thing about this statement was its complete silence about the currency question which had caused almost all the trouble.

Stalin having made a concession, the Western Powers had no difficulty in making one themselves, though not the one he asked for. After informal exchanges in March and April, representatives of the three Western Powers and Russia met in New York on 4 May and on the following day agreed that the blockade and counter-blockade would be lifted in the first minute of 12 May. This was conditional on an agreement that the four Foreign Ministers should meet in Paris on 23 May for another assault on German questions. Russia's abandonment of the blockade had been foreshadowed at the beginning of March by the replacement of Molotov at the Foreign Ministry by Vysbinsky and the substitution of General Chuikov for Marshal Sokolovsky as Soviet military governor in Berlin. But the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 120, 25 October 1948, pp. 5-9. M. Vyshinsky's statement.

truth of the matter was that both Russia and the West had suffered a defeat, though the former's was by far the greater; Russia had not forced its currency on West Berlin as a step towards controlling its life and the Western Powers had for the moment given up the consolidating of West Germany without reference to Russia. The Foreign Ministers duly met in Paris in May, but when they disbanded on 20 June, although the atmosphere was less tense, there was no agreement to do more than facilitate trade between East and West Germany and to hold further discussion on Germany at the next session of the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>1</sup>

The settlement of the Berlin dispute, contrary to Stalin's wish, had not delayed the handing over of political responsibilities to the West Germans. By a coincidence the lifting of the blockade was timed for the very day on which the military governors approved the revised draft Basic Law on which the Parliamentary Council in Bonn had been at work since February. Difficulties had arisen because the military governors of the Western Powers wanted stronger Länder governments than the Bonn constitutional draughtsmen; they believed, for example, that the Länder should put forward their own electoral laws as a safeguard against domination from the centre. After some protest from the Social Democratic Party, the Parliamentary Council revised the draft and, after approval by the military governors and the Länder, it was finally signed at Bonn on 23 May. The military governors, however, had less success with their efforts to draw up an Occupation Statute to define the position of the three Western Powers in the new West German regime. They finally gave up the attempt in December 1948 owing to the insistence of the French representative on leaving less power to the Germans under the Statute than either Britain or the United States thought to be workable.<sup>2</sup> This difference was at length resolved by the Foreign Ministers of the three Powers in Washington on 8 April. By the Occupation Statute which the Ministers then signed full legislative executive and judicial power was to be exercised by German central and provincial organs in accordance with the Basic Law, although nine reserved fields of government were left under the contingent control of the occupying Powers. They could resume this control in any one of three conditions: if it was essential to security; if it was required to maintain democratic government; and if it was necessary for the fulfilment of the international obligations of the occupying Powers.<sup>3</sup> As Germany was still a disarmed state and had not yet

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 7729 of 1949, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Clay, *op. cit.*, pp. 413-8.

<sup>3</sup> Cmd. 7677. Memorandum on the Measures agreed by the UK, US and French Foreign Ministers, Washington, 6-8 April 1949.



proved its capacity for democratic government, the first two stipulations were called for. The third seemed to leave the door open to some future agreement with Russia on a united Germany.

The Occupation Statute was finally promulgated, along with the Basic Law, in May. The first free general elections since 1933 were held in August in what were formerly the three Western zones and the Federal German Republic was inaugurated in September, the Allied military regime being replaced by an Allied High Commission in Bonn.<sup>1</sup> The Western Powers decided to end the state of war with Germany in September 1950 and in March 1951 the Federal Republic was authorised to establish its own Foreign Ministry and maintain direct diplomatic representation abroad.<sup>2</sup> The road from Potsdam had ended.

For Britain the significance of the Berlin dispute was that it showed how it had, through the failure of quadripartite rule in Germany, come to assume commitments entirely contrary to precedent. Very rarely in recent times (and the Polish example in 1939 was a doubtful one) had Britain taken on obligations for which it was prepared to fight as far east in Europe as Berlin. That she would fight in defence of the obligations Bevin left no room for doubt. At the beginning of the Berlin crisis he told Parliament: 'we cannot abandon those stout-bearded Berlin democrats who are refusing to bow to Soviet pressure.'<sup>3</sup> He was able to hold to this position because he knew that it was fully endorsed by the United States, with that country's immense resources and unmatched atomic striking power. The greatest achievement of British diplomacy during the Berlin crisis was indeed, not its firmness against Stalin's pressure, but its securing of American endorsement of the Brussels Treaty, out of which, with the addition of Canada and five more European states, emerged the North Atlantic Pact. The fact that by mid-1948, American opinion had moved of its own accord towards underwriting the Brussels Powers did not lessen this achievement.

#### *The formation of the Atlantic pact*

The close interest which the United States was now taking in the defence arrangements of western Europe was made clear in several pronouncements. On the occasion of the signing of the Brussels

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 7729 of 1949.

<sup>2</sup> Department of State *Bulletin*, 2 October 1950, p. 530; Cmd. 8252 of 1951, *Revision of the Occupation Controls in Germany*, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> 452 H.C. Deb. 5s. (30 June 1948), Col. 2232.

Treaty on 17 March 1948 President Truman said in a message to Congress: 'I am confident that the United States will, by appropriate means, extend to the free nations the support which the situation requires . . . the determination of the free countries of Europe to protect themselves will be matched by great determination on our part to help them to do so.' This was followed on 29 April by another voice from the New World, that of Mr Saint Laurent, the then Canadian Minister for External Affairs, who not only endorsed the Brussels Treaty in a notable speech in Parliament, but forecast a closer association for collective defence of all free nations under the United Nations Charter.<sup>1</sup> But the most striking symbol of the end of American isolation was the resolution moved by Senator Vandenberg, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, in the United States Senate on 11 June. This proposed, as the three axioms of American foreign policy, the encouragement of collective security arrangements within the terms of the Charter, the association of the United States with such arrangements when based on the fullest possible self-help and mutual aid by the signatories, and the pledge that any attack on a peace-loving nation would be met by American forces acting in self-defence.<sup>2</sup> The Vandenberg resolution was carried by a vote of 64 to 4. Its importance was, first, that it showed how a former leading isolationist, converted by the Second World War into a supporter of the United Nations, could recognise that the organisation was no longer adequate, owing to the veto, to deal with the danger of a Soviet attack; and secondly it demonstrated the Senate's new conviction that American partnership in defence of the North Atlantic area was not altruism, but prudent concern for national security in a world in which the traditional defence, remoteness, was no longer relevant.

The Senate's resolution was a great encouragement to the Brussels Treaty Powers now that they were exploring the prospects for a wider security system to embrace the whole of the North Atlantic. These discussions were carried on partly in the Permanent Commission set up by the Brussels Treaty, which began work in London in April, and partly at the Consultative Council of the five Foreign Ministers, which sat at The Hague in July. On 6 July talks began in Washington between the Ambassadors of the Brussels Powers and Canada with the United States Under-Secretary of State, Mr Lovett, and continued throughout the summer. After further discussion in the Permanent Commission in London and at a Consultative Council meeting in Paris in October, the talks were then moved back to

<sup>1</sup> Miscellaneous No. 9 (1949). Cmd. 7692, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *The Private Papers of Senator Vandenberg*, ed. by Arthur H. Vandenberg, jr., London, Gollancz, 1953, pp. 407-11.

Washington on 10 December. Here it was decided to invite the Governments of Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Norway and Portugal to sign the proposed North Atlantic collective defence treaty along with the seven core Powers. Despite considerable Soviet pressure to the contrary, they accepted the invitation and signed the treaty with the others in the presence of President Truman in Washington on 4 April. The treaty came into force on 24 August 1949.

The signature of the Atlantic Pact was, for the United States, a revolutionary act of diplomacy, running counter to all the hallowed maxims of American statesmanship. The fact that hearings on the treaty occupied sixteen days in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the ratification debate in the Senate itself took twelve days showed the transformation in American thinking that the pact symbolised.

In Britain the Government's attitude to the treaty was much more pragmatic. Four-Power co-operation had clearly failed both to solve such pressing problems of the day as Germany and to provide security against war. The United Nations was out of action for the time being as a producer of security. No one could be sure what Stalin's object really was, whether merely security for Russia against a German military revival encouraged by the Western Powers, or the spread of Communism across the globe by force, if not by peaceful means. But without doubt, after the Czech *coup*, weak countries had no assurance that they would not be swallowed up into the Communist camp. For west Europe's defence against this threat three things were needed: co-operation among the west European countries for collective defence—that was the object of the Brussels Treaty; the economic sinews of defence—that was provided by ERP and Marshall Aid; and the underwriting of their efforts by the United States, with its resources and atomic strength—this was ensured by the Atlantic Pact. For Britain the treaty was by no means a revolution, but a practical way of dealing with a practical question. Hence the Minister of Commonwealth Relations, Mr Noel-Baker, described the treaty in the one-day debate on the subject in the House of Commons on 12 May as a 'stop-gap and a stop-gap only'. 'We want a world security system as soon as ever we can,' he said, 'but we do believe that if we are having a collective pact at all it should be as strong as possible in order that its restraining effect on the mind of the aggressor may be as great as possible.'<sup>1</sup>

This conception of the North Atlantic Treaty as an unfortunate makeshift made necessary by Soviet obstructiveness was underlined in its spirit and phrasing. The preamble identified the pact with the

<sup>1</sup> 464 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 2127.

aims and methods of the United Nations. The parties were committed to settle their disputes peacefully and not to use force in any way inconsistent with United Nations principles (Article 1). There was a heavy emphasis on international co-operation for economic stability and better understanding of the signatories' free institutions (Article 2). The pact was said not to affect the rights and obligations of the parties under the Charter or the primary responsibility of the Security Council for maintaining peace and security (Article 7). Above all, the key Article (5), under which the signatories pledged themselves to assist each other, by armed force if necessary, against any armed attack occurring in Europe or North America drew its authority from Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which authorises member-states to use force in self-defence, whether individually or collectively, in cases where the Security Council is unable to defend them against armed attack. United Nations members, such as the Atlantic Powers, are enjoined to look for security to the organisation, but the Charter allows (if it does not exhort) them to develop their collective power to resist attack against the day when the Security Council may be stultified by the veto. This authority the Atlantic Powers availed themselves of.<sup>1</sup>

The British Government's argument on behalf of the treaty, and of the lead they had taken in getting it launched, were not criticised by the Opposition. Military pacts never held fears for Conservatives, and the fact that the pact was itself something of an adverse judgement on Russia rather commended it to the Right. All Mr Churchill asked for was that steps should be taken to mend relations with Spain, a possible future member of the pact.<sup>2</sup> Two forceful criticisms which the Foreign Secretary had to face from his own backbenches were that the pact helped consolidate the division of the world, from which it was argued that only Washington and Moscow, if anyone, stood to gain, and that the pact represented a repudiation of the United Nations. On the former of these arguments, Mr Warbey said in the Commons that 'if we build up a polarisation, a power bloc around Washington, then we are encouraging similar polarisation in the other part of the world', while Mr Zilliacus put the United Nations case against the pact in the words: 'we can have either power politics or the rule of law, a balance of power or the United Nations. But we cannot have both.'<sup>3</sup> Mr Bevin's reply was that the absence of a pact like the Atlantic treaty had not prevented war in 1939, or in 1914, and that war could only be avoided by making clear to an

<sup>1</sup> The text of the North Atlantic Treaty is printed in Cmd. 7883 of 1950, *Collective Defence under the Brussels and North Atlantic Treaties*.

<sup>2</sup> 464 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 2028 (12 May 1949).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Cols 2040, 2079.

aggressor what he would have to face if he began one. As for the United Nations argument, he denied that there was any inconsistency between the Charter and the pact; the Charter admitted in Article 51 that it might not work, and recognised that if action were not taken by the United Nations other agencies must be ready to fill the gap.<sup>1</sup> At the vote after the debate only six MPs opposed the treaty.

Critics of the pact on the Left in Britain represented the schism in Germany, and the accompanying Cold War which led to the treaty, as largely due to the refusal of ruling forces in the West to accept the Communist Revolution in Russia, which, it was alleged, they had tried to strangle in 1919. The pact's defenders, and Mr Bevin in particular, denied any personal hostility towards Russia. The Cold War, they said, had arisen from Russia's own suspicions and her determination to extend her power by insult, subversion and force against the West. Had Russia been willing to co-operate in Germany, they said, the whole dismal tale of deadlock, mutual invective and now pact against pact would never have been written. Both arguments, by placing the blame on the hostility or ambition of one side or other in the Cold War, missed perhaps the most important element in the story. This was that both sides feared to lose Germany to the other, which both genuinely thought to be bad for themselves and bad for the world. This fear they might have exorcised by united efforts to build a regime in Germany which would have neither wish nor opportunity for aggression. But Russia and the West did not agree on what made for a peaceful Germany. The West held that a freely elected German government could hardly be aggressive. Yet history did not offer much support for the argument that an independent Germany would continue to enjoy a free elected government. Russia believed that only the extermination of forces in Germany other than the extreme Left could keep her peaceful. But any such regime must either be a pawn of Russia (and therefore unacceptable to the West) or beyond the control of either East or West (as the Russians themselves may have suspected). To this conflict of view other factors were added: the Western tendency to allow a situation to grow up out of day-by-day expedients, and Soviet pressures to stamp their ideas all over Europe. But the basic dilemma remained.

<sup>1</sup> 464 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 2015-7.

### MIDDLE EAST RECESSIONAL

Britain has had an interest in the area comprising south-west Asia and the Nile lands, now known as the Middle East, since the eighteenth century. At first this interest was primarily naval and commercial: to preserve the region as a bridge to British possessions in the Far East and a highway for British trade, especially after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. With the coming of air power the Middle East began to lose its importance for naval communications and during the Second World War the Mediterranean, the sea approach to the area from the west, was closed to Allied shipping from 1940 until 1943. Nevertheless, the maintenance of British power in Egypt, the Persian Gulf and at the Aden colony continued to be thought essential to defend the region against hostile Powers.

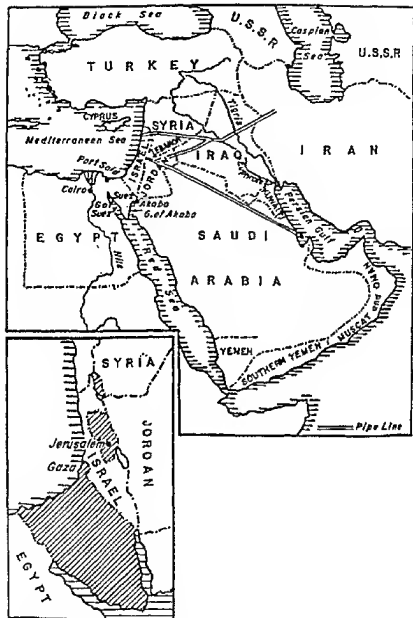
This strategic significance of the region was rivalled in the twentieth century by its growing importance as a source of oil supplies for western Europe. This factor was one of the principal reasons for the desire of Britain and France for supervisory powers over the Arab states which freed themselves from Ottoman rule in 1918. But it was not to be realised to its full extent until after the Second World War. In 1938 the total output of crude oils and natural gas from the Middle East was 335,000 barrels daily, a poor fourth in the world's table. This figure rose to 865,000 barrels daily in 1947 and to 3,480,000 in 1956, when the Middle East was second only to North America in oil production.<sup>1</sup> Although the oil wells themselves were irregularly distributed over the region, the most important producing states being Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, a sizeable fraction of the output was carried by pipeline across the Arab states of the hinterland to Mediterranean ports. This meant that stability in the area as a whole was essential to the continued supply of oil to Britain and Europe, both as a raw material to be used in home industries and as an export.

While these two interests prescribed for Britain a policy aimed at keeping the region peaceful and friendly towards herself, conditions at the close of the Second World War were unfavourable to the implementation of such a policy. Apart from Soviet hostility and the

<sup>1</sup> The Royal Institute of International Affairs, *The Middle East: A Political and Economic Survey*, 3rd edition, London, 1958, p. 541. Figures for periods earlier than 1966 are not given in the 4th edition of this work (1973).

new, competitive interests acquired in the area by the United States, Arab nationalism, expressed in the Arabs' desire to expel all foreign influence and master their own affairs, was able to profit from Britain's declining power. Culturally Arab nationalism represented a cross-fertilisation of Western education with an Islamic revival occurring in the second half of the nineteenth century. Politically it had embraced the self-determination ideals of the Allies in the First World War. When General Allenby entered Damascus on 7 November 1918 after the rout of Turkish forces in Palestine, he pledged Britain and France to the creation of national Arab governments based upon popular consent. Instead of this, however, which the Arabs considered was already their right under the Hussein-MacMahon correspondence of 1915, they found themselves after the war under British and French rule in the thinly disguised form of League of Nations mandates. The resulting Arab sense of betrayal was accessible to nursing by the government of any state in conflict with Britain or France during the inter-war years. Bolshevik Russia repeatedly summoned the Arabs against the capitalist West, but was too close to be regarded as disinterested and too Godless to be thought respectable. Germany and Italy, the dissident states of the 1930s, were better placed to exploit Arab discontents, with the result that the Middle East, including Iran, was so penetrated with Axis propaganda and intrigue that it was virtually brought under close Allied control during the Second World War in order to protect communications between Russia and the West.

The campaign against the West was a factor in Arab unity; at the same time the unstable and highly xenophobic spirit of Arab politics was due to local factors. Whereas European nationalism was traditionally steeped in democratic protest against arbitrary government, Arab nationalism was in the first instance a protest against the foreigner voiced by a middle-class intelligentsia which often considered local governments as the mere puppets of foreign states. Moreover, the fact that in 1919 no united Arab state had been formed, but the Arab lands were parcelled out among leaders most of whom had been appointed by the West, with frontiers decided by bargaining between London and Paris, meant that Arab nationalism was based, not so much on loyalty to a country, but on the abstract ideal of a united Arab state, failure to attain which was laid at the West's door. The will to form an Arab nation tended to be left with only two real affinities from which to draw its strength: the Arab language and hatred of the foreign imperialist. The former has been described as the least suitable in the world to orderly and rational politics; the latter was the one persistent theme in Arab relations with the West.



ISRAEL AFTER SIX-DAY WAR

THE MIDDLE EAST



Britain might have stood a better chance of coming to terms with this phenomenon on one or other of two conditions: had it disposed of sufficient power to demonstrate the will to maintain its interests whatever the challenge of Arab nationalism, or had other Powers with interests in the Middle East been willing to co-operate. In the circumstances of 1945 neither condition existed. We have seen how economic pressures, together with the widespread feeling in Britain that the country had done its part during the war and now deserved some relaxation, limited the possibilities before a British Foreign Secretary. The Arab mind is said to respect great power; the spectacle of Britain peering into an empty purse at the end of the war was certainly no invitation to Arab quiescence. Nor did other Powers with a stake in the area make it easy for Britain to maintain something of her former position. Germany and Italy had departed but the Soviet Union made up for their absence. As early as 1940, in discussions with its ally, Nazi Germany, Moscow sought to have the area south of Batum and Baku in the general direction of the Persian Gulf recognised 'as the centre of the aspiration of the Soviet Union'.<sup>1</sup> These dreams were not realised but at the end of the war Russia, seen from London and Washington, seemed poised for acts of incursion in the Middle East. Though it was in no want of oil, the protection of its own oilfields in the Caucasus justified advances by the standards of traditional diplomacy, especially now that Britain was much weaker.

The other dominant Power of the day, the United States, saw no particular reason for underwriting British authority in the area and was only reluctantly persuaded to defend Iran against Russia in 1946. Provided Britain's case took the form of defending free peoples against Soviet threats, as in Greece and Turkey, America was generous with aid; but the essence of Middle East affairs after 1946 was that Russia had to all intents retired from the scene and American distaste for great-Power interference with small nations was apt to re-focus on Britain. Moreover, by 1945 the United States had acquired substantial local interests in the Middle East of its own, especially the oil and air base facilities of Saudi Arabia, which tended to conflict with the pro-Zionist electoral considerations of the administration. Some of these interests competed with those of Britain. The result was that for at least a decade after the war American policy appeared in London to be vacillating, at war with itself and more disposed to edge British authority out of the Middle East than support it. If so, it found an ally in the estranged mood of France. After the French liberation in 1944 it was fully in accord

<sup>1</sup> *us Department of State, Nazis-Soviet Relations, 1939-41, Washington, 1948, p. 250.*

with General de Gaulle's notions that France should return to Syria and Lebanon, which she had acquired as League mandates in 1920 and Britain had occupied after 1939 to prevent them falling into German hands. When this led to a French bombardment of Damascus in May 1945 it was Britain who forced the French out of Syria and who ensured Syrian and Lebanese independence a year later. French opinion was left to conclude that, while Britain wished to meet Arab grievances if possible, it preferred to do so at an ally's expense.

Britain's policy of insulating the Middle East against hostile influences from the outside had generally been expressed through friendly overlordship over the Arab states relieved by subsidies and occasional doses of independence. Iraq was freed in 1930 from British-imposed restrictions and concurrently entered into a treaty relationship affording Britain the use of airfields and communications. Transjordan became independent in 1946, with British subsidies and military assistance to its ruling Hashimite family. Egypt, which Britain had declared an independent state in 1922 while reserving certain powers, became fully sovereign by a treaty of friendship in 1936, when British forces were confined to the Suez Canal zone. The Gulf states remained British clients under their feudal rulers, while the friendly, isolated kingdom of Saudi Arabia was separated from the other Arab states in the north by the desert and fringed by British protectorates on its Indian Ocean side. The tempo of independence could hardly be expected to satisfy Arab nationalists excited by the heady pronouncements of both belligerent sides in the Second World War, but so long as Britain was the principal source of funds, of officers to staff the armies of Arab rulers, of arms, oil and oil-transit royalties, Arab impatience could perhaps be controlled.

When at the end of the war the Arab states found themselves, not the pensioners of Britain, but the owners of sterling balances resulting from British spending in the Middle East during the war, which Britain was in no position to repay, a new relationship seemed required. One possibility was an organic association of the Arab states; this was espoused by the wartime Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, in a speech in the Commons in May 1941 and culminated in the formation, with British encouragement, of the League of Arab States the pact of which was signed by seven countries on 22 March 1945.<sup>1</sup> The Arab League might have proved an efficient means for maintaining a friendly alignment between the Arabs and Britain. That it failed to do so was partly due to the bitter rivalries

<sup>1</sup> The signatories were: Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Transjordan and the Yemen.

dividing Arab leaders. But equally important was the Palestine question. So long as Britain held to the Palestine mandate, either as a champion of the Jewish National Home or merely as an umpire between Jews and Arabs, British policy requirements and Arab discontents could find no point of mutual reconciliation.

### *Palestine*

The obligations assumed by the British Government on 2 November 1917 to support on certain conditions the creation of a national home for the Jews in Palestine, embodied after the war in a League of Nations mandate entrusted to Britain, was in the first instance a wartime measure to meet a wartime need. Its object was partly to rivet American opinion to the Entente cause, partly to dissuade the Bolsheviks, many of whom were Jews, from throwing in their lot with Germany, partly to forestall an adoption of the Jewish dream by Germany, and partly to seize from the collapsing Ottoman Empire a naval foothold on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. On its romantic side, the Jewish National Home was part of the traditional practice of protecting European minorities in the East by means of capitulations and unequal treaties. As such, it was out of tune with the twentieth century since the nationalist ideas of the post-war period ruled out reservations to the principle of nationally homogeneous states.

By the 1930s the mandate had become unworkable. The Jews were not content to remain a minority and the Arabs refused to allow them to be more than a minority. When the Palestinian Arabs rose in revolt in April 1936 and both Jews and Arabs refused to accept the recommendation of the Peel Commission appointed by the British Government, that this tiny country, no larger than Wales, should be split between them, Britain decided in May 1939 to put the National Home into cold storage, hoping that it might freeze to death. Jewish immigration was limited to 75,000 during the five years from April 1939, after which no more Jews would enter the country without Arab consent. The sale of land in Palestine to Jewish settlers was also restricted.<sup>1</sup> The White Paper announcing this decision was rejected by a majority of one by the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations. It did not prevent Jewish efforts to smuggle immigrants into Palestine during the war. But the Jews saw no reason to give Britain trouble during its conflict with Nazism. Like the Arabs, who however welcomed rather than feared a German victory, they prepared to resume the struggle for Palestine when peace came.

<sup>1</sup> Palestine. *Statement of Policy*, Cmd. 6019 (1939).

The Zionists viewed the accession to office of a Labour Government in Britain in 1945 with joy equal to the misgivings of the Arabs. At its congress in the United States in 1942 the Zionist Organisation had adopted the Biltmore programme envisaging a definite Jewish state after the war. This had been officially urged on the British administration in Palestine in May 1945, before Attlee's Cabinet was formed, and Churchill adhered to his position that the issue must await discussion between the Allies.<sup>1</sup> Now, with Labour's victory, the road seemed clear. The strong connections of the European Left with Jewish life were well known; in its statement on reconstruction after the war, issued in April 1944, the national executive committee of the British Labour Party had called on the Arabs 'to move out as the Jews move in'. This was more than the Zionists themselves had ever asked for, since they had never sought to make Palestine exclusively Jewish.<sup>2</sup> In addition to this Labour sympathy and the general moral strength of the Zionist cause in view of the appalling tragedy of the Jews in Europe, the Biltmore programme had the approval of the Government of the United States, with its five million Jews. At the Potsdam Conference President Truman passed on to the British the Jewish demands for permission for 100,000 Jewish refugees in western Germany to enter Palestine while extending little hope of American military assistance in dealing with the consequences in terms of Arab resistance.

The negative reaction of the Labour Cabinet to these demands, and their coldness to Zionist aspirations as a whole, except on the impossible condition that the Arabs freely accepted them, have received many interpretations, most of them biased. Some focused on the personality of Bevin, the Foreign Secretary. That he was a mild anti-Semite is possible, if to be anti-Semite is to accept the image of the Arabs as courteous, leisurely, contemplative folk which T. E. Lawrence and others have injected into British political mythology. It was on this ground that Bevin was criticised for failing to punish subordinates who expressed anti-Semitic sentiments, such as Lieutenant-General Sir Evelyn Barker, the British Commander in Palestine, who issued a non-fraternisation order after the King David Hotel tragedy in July 1946. Bevin, according to his Cabinet colleague, Hugh Dalton, 'suffered from an inhibition due to his belief, which I have heard him more than once express, that "the Jews are a religion, not a race or a nation"'.<sup>3</sup> That Bevin came under

<sup>1</sup> 408 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1289 (27 February).

<sup>2</sup> Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1949, p. 535.

<sup>3</sup> Dalton, *High Tide and After. Memoirs, 1945-60*, London, Muller, 1962, p. 147.

the spell of Arab-biased advisers in the Foreign Office and Colonial Office is also possible; this may have led him to over-estimate the military strength the Arab states would oppose to further Jewish immigration. But such explanations are unnecessary to account for the dilemma facing British policy-makers at the end of the war.

The Labour Government denied that the 1939 White Paper was still valid and pointed to the policy of admitting 1,500 Jews a month as evidence for this. When the Jewish authorities dismissed this scale of immigration with contempt, refusing even to accept the immigration certificates, and when they ran unseaworthy ships crowded with pathetic refugees into the country, the British were powerless to deal with the situation. After twelve months of mounting Jewish violence, the administration finally took action at the end of June 1946, when widespread arrests were made, including four members of the executive of the Jewish Agency. But the Jewish resistance, the military form of which was the 70,000-strong Haganah, the Jewish defence force, and its mobile striking force, the 5,000-strong Palmach, with the two terrorist organisations, the Irgun Svai Leumi and the Stern Gang, was in fact not that of a handful of terrorists; it was the resistance of a nation. The Nazis in Europe had found that where resistance movements are backed by the local population, only war against every man, woman and child is effective. Bevin and the Cabinet affected to be shocked that the Jewish Agency should connive with the military resistance against Britain while verbally dissociating itself. But the Jews had never been discouraged by Britain from banding out violence to Germans during the war; they had in fact been armed and instructed in the use of effective violence in the name of freedom. Their freedom to build Israel they now regarded as no less precious. Hence the British purge in June 1946 had its inevitable outcome in the blowing up of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in July by way of reprisal. Eighty-four British, Arabs and Jews were killed, forty-six maimed and twenty-two unaccounted for. The Jews seemed to calculate that the policy of blood against blood would not be tolerated for long by British public opinion. In this they calculated rightly since the creation of Lidices in Palestine could not be acceptable in Britain.

To capitulate to Jewish demands, however, was equally impossible. The Arab Bureau, which had been set up in London in 1945 by the newly formed Arab League, warned the British Government that to allow 100,000 Jews to enter Palestine would ruin Anglo-Arab relations.<sup>1</sup> This was no idle threat. During the Arab uprising of

<sup>1</sup> J. C. Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine*, New York, Norton, 1950, p. 229.

1936-9 some 4,000 people were killed and two divisions of British troops, along with several squadrons of the RAF, had to be employed to deal with the revolt, which took almost two years to suppress.<sup>1</sup> With the strong anti-British feeling prevalent in the Arab world at the end of the war, with the existing United States and Soviet attitudes on the Middle East, and with Britain's diminished military and economic strength in 1945, such an operation could not be repeated. Moreover, the British policy of support for the Arab League and the special British relation with Transjordan ruled such a policy out. In February 1946 Abdullah, the ruler of Transjordan, was invited to London, to be given the title of King of a fully independent state as a reward for his war services. On 22 March a treaty of alliance was signed with Transjordan providing for the garrisoning of British troops and mutual assistance in case of armed attack on Britain or Transjordan.<sup>2</sup> The subsidy Britain paid Abdullah was increased to £2 million and eventually to £12 million. Above all, the future of the British military base in the Suez Canal zone was uncertain in view of Egyptian demands for revision of the 1936 treaty.<sup>3</sup> These considerations excluded British support for the full Zionist demands, or even for further Jewish immigration on any scale appropriate to the needs of the Jewish displaced persons in their camps in Europe.

One new factor in the situation was the Bevin-Sidki agreement signed in London in October for the withdrawal of British forces from the Suez base with provision for the base to be reactivated by Britain in emergencies.<sup>4</sup> So long as the reactivation formula was under consideration Britain would require a foothold in some part of Palestine from which the necessary military operations could be carried on. On the other hand, the Colonial Secretary, George Hall, was replaced on 4 October by Creech Jones, a former pro-Zionist who had come to regard partition as inevitable. The Cabinet's legal advisers considered that partition was in principle inconsistent with the Mandate, but it was clear that during the three months' recess of the London conference, announced shortly before the change at the Colonial Office, British policy would be swayed by conflicting pressures. The moment thus seemed ripe for the President of the Zionist Congress, Chaim Weizmann, to attempt a dilution of the Biltmore programme and to canvass support for the principle of a 'viable Jewish state in an adequate area of Palestine'. This proposal

<sup>1</sup> Palestine. Termination of the Mandate, 15 May 1948, London, HMSO, 1948, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 6916 of 1946.

<sup>3</sup> The Egyptian negotiations are dealt with below, pp. 114-15.

<sup>4</sup> See below, pp. 114-15.

was defeated, however, at the 22nd Zionist Congress held in Basle in December 1946 and Weizmann paid the price of his revisionist tactics by losing the Presidency. By a tiny majority the Congress decided against attending the London conference when it resumed on 27 January.<sup>1</sup>

Informal talks were held in London in January outside the resumed conference between Bevin and Creech Jones on one side and members of the executive of the Jewish Agency on the other; but the minimum demands of the latter never fell short of immediate partition and the creation of a Jewish state in an adequate area of the country. When the British Ministers left the Jews and met representatives of the Arab states, now accompanied by Palestinian Arab spokesmen, at the conference, Arab claims for an independent Palestine with a permanent Arab majority had not materially altered. A compromise, proposed by Bevin to both parties on 7 February, clearly demonstrated the British desire, while the strategic outlook in Egypt and Iraq remained uncertain, to maintain the *status quo* in Palestine in the hope that within five years or so something might have turned up. Not surprisingly, the Bevin compromise was at once rejected unconditionally by both Palestinian factions and their various supporters. A week later the Government announced their intention to refer the problem to the United Nations.

#### *The UN debate: Israel and the Arab defeat*

In reporting on the London talks to the House of Commons on 18 February 1947 Bevin defined the positions of the two groups in Palestine as follows:

'For the Jews the essential point of principle is the creation of a sovereign Jewish state. For the Arabs the essential point of principle is to resist to the last the establishment of Jewish sovereignty in any part of Palestine. The discussions of the last month have quite clearly shown that there is no prospect of resolving this conflict by any settlement negotiated between the parties.'<sup>2</sup>

Britain, the Foreign Secretary went on, had no authority under the mandate to award the country either to Jews or Arabs, nor to partition it. But it was noted that, in explaining the reference of the problem to the United Nations, as the legal successor to the League of Nations, he did not include partition among the alternatives

<sup>1</sup> Chaim Weizmann, *op. cit.*, p. 544.

<sup>2</sup> 433 H.C. Deb. 5s. col. 988.

between which he was inviting the United Nations to choose. While proposing no British solution, Bevin defined three possibilities:

'First, should the claim of the Jews be admitted that Palestine was to be a Jewish State, or, secondly, should the claim of the Arabs be admitted that it was to be an Arab State, with safeguards for the Jews under the decision for a National Home, or, thirdly, should there be a Palestinian State in which the interests of both communities were as closely protected as possible?'

Since each of these alternatives had already been rejected by one party or the other, or by both, and therefore neither was likely to command a two-thirds majority in the United Nations General Assembly, the effect of a debate in the Assembly, the Government seems to have hoped, would be merely to advertise the deadlock and leave the situation much as it was. That the Government were in no hurry for active intervention by the United Nations seemed implicit in their initial proposals to wait for the next ordinary session of the General Assembly in September. Opposition pressure, however, combined with the deteriorating situation in Palestine, forced the Cabinet to ask for a special session of the General Assembly.

When the special session met in April Sir Alexander Cadogan, the British delegate, said that Britain could not act alone. 'We shall not have the sole responsibility', he said, 'for enforcing a solution which is not accepted by both parties and which we cannot reconcile with our consciences.'<sup>1</sup> This seemed not to rule out British participation in any collective enforcement of a United Nations solution. But when it became clear that, contrary to expectations, the United Nations *would* arrive at an agreed solution, the tone changed. The Special Committee on Palestine which the General Assembly appointed in May failed to agree on a unanimous formula for the Palestine issue, but seven members produced a report which came before the Assembly's ordinary session in September.<sup>2</sup> The essence of this was the proposal to create an Arab and a Jewish state, each in three segments, and an international City of Jerusalem. The two States were to be fully independent after a period of two years from 1 September 1947, Britain in the meantime continuing as the administering authority under the United Nations. Jewish immigration was to be fixed at 150,000 over the two years and at 60,000 a year

<sup>1</sup> UN First Special Session of the General Assembly, Official Records, Vol. III, p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay. A minority plan supported by three other members of the Special Committee, India, Persia, Yugoslavia, favoured a federal Palestine with Jerusalem as the capital. The representative of Australia, the eleventh member of the Special Committee, did not vote for either plan.



afterwards if the transition period should last longer than two years. The Negeb was awarded to the proposed Jewish state. When discussion of the plan began in an *ad hoc* committee created by the General Assembly, Creech Jones at once said that Britain could not support any solution which did not command the assent of both sides. On 26 September he said:

'The United Kingdom Government was not prepared to undertake the task of imposing a policy in Palestine by force of arms. In considering any proposal that it should participate in the execution of a settlement, it would have to take into account both the inherent justice of the settlement and the extent to which force would be required to give effect to it.'

To which was added the threat that, in the absence of a settlement agreed among the parties, Britain would have to plan for an early withdrawal of British forces and the administration from Palestine.

At each stage of the tense discussions in New York Britain applied pressure on friendly delegations to vote against the partition plan, while issuing repeated warnings in public that she would not co-operate in the plan if adopted. When both the Soviet Union and the United States gave their support to the plan in the *ad hoc* committee Creech Jones said that Britain could accept no responsibility 'either alone or in a major role'. Since Britain was the *de jure* ruling power in Palestine, she could hardly act in a minor role if she was going to assist in implementing the plan at all. When on 10 November a Soviet-United States compromise proposed bringing the Mandate to an end on 1 May 1948 and the establishment of the Arab and Jewish states on 1 July Cadogan repeated that Britain would take no part in imposing the plan on either Jews or Arabs. She would instead hand over to the Commission of Five to be appointed by the United Nations to supervise the implementation of the plan and use her forces in Palestine only for the maintenance of law and order. When the General Assembly at length debated the *ad hoc* committee's report in favour of the partition plan in November, Cadogan once more declared that British troops and administrators would not be available to enforce a plan which was not acceptable to both sides. In effect this meant that Britain would never again use force against the Arabs in Palestine. Nevertheless, after intensive lobbying and log-rolling by all parties, the partition plan in slightly revised form was adopted by the General Assembly on 29 November by a vote of 33 to 13 with 10 absentions. The most serious modification of the plan was that the proposed Jewish state was reduced from 6,000 to 5,500 square miles in area; it would constitute some 55 per cent of the total land area of Palestine.

The majority for the plan, which had only numbered twenty-five in the *ad hoc* committee, reached the required two-thirds in the General Assembly since six states (France, Haiti, Liberia, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and New Zealand) which abstained in the committee now voted with the majority, and two, Paraguay and the Philippines, which had been absent during the committee's vote, now supported the plan. No Middle East or Asian delegation voted for the plan. Britain and as many friends as it could muster abstained.

In view of its delegate's statements at the United Nations Britain could hardly do other than take its leave of Palestine with the least delay. The British Ministers responsible, Bevin and Creech Jones, told the House of Commons that the Mandate would be terminated on 15 May 1948 and the military withdrawal completed by 1 August. In effecting these operations they have been charged with collusion with the Arabs to sabotage the United Nations partition plan. The British authorities in Palestine certainly prevented the United Nations Commission, the 'Five Lonely Pilgrims',<sup>1</sup> from entering the country until 1 May though they allowed a small advance party to see conditions for themselves, on the grounds that the Commission's presence would inflame Arab feeling and make the maintenance of order more difficult during the last days of the Mandate.<sup>2</sup> Arab irregular forces, however, were permitted to cross the Syrian border to attack Jewish settlements in Palestine, while Jewish forces were still prevented from arming themselves and Palestinian ports were denied to Jewish immigrants. But this is not conclusive evidence that Britain was conspiring with the Arabs to destroy the plan and Zionist dreams with it. For if Britain was unable to suppress Jewish terrorist violence under the Mandate, when it had a perfect legal right to do so, it could hardly hope to undermine the emerging Jewish State promised in the General Assembly's resolution when British troops were packing up to leave. Moreover, had the Arab States received definite offers of clandestine British assistance against the Assembly plan, it is surprising that they did not enter the Palestine war with more enthusiasm. When the Arab League Council met in Cairo on 8 December it issued a statement saying that 'previous plans' would be carried out, but until British forces left Palestine the Arab States confined themselves to sending irregular bands over the frontier rather than putting their own armies into the country.

The more probable explanation of Britain's sullen attitude during

<sup>1</sup> The states represented on the Commission were Bolivia, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Panama and the Philippines.

<sup>2</sup> Palestine. The Termination of the Mandate, p. 11.

and immediately following the United Nations debates is that the Government, and even more so public opinion, were sick of a sterile and costly argument into which the high idealism of the Balfour Declaration had sunk, and wished to unburden themselves of the conflict, all the more since the United Nations had adopted a solution they had themselves rejected time and again. Since 1945 338 British subjects had been killed in Palestine. The upkeep of troops there had cost the taxpayer £100 million. By the time the Assembly plan was voted the country was in effect a British police state. Over 80,000 British troops, one-tenth of the total strength of the British army at that time, were unable to maintain order in the face of rising Jewish resistance.<sup>1</sup> The impossible task of insulating the two warring factions from one another was dramatically symbolised in February 1947, when the families of all British civilians and non-essential officials in Palestine had to be evacuated. The remaining non-military British were herded together in security zones from which Jewish families had been evicted. To assist in implementing the partition plan in conditions in which the Arabs plainly meant to fight was to increase still further the military burden of this unhappy country while utterly destroying such elements of British influence as still remained in the Arab countries. The British view, Weizmann concluded, after seeing Creech Jones in New York when the General Assembly had voted its plan, was therefore that the Jews and Arabs should be left to themselves for an unavoidable period of blood-letting.<sup>2</sup>

These calculations were based on the accurate assumption that the United Nations would not be able to enforce the plan and hence that the issue would remain to be fought out between Jews and Arabs, and on the false assumption that the Arabs would get the better of the fighting. Considering that the Arab states number some 30 million people, as against the 600,000 Jews, and that the Jordanian, Iraqi and Egyptian forces were armed and in some cases officered by the British, the latter assumption did not seem as wild as it proved. That the Jews were in the event so successful that by February-April 1949, when armistices were signed with the surrounding Arab states, they had virtually brought the whole of Palestine, except for Samaria and Judea, under their control was due to many factors: their superior military equipment, much of it purchased in Iron Curtain countries with funds collected in the United States; their better generalship and far greater zest to win the struggle; and the purely accidental fact that the crossing into Palestine of irregular Arab forces from Syria as soon as the General Assembly voted the

<sup>1</sup> Palestine. Termination of the Mandate, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Weizmann, *op. cit.*, p. 580.

partition plan gave the Jews a pretext to occupy the continuous line of the mountains facing west from Jerusalem, thus cutting the Arabs off from the sea.<sup>1</sup> The effect of the Arab military defeat, however, was not merely to create the new state of Israel consisting of the whole of Mandate Palestine, with the exception of the Gaza strip along the coast, and having on its eastern flank an Arab salient, assigned to Transjordan to form the new state of Jordan, which was, from the Arab standpoint, a point of entry into Israel and, from the Jewish, a territory some day to be absorbed. It was to deepen the tensions between Britain, the official author of the National Home from which Israel had sprung, and the Arab States. The latter, now venting their disillusionment in strife between themselves, found a convenient scapegoat for their defeat in Britain.

But the British assumption that the United Nations would be unable to enforce its plan was confirmed when attention in New York moved to the question of implementation. The Soviet Union had voted for the partition plan on condition that the Security Council, if it found that a threat to peace existed by virtue of the Palestine situation, took the necessary measures to enforce the plan and authorised the Commission to carry out its functions. Britain itself had tacitly underlined the need for enforcement by its warnings of the likelihood of Arab resistance. But in the event it was unnecessary for Britain to do more in the Security Council than sit and wait for the United States to withdraw support from enforcement and thus set itself against the Soviet Union. This reversal of the American position occurred on 19 March 1948 when the United States representative at the Security Council, Warren Austin, rejected the partition plan and made the astonishing proposal of a temporary trusteeship for Palestine, leaving the way open for a possible solution through partition at a later date. It was apparent that strategical and economic considerations in United States policy had triumphed over Zionist influence. For some months American oil concessions in the Arab states had been under threat and this was no time to make their position more difficult. Above all, the possibility that a United Nations force in Palestine might include Russian contingents was now recognised as a threat to the policy of resistance to Soviet advances in the Near and Middle East which was embodied in the Truman Doctrine of the previous year.

The United States Government sought to improve their position with the Jews after the volte-face of 19 March by granting *de facto* recognition sixteen minutes after the proclamation of the State of Israel on 15 May. This was not followed by Britain until 29 January

<sup>1</sup> Sir John Glubb, *Britain and the Arabs*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1959, p. 288.

1949, a month before the first armistice in the Palestinian conflict, that between Israel and Egypt, signed at Rhodes on 24 February. *De jure* recognition was granted by the United States to Israel and the reorganised state of Jordan on 31 January. A deep chagrin and disappointment with the outcome of the war in Palestine had held up British recognition, which was forced on the Government only by the revulsion of feeling in Britain caused by the events of 18 January when five RAF aircraft over the Israeli-Egyptian border were shot down by Israeli defence forces. This incident marked the end of British efforts to embarrass the establishment of the Jewish state. As though to mark the close of a chapter the Foreign Secretary gave news in the House of Commons of the release of Jewish immigrants of military age from detention in Cyprus.<sup>1</sup>

The Palestinian war showed that the Arab states would be unable to deal with an aggressive state of any power which invaded the Middle East from outside. The more was this so since the immediate aftermath of the Arab defeat in Palestine was a series of military *coups* and assassinations as the discredited regimes paid the penalty for the mismanaged effort to destroy Israel. In Syria in March 1949 the Deputy Chief of Staff, Colonel Shishakli, executed a seizure of power, which he consolidated two years later by dismissing Parliament and suspending the constitution. In Jordan King Abdullah was assassinated by nationalists in July 1951 and a year later Farouk, the ruler of Egypt, was forced to abdicate by a young officers' rising led by Colonel Neguib. In these circumstances British policy sought to strengthen the Arab states against Israel on the assumption that Israel would retain a definite preponderance of military strength. Hence, after the Security Council lifted the embargo on the supply of arms to the Middle East in August 1949 British supplies of arms in limited quantities were resumed under existing treaty commitments to Egypt, Iraq and Jordan. The United States and France, however, besides being highly suspicious of alleged British designs for assisting Iraq and Jordan in their efforts to bring Syria into a united Fertile Crescent, were unwilling to see an arms race develop in which Israel might turn to Russia through fear of being outpaced by the Arabs. The formula which was devised to relate these positions of Britain, on one side, and her two allies, on the other, was the Tripartite Declaration issued in the name of the three Powers on 25 May 1950. This statement deprecated an arms race between Israel and the Arabs and laid down the principle that applications for arms should be considered only 'in the light of legitimate self-defence and . . . defence of the area as a whole'. The Declaration then went on to pledge the three Powers to take action both within and

<sup>1</sup> 460 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 36 (18 January 1949).

outside the United Nations should they discover that preparations were being made to violate the agreed armistice lines.<sup>1</sup>

The Tripartite Declaration, though it introduced the only element of stability into the unsettled Arab-Israeli situation, did nothing to conciliate the governments of the Arab states. They remained doubtful whether the three Powers would ever really use force to restrain Israel should it seek to expand its frontiers by aggression, which they regarded as inevitable. At the same time they denounced the Declaration as an attempt to sanctify armistice lines which in their view Israel had won by breaking the United Nations truce with the acquiescence of the United States, one of the signatories of the Declaration.

### *Britain and Egypt*

The Anglo-Egyptian relationship at the end of the Second World War was expressed in the Treaty of Alliance signed by representatives of all the Egyptian political parties in August 1936 when the situation in the Mediterranean was disturbed by Mussolini's attack on Ethiopia and the outbreak of the civil war in Spain in July. By 1945 the treaty, which could be renegotiated at the request of either signatory after twenty years, had become intolerable to Egyptian opinion. It committed Egypt to assist Britain in the event of war and in 1945 no war was in sight. It gave Britain authority to use Egyptian ports, aerodromes and means of communication and to call for martial law and censorship in Egypt, not merely in war, but in the event of an 'apprehended international emergency' (Article 7). Coupled with the right accorded to Britain to station forces in the Suez Canal zone 'as an essential means of communication between the different parts of the British Empire' (Article 8), this meant that the whole life of Egypt could be brought under British control, as it was during the Second World War, if an international conflict impended. Since in 1945 Britain was still a great Power, with great Powers as allies, and Egypt an insignificant Power, economically underdeveloped and overcrowded, the definition of the emergency in which these powers were assumed by Britain would in all likelihood be one designed to suit its interests rather than those of Egypt. Above all, the hinge on which the 1936 treaty turned was that the Egyptian army was unable 'to ensure by its own resources the liberty and entire security of navigation of the (Suez) Canal' (Article 8) and that until such time as Egypt was able to defend herself the special position of Britain should remain.<sup>2</sup> This was

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 28 May 1950.

<sup>2</sup> Egypt No. 1 (1936), Cmd. 5270.

offensive to Egyptian national pride. Egyptian politicians saw no reason why, if India, Burma, Pakistan, Ceylon were deemed capable of governing themselves, Egypt should not be included. The British reply was that Egypt, being sovereign over the Canal, was in a special position and exposed to special dangers.

Although Britain was not obliged to enter into talks for the revision of the treaty until 1956, the Labour Government agreed at the end of 1945 that it would negotiate, provided there was no prospect of British forces having to leave Egypt with nothing but the Egyptian army to replace them. As Bevin said in the Commons on 24 May 1946:

'There must not be a vacuum. If the Egyptian Government try to force a situation in which there is a vacuum—meaning that we have gone and that there is nothing there for security instead, regional defence or other organisation—to that I can never agree. But I have offered . . . a new basis of approach. Perhaps partnership is the wrong term, but it is a joint effort for mutual defence, not only in the interests in Great Britain and her Commonwealth, but in the interests ultimately of the contribution to what I hope will yet become a United Nations defence for the security of the world.'<sup>1</sup>

The 'new approach' mentioned by Bevin was incorporated in a draft agreement the Foreign Secretary initialled with Sidky Pasha, the Egyptian Prime Minister, in October. Sidky Pasha had come to London with his Foreign Minister after talks during the summer between a strong all-party Egyptian delegation and a British delegation led by Lord Stansgate, the British Minister for Air, in Cairo. The essence of the agreement was that British forces would withdraw from Cairo, Alexandria and the Delta to the Canal zone by 31 March 1947, and from the zone itself by 1 September 1949. Egypt on its side promised to take action in the event of aggression against adjacent countries, to enter with Britain into a Joint Defence Board, intended to make recommendations to the two Governments about events threatening Middle East security, and to consult with Britain on the necessary measures to ward off a threat to the security of the area.<sup>2</sup> The draft agreement, although it committed Egypt neither to fight at Britain's side nor to provide bases for British forces in future conflicts, fell to the ground when King Farouk dissolved the Egyptian delegation to the talks on 26 November and forced Sidky himself to resign on 9 December.

<sup>1</sup> 423 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 788.

<sup>2</sup> Egypt No. 2 (1947) Cmd. 7179.

*The problem of the Sudan*

A different outcome might have resulted from the Bevin-Sidky talks had they not been enmeshed with the future of the Sudan, since the Egyptian claim, partly on emotional, partly on economic grounds, that Egypt and the Sudan be united under Farouk gave the British Government a solid basis for refusing to sell the Sudan in return for Egyptian consent to a joint security pact. The Sudan was Egyptian territory when Kitchener conquered it in 1898 after the revolt of the Mahdi from the Khedive, who ruled Egypt on behalf of the Ottoman Sultan. The Condominium created in 1899 to govern the Sudan was ostensibly a joint Anglo-Egyptian arrangement; in fact the country was thenceforward to all intents a British protectorate. While the northern Sudanese were predominantly Arabs and Egypt's concern with the maintenance of the level of the Nile, on which her life literally hung, created an argument for unity, the southern part of the country was inhabited by more backward African peoples too unpolitical to decide whether they desired amalgamation with the more advanced state to the north. In the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936 the question of sovereignty over the Sudan was left undecided, but 'new conventions in future' were envisaged to replace, if necessary, the 1899 arrangement. Britain wished to postpone the question again in 1946 and merely agreed that the Sudan should be considered as forming a 'dynastic union' with Egypt, but only so long as the British-appointed Governor-Generalship, created in 1899, and the arrangements for the defence of the Sudan continued in force. Since defence was mainly a British responsibility the 'dynastic union' could never be consummated without British consent, and the British Government made clear that they would not consent without having consulted Sudanese wishes.

Since the two questions of the Canal base and the future of the Sudan remained tied together in the Egyptian mind no progress was registered during the following three years. Egypt took her case to the United Nations Security Council in July 1947 on the grounds, first, that British troops were 'an offence to Egypt's dignity, a hindrance to its normal development, as well as an infringement of fundamental principles of sovereign equality' and, secondly, that Britain had encouraged an artificial separatism in the Sudan in order to destroy the unity of the Nile Valley. Although the Egyptian delegation at the Security Council had the support of the Soviet Union on the first count, the Soviet delegate, Mr Gromyko, offered no solution of the Sudanese problem and the debate was at length adjourned without Egypt having established her contention that the

<sup>1</sup> 428 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 295-6.



1936 treaty was no longer valid. A similar deadlock attended talks between Sir William Slim, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and Egyptian Ministers in March 1949 and again in June and July 1951; Egyptian Ministers continued to argue that British troops were intolerable not merely in peacetime, but even in times of imminent threat of war, and that Egypt and the Sudan were one country and should be ruled by one government. Detailed British proposals had been set before the Egyptians on 11 April 1951 at a time when British tempers were ruffled by the domestic financial position, which was not improved by Egyptian demands for release of Egypt's sterling balances in London, and by the Egyptian refusal to allow British tankers bound for Haifa, in Israel, to sail through the Suez Canal. The British suggested that their forces should leave the Canal zone at the end of 1956, but that they should be allowed to return in an emergency; in the meantime the base would be kept in working order by British civilians, who entered as the troops left, and operated by a joint Anglo-Egyptian control board. These proposals were totally rejected by Egypt on 24 April, as were new British proposals on 17 August which involved a regional pact to guard the Canal zone. The United States, France and Turkey had already signified their willingness to join such a pact, Turkey having agreed to do so in return for her admission to the NATO pact along with Greece in September.

When the proposal was set before Egypt by the three Western Powers and Turkey on 13 October in the revised form of an integrated Middle East Command it was pointed out that no British troops would remain in Egypt which were not under the new command, and that in any case Egypt would be able to forbid the movement of troops in her territory.<sup>1</sup> None of this, however, sufficed to remove Egyptian suspicions that the command was merely a new way of perpetuating the British occupation and the general Arab argument that the danger came not from Russia but from Israel, the alleged pawn of the Western Powers themselves. On 15 October, two days after the delivery of the four-Power defence proposals, and of a British proposal for an international commission to watch over the constitutional development of the Sudan, the Egyptian Wafd Government under Nabas Pasha, who had signed the 1936 treaty, enacted two bills, one of which *abrogated the treaty and the other purported to end the Condominium for the Sudan and to unite the Sudan with Egypt under the Egyptian crown.*<sup>2</sup>

These enactments did nothing to change the situation. They did, however, add fuel to Egyptian nationalistic feeling against

<sup>1</sup> Egypt No. 2 (1951), Cmd. 8419, pp. 24-6, 43-5.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 8419, pp. 46-7.

Britain to such an extent that it defeated Farouk's attempts to control it and instigated events which led to his abdication. On 16 October, the day after the enactment of the bills, Egyptian students rioted against British camps at Ismailia and Port Said and when the British commander, Sir George Erskine, imposed controls on traffic entering and leaving the Canal zone, Egyptian workers left the zone in large numbers. Attacks in December on British convoys going to and from water infiltration plants (without which water used in the zone was undrinkable) in the zone led to the construction of a new road by Erskine and when fifty houses in an Egyptian village were demolished to make room for it, the Egyptian Ambassador in London was recalled. By January 1952 British tanks were in action in the attempt to maintain order and security at Suez and battle raged at the end of the month at Ismailia, where British efforts to disarm the Egyptian auxiliary police resulted in the killing of forty-one Egyptians and three British. The fighting at Ismailia was the signal for 'Black Saturday' (24 January) in Cairo where 500 auxiliary police mutinied and what seemed like organised gangs followed by hysterical mobs set fire to European buildings and the tourist quarter. Farouk, though he himself had left the calling out of Egyptian troops until the late afternoon, dismissed his Prime Minister, Nahas Pasha, for failing to maintain law and order. He then called on Ali Maher to form a government, thus ending the Wafd domination. Meanwhile, the officers who were called to put down the riot on 26 January set about preparing a *coup* which resulted in Farouk's abdication and the formation of the Revolutionary Command Council under Colonel Mohammed Neguib in July.

The officers' uprising provided an opportunity for a new start on settling the British deadlock with Egypt. The *coup* was welcomed in Britain as affording an end to the corrupt and unstable governments of the last few months of the Farouk era and since its architects were soldiers, they were thought better able to understand the security considerations which British Ministers were constantly urging on Cairo. Moreover, the United States took a favourable view of the reformist character of the Officers' regime, especially good relations being established between Neguib and the American Ambassador, Jefferson Caffery. Since American hopes of drawing Egypt into the projected containing belt against Russia in the Middle East thus revived, it could be expected that increased pressure from Washington would be felt in London to treat Egypt generously. But, while Neguib and his colleagues were not outwardly anti-Western, it soon became clear that they were no more willing than Farouk's Ministers to be hurried into a defence pact centred upon some new arrangement

for the Canal base. Neguib's speeches were monotonously anti-British. Secret circulars distributed by the Free Officers' Organisation soon after their seizure of power showed distinct neutralist leanings and the Minister of State for Propaganda (afterwards National Guidance) in the new Government, Fathi Ridwan, had been an advocate for a non-aggression pact with Russia. By the end of the year these tendencies were sufficiently in evidence for the Western idea of a Middle East Defence Organisation to look distinctly a non-starter.

These inauspicious beginnings to British relations with the Revolutionary Command Council were belied in the following year when the obstacle which had caused the difficulties since the war, the linking of the Sudan with the Suez base, was removed. The Neguib Government found it much easier than did the Wafd to separate the two issues. After the troubles in the Canal zone in January 1952 it was imperative to reach some agreement with Britain and it was worth Neguib's while to pay a high price to secure a final British evacuation of the Suez base in order to consolidate the new regime. The constitutional changes in Cairo also much improved the prospects of extending Egyptian influence over the Sudan as it approached self-government and independence. The passing of Farouk and, with him, the principle of the unity of Egypt and the Sudan under the monarchy opened the way to other forms of relationship more acceptable to the Sudanese than the rigid one of Egyptian sovereignty; Neguib's own popularity in the Sudan was obviously of considerable assistance here. Moreover, Eden told the House of Commons on 22 October that the self-government statute would be put into effect in the Sudan and further obstinacy looked as if it might ruin Egypt's chances of influencing the new developments.<sup>1</sup> Neguib therefore devoted himself, not to opposing Sudanese self-determination until the principle of unity with Egypt was accepted, but to winning over the Sudanese parties to the Egyptian point of view in advance of the elections which had been promised for November 1952 under a draft constitution for self-government, which had been approved by the Legislative Assembly in Khartoum in April.

The result of this change in Egypt's position in regard to the claim for compulsory unity under the Egyptian crown was the agreement on Sudanese self-government and self-determination finally signed on 12 February 1953. This provided for full exercise of self-determination at the end of three years, supreme constitutional authority in the meantime being exercised by the Governor-General with the aid of a commission consisting of two Sudanese, one British, one

<sup>1</sup> 505 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 1014-5.

Egyptian and one Pakistani representative. An international commission of seven would prepare and supervise elections. British and Egyptian forces were to make arrangements to withdraw from the Sudan when the Sudanese Parliament, at the end of the three years, decided that the arrangements for self-determination should be put into effect. The latter would take the form of the election of a Constituent Assembly to 'decide the future of the Sudan as an integral whole', which would include the choice of uniting with Egypt or complete independence. During the transition period a special committee would put into effect the Sudanisation of the administration, the police, the Sudan Defence Force and other services.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Suez base agreement*

The Sudan settlement opened the way for a solution of the far more difficult question of the Suez base. Some idea of the importance of the base may be gained from the fact that the installations, a tangled mass of workshops, railways and strongpoints in an area as big as Wales, were valued at between £500 million and £700 million. One of the factors making for a fresh approach in 1953 was the Government's belief that the base was of declining importance in an age of nuclear warfare, though the decision to move the joint headquarters for the Middle East to Cyprus in December 1952 was criticised by the so-called 'Suez group' in the Conservative Party on the ground that Cyprus, which in any case had no deep-water port, was equally exposed to nuclear weapons.

Ideally the British Government still preferred the evacuation from the base to be linked with the formation of a regional defence arrangement to include the base. This was also the American view. In talks with President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles in Washington in March 1953 Eden gained their support for the idea of a phased British withdrawal on condition the base could be reactivated in the event of war and Egypt joined some regional defence scheme. The Americans were unwilling to press the point, however, when the Egyptian Government refused to allow the President's nominee, General Hull, to join the talks on the base, even though Egypt was in receipt of American economic aid which gave Washington abundant power to insist. Eden was in fact driven to make the strongest representations to Dulles when rumours reached London of an impending delivery of American weapons to Cairo on the very eve of the talks.<sup>2</sup> Help was eventually to come to Britain not

<sup>1</sup> Egypt No. 2 (1953), Cmd. 8767.

<sup>2</sup> *Full Circle*, London, Cassell, 1960, pp. 253-4.

from Washington but from the Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers who conferred with Colonel Abdul Nasser (who had replaced Neguib in Egypt in November 1953) on their way home from a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference in London which had ended with the issue of a communiqué insisting that the base must be effectively maintained.

After further difficulties and a postponement of the talks in the following year on account of the struggle for power between Neguib and Nasser, the Egyptian Government at length consented to the reactivation of the base in the event of an attack on the Arab League states or on Turkey, but not on Iran, thus providing a tenuous link between Egypt and the northern tier. Heads of agreement were finally signed in Cairo by the British Minister of War, Anthony Head, on 27 July and the treaty itself by the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, Anthony Nutting, in Cairo on 19 October. The agreement was to last for seven years and provided for the withdrawal of British forces from the Suez base within twenty months. The British Government undertook to maintain agreed installations at the base by means of British and Egyptian civilian technicians (thus, by denying them uniforms, avoiding injury to the Egyptian sense of sovereignty) while Egypt agreed that the base should be reactivated, that is, Britain should place it on a war footing again, in the event of an armed attack on either Egypt or any other member of the Arab League or Turkey. Egypt and Britain would consult together in the event of an attack or threat of attack on the above countries. The base agreement was accompanied by an Egyptian undertaking to continue to respect the Constantinople convention of 1888 on freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal and was sweetened by a financial arrangement by which Britain released £10 million in Egyptian sterling balances which it had previously blocked and Egypt freed sterling area imports from restrictions imposed during the troubles.<sup>1</sup> Although the agreement was sharply criticised by Attlee, then leader of the Opposition in the Commons, on the ground that the Government had been compelled to take far worse terms for the evacuation than any they could have had since the war, and more bitterly by the Conservative 'Suez group' twenty-seven of the members of which voted against the Government, it was widely welcomed in Britain as ending a long and bitter struggle.

#### *Middle East defence and the Bagdad pact*

As an aftermath to the 1948 war in Palestine the Arab states had formed a defence pact between themselves but this was without

<sup>1</sup> Egypt No. 2 (1954), Cmd. 9298.

substance and remained to all intents a dead letter; in any case it excluded outside Powers and would almost certainly be unable to contain any Communist incursion from the north. This was the Inter-Arab Joint Defence Alliance and Economic Pact adopted by a majority of the Council of the Arab League on 13 April 1950. A permanent military commission representing the General Staffs of the signatory states was created together with a Joint Defence Council consisting of Foreign and Defence Ministers, both organs being under the control of the Arab League Council. The pact was signed by Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. Iraq signed a revised version of the pact at a meeting of the Arab League Council in Cairo after one more abortive discussion of an Arab federation. Jordan did likewise in February 1952 following the assassination of Abdullah in the previous July.

Britain could not seriously consider this arrangement as a substitute for Western plans for an effective defence system. Moreover, British thinking on the strategical picture in the Middle East had to take account of rising American interest in filling the gaps in the Asian containment belt around Russia's land mass. After his tour of twelve Arab and Asian countries in May 1953 the United States Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, had returned convinced that for the time being the Arab states were improbable starters for any Western-backed defence network to cover the Middle East. Reliance would therefore have to be placed on Turkey, with its geographical location on Russia's southern flank, its considerable army and long history of opposition to Russian advances towards the Mediterranean. Turkey, along with Greece, had been admitted to the Atlantic Pact on America's urging in October 1951. Another candidate for the new Asian containment girdle was Pakistan, which had every reason for seeking American economic and military assistance in view of the quarrel with India over Kashmir and which was to join the American-sponsored South East Asia defence organisation pact concluded at Manila in April 1954. American policy therefore concentrated on bringing Turkey and Pakistan together, thus linking NATO with the South East Asia defence treaty and in doing so insulating the military vacuum of the Middle East against Russian penetration, even though of that penetration there was yet no sign.

In the autumn of 1953 the Governor-General of Pakistan, Mr Ghulam Mohammed, fulfilled an invitation to visit Washington and, although President Eisenhower denied at the end of the visit that military aid and bases had been discussed in detail, it became apparent in the New Year that Pakistan was in fact negotiating a friendship pact with Turkey on American initiative and also a

military aid agreement with the United States. It was no surprise when on 19 February 1954 the Turkish and Pakistani governments announced their intention to study methods of collaborating for peace and security. On 2 April a treaty was signed to cover five years of co-operation and was accompanied by an invitation to other states to join. The striking feature of the pact was its non-committal character: it merely pledged both sides to study methods of co-operation should an unprovoked attack be launched against either. No doubt this moderate obligation was intended to lull Soviet and Indian suspicions, by now thoroughly aroused, and to serve as an inducement to others to join. Meanwhile, on 26 February the Prime Minister of Pakistan had announced the impending receipt of military aid from the United States. An aid agreement was signed on 19 May after the pact with Turkey had been effected.

While pessimistic about the intentions and strength of the Arab states in general, the American Government hoped that all countries in the Middle East would gradually come to appreciate the example set by Turkey and Pakistan. In particular they regarded Iran and Iraq as hopeful prospects. Both countries, especially after the Iranian 1951 oil crisis had been settled, had strong inducements to enter defensive agreements against Russia. Iran still had lively memories of the Soviet war of nerves directed against it in 1945-6 and suspected Soviet intrigue during the semi-dictatorship of Moussadig. The very proximity of Russia, however, which gave Iran a natural interest in any strong defensive pact, also acted as a deterrent and it was not until September 1955 that Teheran felt strong enough to join a Middle East defence arrangement. Iraq, the nearest to Russia of all the Arab states, was in a similar position to Iran in that her minority peoples to the north overlapped Russia's southern frontier. Hence Iraq might one day find herself confronted by the same kind of Soviet-sponsored secessionist demand which Moscow had imposed on Iran in 1946, an independent Kurdistan playing the same role in Iraq's case as Soviet Azerbaijan had in Iran's. But Iraq was an Arab state and hence any Iraqi decision to enter a military treaty under the aegis of the Western Powers must appear to the rest of the Arab world as a betrayal of the Arab cause against the West. By the same token it was bound to revive suspicions that Iraq proposed to establish an hegemony over the Arab world with Western help.

These difficulties in the way of Iraq's participation in any anti-Soviet defence system were fought and temporarily overcome by the Iraqi Prime Minister, the pro-Western statesman Nuri As-Said, who, after his overwhelming victory in the Iraqi elections in September 1954, dominated the politics of his country until his assassination at the hand of nationalists in the July revolution of

1958. Nuri Pasha had little if any of the passionate neutralism of the typical Arab nationalist in his make-up. While neutralism signified to him a barren and negative struggle against the West, he lived rather for the prospect of making his country the leader of the Arab world through a judicious blend of Iraq's own natural wealth and the assistance of the West. This ambition naturally brought him into conflict with Egypt, Iraq's acknowledged rival for predominance in the Arab world, and with Saudi Arabia and its traditional hostility towards the Hashimite dynasty of Iraq.

At a meeting of the Arab states in Cairo in September 1954 Nuri argued the case for turning the Arab League security pact into a regional defence arrangement with Britain and the United States. This was firmly opposed by Colonel Nasser, now leader of the Egyptian revolutionary regime. Thus began the struggle between the two men which reached a crisis after the announcement of 12 January 1955 of an impending treaty of mutual defence between Iraq and Turkey. This news was at once followed by feverish efforts by the two Arab leaders, Nuri and Nasser, to recruit Arab support for and against the proposed pact. Nuri unsuccessfully canvassed Syrian and Lebanese agreement to join with Iraq and Turkey in the pact, which was signed on 24 February and was known as the Bagdad pact. Nasser summoned a meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Arab League to meet in Cairo on 22 January with the object of arraigning Nuri for desertion of the Arab collective security pact and for consorting with Turkey, with whom the Arabs still had an unsettled quarrel about Alexandretta. Nuri failed to attend the Cairo meeting on a plea of indisposition but said that he would not regard himself as bound by the Arab League security pact if the League condemned Iraq. Nasser retorted with the threat to leave the Arab League if Iraq signed the pact with Turkey.

Britain welcomed the Turko-Iraqi pact as a godsend. It seemed a distinct contribution towards filling the military void in the Middle East without involving Britain in efforts to cajole the Arab states into a Western-oriented regional pact, in which she had already failed. At the same time the Bagdad pact seemed to open the way to a solution of the problem of British bases in Iraq. By the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930 the RAF enjoyed the use of the air base at Habbaniyah and Shaiba and Iraq agreed to place her communications system at Britain's disposal in time of war.<sup>1</sup> This agreement had been replaced by the Treaty of Portsmouth, signed on 15 January 1948, which offered similar facilities to British forces.<sup>2</sup> Violent anti-British

<sup>1</sup> Treaty Series No. 15 (1931), Cmd. 3797.

<sup>2</sup> Iraq No. 1 (1948). Treaty of Alliance between HM in respect of the UK, and HM the King of Iraq. Cmd. 7309.



demonstrations in Iraq, however, prevented the ratification of the Portsmouth treaty and by 1955 the original treaty of 1930 had only two years to run. The British Government therefore decided to adhere to the Bagdad pact, the adherence being formally completed on 4 April 1955, as a means of concluding new arrangements with Iraq to replace the abortive treaty of 1948. Thus, by supplemental agreements signed by Britain and Iraq on the same day as Britain adhered to the Bagdad pact the two air bases were recognised as under Iraqi sovereignty but the RAF's right to use them was affirmed in accordance with the mutual defence provisions of Article I of the pact. The British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, emphasised in the Commons, however, that Britain was not a party to the exchange of letters between the Turkish and Iraqi governments at the time of the signing of the pact, which could be construed as committing Turkey to support Iraq in the event of hostilities between the latter and Israel.<sup>1</sup>

It was not long before the welcome given to the Bagdad pact and Britain's adherence to it on both sides of Parliament was recognised as premature. No other Western Power followed in Britain's steps. France seemed to fear that to do so would be to compromise herself with Syria, which it was advising not to join the pact on the grounds that it might turn out to be one more British scheme for uniting the Fertile Crescent against French influence. Nor did the United States join the pact, though it did become a member of its military committee two years later, despite the fact that much of the inspiration behind the pact came from Washington. The reason for American hesitations was thought to be unwillingness to be too much identified with British policies in the eyes of Arab nationalists. It was said that the United States preferred to wait until the dust of Anglo-Egyptian quarrels had settled. Whatever the motives, the effect may well have been to add to Colonel Nasser's deep prejudice against the pact, which he now saw to be without apparent American support and which might even have incurred American dislike.

The immediate consequence of the Bagdad pact, it seemed, was to inflame everybody against everybody. Egyptian hostility against Britain, which had seemingly been allayed by the Suez base and Sudan settlements, was re-awakened. Whereas before the pact was signed Nasser seemed genuinely poised in indecision on the issue of commitment to the West, the pact, by once more kindling suspicion of British intrigue, precipitated him into the neutralism into which he was being induced at the Bandoeng conference of African and Asian states at the very time when Britain adhered to the pact. Nor did

<sup>1</sup> 539 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 318 (30 March).

the pact do anything to improve Arab-Israeli tensions. Israel, which was prevented from joining the pact by Article 5, which excluded from membership any country not recognised by the Arab states, feared that Iraq was being reinforced against it, while Egypt, believing that the pact divided the Arab countries and was therefore to Israel's advantage, began to fear Israel more. The resulting Israeli-Egyptian tensions, which had been taking the form of sporadic frontier raids throughout 1954, culminated in a full-scale clash between the armies of the two countries in the Gaza area on 28 February 1955. Egypt suffered a second heavy defeat. The effect was to reinforce Colonel Nasser's ambition to make the extermination of Israel the primary basis of his claim to the leadership of Arab nationalism.

### *The Suez Canal: roots of conflict*

That claim required some dramatic *coup* to fix it in the Arab imagination. Hence there was a certain inevitability about the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company announced by President Nasser in a speech in Alexandria on 26 July 1956.<sup>1</sup> A revolutionary nationalist regime is driven to appropriate any vestige of foreign control which exists in its territory; the campaign against foreign influence was in fact the essence of Nasser's revolution in Egypt in the same sense in which the campaign against world capitalism was the essence of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917. The Suez Canal was the world's most striking example of foreign enterprise within the territory of a state passing through a nationalist revolution. Egypt had seen Dr Moussadig nationalising the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company with impunity in 1951 and the World Court declaring its lack of jurisdiction. Britain had refrained from using force then, largely owing to American pressure, and if it challenged Nasser's action over the Canal in 1956 American restraints were likely to be even greater owing to the growing American desire to win over the uncommitted states and the occurrence of an American Presidential election in November 1956 in preparation for which the Republican incumbent, Mr Eisenhower, was being built up as a 'man of peace'. Moreover, while the nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company involved Britain alone, most of the world maritime Powers would be affected by action over the Canal, and if one or two of these countries decided to come to terms with Nasser the commercial advantages to them would be very great. Nasser was too much of a realist not to understand the effect of

<sup>1</sup> The Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Documents on International Affairs, 1956*, London, OUP, 1959, pp. 77-113.

economic need on countries which are proposing to stand together on a point of principle. True, Moussadig's action in 1951 had turned out unfavourably for Iran when a settlement was reached with Britain in 1954, since Iran had to be content with a smaller cut of the world oil market. But no such reverse could happen to Egypt since, barring the construction of a new canal through the Negeb, now in Israel, world trade must make use of this highway on an intensive scale. Finally, since the lease of the Canal company was due to expire in 1968, Nasser no doubt calculated that Egypt could not be utterly damned for anticipating what would come into its possession in a few years anyway.

To this should be added the effects of the struggle with Israel. To almost every Arab without exception Israel was beyond doubt the main source of danger and at the same time standing proof of Western imperialism. No Arab could admit that the Israeli victory in 1949 had been due to any other reason than the refusal of the West to supply the Arabs with adequate arms and the means to acquire them; since weapons bought by the Jews on world markets with American money had, in the Arab view, won them Palestine, only weapons could revise the armistice lines of 1949, or, at best, drive the Jews into the sea. But the Arabs found it just as difficult to buy arms against Israel after the war as before. Under the Tripartite Declaration of 1950 Britain, the United States and France recognised that the Arab states and Israel needed armaments for internal security and legitimate self-defence and to permit them to play their part in the defence of the area as a whole, but opposed the development of an arms race. Moreover, Britain had made clear that while arms would be forthcoming for states which accepted its defence policy in the Middle East they would be denied to those which could not so commit themselves. Yet it appeared to Nasser that any danger from the Soviet Union would come, not in the form of a military attack, but in that of propaganda and subversion. To commit Egypt to a Western pact, be considered, would not only be to lose his freedom in foreign policy but to attract the very Communist subversion which Western policy sought to defend Egypt against.

The dilemma became crucial in February 1955 when Egyptian forces in the Gaza strip suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of Israel. Private Egyptian border raids had been going on in the Gaza strip since the end of the Palestine war, but the Egyptian army had never been involved. When the Israelis overran the frontier in force in February, Nasser's army was manhandled. Again the cry was heard that the West, having planted Israel in Arab territory, was starving the Arabs of the means to defend themselves against it. The logical corollary was the agreement concluded by Cairo with

Czechoslovakia, which meant of course the Soviet Union, in September 1955. Between the two events lay Nasser's attendance at the Bandoeng conference in April and the signing of a friendship treaty with India. At one stroke Egypt found, or appeared to find, the arms which it could only get from the West at the cost of tying its defence policy to an East-West conflict which seemed increasingly irrelevant to the struggle with Israel. At the same time, the policy of positive neutrality which was growing in Nasser's hands, and which had received a fillip from Nuri As-Said's failure to win support in the Arab world for the Bagdad pact, promised at Bandoeng to give a new access to international importance to Egypt owing to the growing force of neutralism in Asia. This new company of the uncommitted in which Nasser moved during 1955 provided a sympathetic audience for the nationalisation of the Canal. The sight of an uncommitted African country defying the West by obtaining arms from countries which expected no commitments in return, while taking over a profitable venture and using it to raise living standards which had been allegedly neglected under Western influence, was bound to raise Nasser's prestige, not only among the Arabs, but throughout the neutralist world.

The West's reaction to the Egyptian arms deal with the Soviet bloc, in the Arab eyes, seemed to demonstrate that the West was less interested in Arab independence than in its own struggle with the Communist states. At the end of 1955 Britain and the United States had agreed to supplement a World Bank loan to Nasser to finance the projected High Dam at Aswan. This project had been talked about in Egypt for at least twenty years;<sup>1</sup> the cost would be enormous and there was no immediate prospect of financing it either from Arab resources or from the Soviet bloc. It was the kind of undertaking which, if successfully launched, would give Egypt a secure predominance in the Arab world. For this reason Nasser was anxious to conciliate the West and during 1955 kept the anti-imperialist campaign under control. In fact, during 1955 so long as there was a prospect that the finance for the Dam would come from the West, Egyptian policy was in a dilemma. The West had an interest in reducing Arab-Israeli tensions; with this end in view Eden made a speech at Guildhall on 9 November 1955 proposing in effect that Israel make territorial concessions in favour of the Arab states, and the government refused to arm Israel even after the Soviet bloc arms deal with Egypt.<sup>2</sup> Yet the conflict between Nasser and

<sup>1</sup> Colonel Nasser said the project had been in existence since 1924 (RILA, *Documents on International Affairs 1956*, p. 95).

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 10 November 1955; 549 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 2128-9 (Gaitskell, 7 March 1956).

Nuri required Cairo to accentuate the struggle with Israel as a means of winning Arab opinion away from Iraq, which was accused of having betrayed the Arab cause and deserted the Arab Collective Security Pact of 1950. When the United States, followed by Britain suddenly withdrew the offer to help finance the Dam on 19 July 1956, the dilemma was suddenly resolved. The news was disclosed on Nasser's return from a conference with his fellow neutralists, Tito and Nehru, at Brioni in Yugoslavia. In his Alexandria speech on 26 July he boasted of these meetings as symbolising Egypt's accession to the ranks of Powers which were shaping world history. To accept at this point a rebuff from the West which threatened both to destroy the dream of the Dam on which all Nasser's hopes were pinned and to force Egypt into an international alignment contrary to the direction in which Nasser's foreign policy was moving might have shorn away the basis of his power.

If an Egyptian nationalisation of the Canal Company was predictable (though there is no evidence that the British Foreign Office predicted it, even after the denunciation of the 1936 treaty and the Sudan condominium agreement by Nahas Pasha in 1951), the British Government were equally bound to contest it. Britain was the largest single user of the Canal, accounting in 1955 for 28.3 per cent of an annually increasing tonnage passing through the Canal.<sup>1</sup> The Canal Company, though its shareholders were foreign, the British Government holding 44 per cent of the shares, was registered under Egyptian law and, at first sight, nothing in law prevented a Government nationalising a foreign-owned concern operating on its own soil. On the other hand the Canal Company was part of an international agreement, the Suez Canal Convention of 1888 which was deemed to bind Egypt since it formed part of the obligations she had taken over from the Sultan of Turkey, who had signed the convention on Egypt's behalf; Egypt had reaffirmed the 1888 Convention when she signed the Suez base agreement in 1954. The legal position was thus not watertight from the British viewpoint, but there was little doubt that Nasser was not entitled to make off with a property which was part of international treaty when he was in no position to fulfil the undoubted legal obligation to pay compensation since he had implied in his speech on 26 July that he meant to use the Canal to finance the Aswan Dam. The alleged £35 million a year profit of the company, Nasser said, would be taken.<sup>2</sup> Above all, the unilateral and sudden seizure of the company threw doubt on Nasser's assurances, which he was careful to make and to

<sup>1</sup> 552 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1969 (15 May 1956, Mr Dodds-Parker, the Joint Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs).

<sup>2</sup> *RJA*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

try to uphold throughout the crisis, that freedom of navigation through the Canal would be respected in accordance with the 1888 Convention.

Britain had had a long and bitter experience of the one-sided denunciation of international treaties which, if successful, only whets the appetite for further violations. There was in the British political consciousness the half-guilty memory of how the dictators before the war had followed up their acts of force with assurances which the good-natured democracies had accepted until they found themselves in a position where there was no alternative but to fight for survival. 'The pattern,' Eden said in a broadcast on 8 August 'is familiar to many of us, my friends; we all know this is how fascist governments behave and we all remember, only too well, what the cost can be in giving in to fascism.'<sup>1</sup> This was a deep-seated emotion affecting, by a curious perversion, the liberal-minded people who otherwise were most averse to using force against Asian or Arab nationalism. Twenty years before Suez another dictator had sent his forces into the demilitarised Rhineland. Though British opinion was almost unanimously willing to condone this on the ground that the Rhineland was, after all, German territory, it was realised later that Hitler's action decisively turned the military balance of power in Europe to Germany's advantage. The Foreign Secretary then, Eden, was the Prime Minister in 1956. Only a year before he had succeeded the great architect of opposition to Axis defiance, Churchill, who, almost alone, had called attention to the lawlessness of the dictators in the 1930s. Eden, who, when he resigned from the Government in 1938 rather than do further business with Mussolini, was described by Churchill as 'one strong young figure standing up against the long, dismal, drawling tides of drift and surrender', must have felt that the old man would certainly approve.<sup>2</sup>

But when it is asked how Eden and many other able and experienced politicians, such as the Leader of the Opposition, Hugh Gaitskell, could have confused Egypt with Germany, whatever the resemblances between Nasser and Hitler or Mussolini, the answer lies in the third factor which predisposed British opinion to react violently to the nationalisation of the Canal. On balance, British public opinion accepted the decline of British power in the post-war world with tired resignation rather than truculence. The remarkable transformation of the British Empire effected by the grant of independence to India and Pakistan in 1947 was not only without

<sup>1</sup> *The Listener*, 16 August 1956.

<sup>2</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. I, London, Cassell, 1948, p. 201.

precedent in its extent but also in the relative lack of dissension in Britain on the abandonment of the chief jewel in the imperial crown. One reason for this was that 'little Englandism' had always occupied a respectable place in British Radical thought and when, after the war, Britain felt no longer in the mood to continue to bear the cares and cost of empire this tradition revived. Nevertheless, residues of resentment remained, often at an unconscious level. The feeling of having been pushed out of one place abroad after another was bound to produce an outburst, especially if the pushing was dramatic and seemingly without excuse. Along with this went latent resentment about American carping at British imperialism, mingled with some jealousy at the transfer of leadership of the democratic world to the United States. When American politicians seemed to be positively egging on foreign nationalists against British rule and American diplomats privately comforted the Moussadigs and Neguibis with assurances that Washington did not entirely share the British view, the impulse to hit back was understandable.

Eden's championship of British rights against a restless dictator also echoed the rising resentment in Britain at the increasing strength of coloured peoples, not only in the world as a whole but in Britain as well. Eden's memoirs tell how his wife received a letter of sympathy from a London bus driver who observed, during the 'Law not War' demonstrations in the capital against the armed action in Egypt, that '80 per cent of the demonstrators were of foreign extraction and can be ignored'.<sup>1</sup> The fact that this element of blind dislike of the foreigner, who appeared to have kicked Britain off her old pinnacle, played a large part in the mood of the times is evident from the speed with which the Suez mood passed away in Britain. The incident dropped from sight, despite the fact that in 1956 it had aroused more controversy than any other international issue since Munich. People seemed conscious that they had given free rein to their ill temper and, having perhaps felt better for doing so, wanted to forget.

#### *British policy and practical questions*

There was no question that the Egyptian seizure of the Canal should be met with the strongest protest and energetic efforts to secure redress. On this Parliamentary opinion was at one when the crisis was debated in the House of Commons on 2 August; the same view was taken by the British Press. Eden took his stand on the two points, first, that Nasser's action was a breach of obligations and secondly that, as for the future, this vital international waterway

<sup>1</sup> Eden, *op. cit.*, p. 546.

should not be under the control of the politics of any one state.<sup>1</sup> The two claims had about them a surface plausibility, but difficulties inevitably arose when they were reduced to practical terms. The argument of the seizure as a breach of obligation (Eden's chapter in the memoirs on the first act of the Suez crisis is entitled "Theft") was never put to the test of an international tribunal, such as the World Court, by the British Government. There was some reason for not doing so; it could be foreseen that by the time the case had been decided, Nasser would probably have consolidated his *fait accompli*, and in the meantime the upkeep of the Canal would either have deteriorated to the point where shipping was affected or, if he succeeded in running the Canal efficiently, world opinion would see no reason why he should not go on doing so, whatever the Court said. Nevertheless, British insistence that the nationalisation was a breach of law, coupled with the refusal to put this to the test, undoubtedly weakened the legal argument in the ensuing controversy. The Opposition in Britain were roused to fury because the Government, having ascribed to Nasser an illegal act, then proceeded to commit what the critics represented as another illegality in order to redress it.

The second argument, that the Canal could not be left to the unfettered will of any one state,<sup>2</sup> also had its weakness as a political argument in the world controversy which developed. For it seemed to imply that a non-European state was less capable than a European of administering an international amenity and less inclined to do so impartially. This argument might have had more force had the Egyptians failed to maintain efficient passage for ships through the Canal. But they did not. Since the reaction of world opinion to the nationalisation would probably depend upon the success with which Egypt managed the Canal during the early days of nationalisation, Nasser did his utmost to keep it going, despite British and French pressure on the Canal pilots to refuse to serve under the new Egyptian administration. After the initial angry statement in the speech of 26 July that he would 'use the Canal to finance the Dam' nothing more was heard of this threat and no complaints were registered that the Canal was less efficiently maintained than before the crisis.

Two apparently fortuitous factors helped Nasser to win this victory in the management of the Canal during the early days of crisis. First, the mere fact that the British and French Governments advised their shippers to sail round the Cape rather than pay Canal

<sup>1</sup> 557 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 777 (Eden, 27 July 1956); *ibid.*, Cols 1603-6 (Eden, 2 August 1956).

<sup>2</sup> 577 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 919 (30 July).



dues to the Egyptian administration meant that traffic through the Canal was less during the first days of the crisis than it had been up to 26 July, thus allowing a breathing space for the transition of control to take place smoothly. Secondly, it soon became evident (and this was one of the many points during the crisis on which the British Government were poorly served by their experts) that pilotage through the Canal was much less difficult than had been assumed. The highly-paid Canal pilots naturally spoke of the impossibility of their being replaced by untrained Egyptians. But events showed that this problem had been overrated.

Apart from the political implications of the British argument that the Canal must not be left under the unfettered control of any one country, there was the question of how this was to be assured in practice. No one, not even Eden, denied that the Canal lay in territory under Egyptian sovereignty. This was affirmed with one voice by the Security Council when the issue was at length discussed by the Council on 24 September. The problem was what form of control of the Canal was to be exercised by the world trading community. The conclusion of the eighteen Powers which supported the British view at the conference at Lancaster House, London, which had been summoned for 16 August on the invitation of Britain, France and the United States, was that an international board representing the maritime Powers and Egypt should manage the Canal, thus replacing the nationalised Company.<sup>1</sup> The Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, led a mission of five<sup>2</sup> to Egypt in early September to take this proposal to Nasser; Menzies described the proposed board as a 'tenant' which would enjoy the use of the waterway the ownership of which would remain with Egypt.<sup>3</sup> Although there might be some parallel to this in the international consortiums which exercised similar functions in non-European countries and in such international concerns exploiting a resource in another country as the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, the board proposed by the eighteen Powers would be an inter-governmental organisation, not a private body, and there was certainly no precedent for such an inter-state organ running an amenity as important as the Canal within the territory of a sovereign state.

The form of internationalisation which Nasser proposed in return to the Menzies mission was a mere reaffirmation of the 1888 Convention on freedom of navigation through the Canal. It was in the conflict between these two conceptions of internationalisation that the Security Council divided. The resolution unanimously

<sup>1</sup> Egypt No. 1. (1956), Cmd. 9853, pp. 10-13.

<sup>2</sup> Representing Australia, Ethiopia, Iran, Sweden and the United States.

<sup>3</sup> Egypt No. 2 (1956), Cmd. 9856, p. 7.

adopted on 24 September, after the return of the Menzies mission on 9 September held that, while the principle of Egyptian sovereignty should be affirmed, freedom of navigation must be the basic principle in the management of the Canal. On the other hand, the Anglo-French resolution calling for international management of the Canal was defeated by a Soviet veto which echoed the protest of India and other neutralist states that Egyptian sovereignty would be infringed if such a body were imposed. The reason why the British Government argued that the six principles which won the assent of all the members of the Council were inadequate was that experience had shown that Egypt would not uphold freedom of navigation but would use the Canal to serve her own political ends. That experience was the blockade of Israel. It was, however, abundantly clear that, although Britain had protested against Egypt's infringement of Security Council resolutions deploring the denial of the Canal to ships bound for Israel, it had taken no further action. If Britain was not content with a mere reaffirmation of the 1888 Convention, which was the utmost to which the Security Council would agree and beyond which it was abundantly clear that Nasser was unwilling to go, the inference seemed to be that it was not afraid on Israel's behalf but on its own. This led to the conclusion that 'Canal politics' could be played in London as well as in Cairo. The United States was bound to see the nationalisation differently from Britain, though Dulles's apparent sympathy for the British case at the outset somewhat obscured this. The background to the American attitude was sneaking sympathy for Arab resistance to British control, all the stronger after Farouk and his licentious court had disappeared, coupled with American desire not to offend the Arab states which were sought as allies in the struggle with Russia. It could be argued in reply that Washington had not hesitated to withdraw the offer to assist the Aswan Dam, informing but not consulting Britain when doing so, in retaliation against Egypt's arms deal with Czechoslovakia in September 1955. But an influence equally important in that decision was the revision of the American view as to Egypt's capacity to service foreign loans for the Dam, especially after her cotton crop had been pledged to pay for the Soviet bloc arms. After all, the arms deal was in September 1955; the withdrawal of the offer of finance for the Dam was not effected until 10 July when the financial implications of Nasser's arms policy were becoming clearer. Besides, 1956 was election year in America and nothing was more capable of destroying the image of the Republicans as the 'peace party' than to be seen helping Britain and France to impose their will on a Middle Eastern state.

All this was understandable, but Dulles certainly appeared to

lead Eden into believing that the United States would remain at least benevolently neutral if force had to be used. The French never really believed this. At the decisive meeting between the British and French Prime Ministers and their Foreign Secretaries in Paris on 16 October when the ultimatum and the intervention were prepared, it was the British belief in American neutrality which apparently carried the day. This belief had already suffered more than one shock. Dulles told Eden when he came to London for a three-Power meeting at Foreign Minister level on 1 August that Egypt must be forced to 'disgorge' the Canal. Yet he seemed to be in no hurry to attend a meeting of the maritime Powers and, despite British warnings of the dangers of delay, the conference was put off until 16 August. At this conference Dulles insisted that the main stand should be on the 1888 Convention; with the Panama parallel in mind, he did not care to press the general principle of internationalisation, to which British policy was dedicated. After the failure of the Menzies mission and with the apparent object of postponing resort to more drastic steps, Dulles came out with the outline of a Canal Users' Association (SCUA). Eden had no alternative but to accept this and another conference was called to design the new body. This represented the eighteen Powers of the August conference and met in London from 19 to 21 September. The principle was that as many maritime nations as possible should be induced to club together for the purpose of employing pilots, collecting dues from members, part of which would be kept to defray the expenses of the Association and the rest passed on to Egypt, and co-ordinating traffic through the Canal. The Association could only be a makeshift and even so its success would be largely dependent upon two conditions, which Eden assumed would have American approval. The first was that member-states would bring pressure to bear on ships sailing under their flags to pay their Canal dues to the Association and act under its directives, using legal compulsion if possible. The second was that if the Association was to serve its primary purpose of demonstrating to Nasser the determination of the maritime Powers not to submit to his *coup* it must in the last resort have the backing of force. Eden made these two conditions clear in a speech describing the purpose and functions of the Association in the House of Commons on 12 September.<sup>1</sup>

Dulles not merely negated these two conditions, thus removing the basis of SCUA, but did so in circumstances almost suggesting collusion with Nasser in defeating British purposes. The United States Government failed to compel American shippers to act through SCUA and though ships sailing under the United States flag

<sup>1</sup> 558 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 10-15.

formed a small proportion of the total number of vessels using the Canal, this failure reflected upon American seriousness in regard to an organisation they themselves had suggested. Even more damaging to the prospects of SCUA was a statement made by Dulles at a press conference on 13 September, immediately after Eden's speech in the Commons on the Association. In this he professed ignorance of the actual words used in the House of Commons by Eden, in itself an alarming statement in regard to a diplomat as precise as the Prime Minister, and then said that Eden surely could not mean that force would be used to impose SCUA on Nasser. The Association, Dulles said, never had any 'teeth' in it and there was no suggestion of fitting 'teeth' now.<sup>1</sup>

Dulles's behaviour may be explained to some extent by personal factors, which played a more important part in the shaping of American policy at this time than if the Secretary of State had not exercised the dominating influence over that policy which he did. Considerable personal rivalry existed between Eden and Dulles. They had been at cross purposes over the war in Indo-China in 1954; Eden moreover had snatched victory from the defeat of EDC in the same year, when Dulles was washing his hands of Europe; Dulles had been far less willing to work with Eden in the negotiations leading up to the Suez base agreement in 1954 than either President Eisenhower or Dulles's Assistant Secretary, Bedell Smith. It is thus not surprising that Dulles should have been slow to help Eden out of his difficulties in 1956. Dulles could not get Eden, as he failed to get most European statesmen, to recognise what was to him the primary importance of the conflict with Soviet Communism. To Dulles, the Suez crisis was an unfortunate diversion from the battle front in the war against atheistic Communism. To Eden, it was a challenge to Europe and to British influence in the whole non-European world. For Dulles, armed action from Europe was an incitement to the Arab states to call in the Russians as their allies. To Eden it symbolised those acts of restraint which, had they been applied in time in the 1930s, would have prevented a war which, apart from being a tragedy in itself, had brought Britain to a state of powerlessness where it could not protect its vital interests without American permission.

### *The military phase*

In the absence of Washington's support but on the assumption of its neutrality the Cabinet determined, when the two London conferences had failed and the Security Council debate had not

<sup>1</sup> RIA, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-19.

wrested the Canal from Nasser's hands, to work with France. This decision moved the controversy with Egypt to a new plane. Previously the emphasis had been on the inability of the maritime community to allow a highway on which it depended for its trade and supplies to be held at the discretion of a doubtfully law-abiding state. Now the attack broadened out against Nasser as a general factor of disturbance in the Arab world. This was satisfactory to France for it had every interest in stopping Nasser's support, though this was more verbal than material, for the Algerian rebels against which increasing detachments of its army had to be pitted. But it had the effect of weakening support for the anti-Nasser front among the other maritime Powers, since countries like Norway and Sweden had no concern with the Anglo-French political conflict with Nasser. It also tended to strengthen suspicions in the Asian Commonwealth countries that Eden was more interested in dethroning an Arab nationalist than in the principle of international freedom to use the Canal; and it made Britain the enemy of all the Arab states whereas the Bagdad pact had made it the enemy of all but one, Iraq. The more was this so in that the plan decided by the British and French Ministers at their meeting in Paris on 16 October contemplated one-sided assistance to Israel, the common enemy of the Arabs, when the impending invasion of Egypt by the Israeli army took place.

The full story of the Paris meeting on 16 October has not yet been disclosed. But there is enough evidence to show that Eden had prior knowledge of the Israeli attack on Egypt and that, by his own account, he brought pressure to bear on France to make sure that if and when Israel did make her attack it would be on Egypt rather than on any other Arab state. If Israel attacked Jordan (though there was only the remotest prospect that it would) Britain would have to go to Jordan's assistance under the treaty of alliance and friendship concluded in 1948. Eden therefore urged that if there were to be a break-out Israel should be encouraged 'to break out against Egypt'.<sup>1</sup> He may not have known, nor did he desire to know, the full extent of French collaboration with Israel in the attack on Egypt which was unleashed on 25 October. But the statement in the *Memoirs* that Egypt provoked the attack and that 'the marked victim of the garrotte' (that is Israel) 'is not to be condemned if he strikes out before the noose is round his throat'<sup>2</sup> cannot be sustained in view of the total and instantaneous success of the Israeli attack. If Eden considered that this success was attained without French assistance in the form of *Mystère* fighters and naval support in the

<sup>1</sup> Eden, *op. cit.*, p. 513.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 523.

Levant to protect Israel against Egyptian retaliation, his intelligence sources must have been more than usually at fault. Moreover, even if the Israeli invasion was not expected or planned by the British and French Ministers, the Anglo-French ultimatum delivered to the warring sides on 30 October could only have been written by allies of Israel who were as much interested in her success as in their reported purpose of defending the Canal.

The ultimatum called upon the belligerents to retire to beyond ten miles east and west respectively of the Canal. If the ultimatum was not complied with within twelve hours Britain and France undertook to intervene in whatever strength may be necessary to secure compliance (using for the purpose the forces which had been mustered since the beginning of the crisis in July).<sup>1</sup> Israel agreed since she was asked to withdraw to Egyptian territory 100 miles from her own frontiers, thus leaving the whole of the Sinai peninsula in Israel's possession. Egypt, which would have had to disengage its forces and draw them back ten miles west of the Canal, refused and the Anglo-French intervention began. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the Israeli attack was somewhat more than a happy accident which gave Britain and France the pretext to occupy the Canal. It seemed rather part of a general compact between the two Western Powers and Israel—though Eden may be excused from the charge that he was privy to the arrangements with Israel—to set on foot a train of developments which would result in the expulsion of Nasser from Egypt. An admirer of Eden, Randolph Churchill, an intimate of many of the leading British politicians of the day, describes the evidence of collusion as 'massive and conclusive' in his biography of the Prime Minister.<sup>2</sup>

An enterprise launched in such suspicious circumstances was almost bound to fail. In fact no sooner had troops landed, six days after an intensive Anglo-French air bombardment of Port Said, than they were given orders to stop when, in their advance along the 100-mile length of the Canal, they were within sixty miles of its southern extremity, Suez. Forces were operating in London to put an end to the adventure, though the French would have willingly continued.

The least of these forces was a Soviet threat addressed in a letter to Eden by Marshal Bulganin, the then Soviet Prime Minister, on 5 November that Russian rockets would fall on Britain if the armed action was not called off.<sup>3</sup> This bore every appearance of being largely intended to demonstrate Soviet fraternity with the

<sup>1</sup> 558 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 1274-5 (Eden, 30 October 1956).

<sup>2</sup> *The Rise and Fall of Sir Anthony Eden*, London, McGibbon and Kee, 1959, p. 265.

<sup>3</sup> *Soviet News*, 6 November 1956.

victims of colonialism. The Soviet Union had no commitment to come to Egypt's defence: the Anglo-French action could hardly develop into a threat to Soviet security. So far from the Soviet threat being a disincentive to Britain and France, they might well have wished the threat was real, since only if it were was the United States likely to come to their aid. The manifest and almost unanimous opposition of the United Nations to the Suez enterprise, as shown in the General Assembly resolution condemning it on 2 November was certainly much more important, particularly on account of its effects on British public opinion. The more isolationist wings of that opinion, represented by such newspapers as *The Daily Express*, argued with some plausibility that the unrepresentativeness of the General Assembly and the far greater relish with which the Assembly condemned the Anglo-French action, as compared with its condemnation of the simultaneous crushing of a nationalist uprising in Hungary by Soviet armed forces, implied that its voice need not be taken too seriously when vital British interests were at stake. This view perhaps coincided with that of the man-in-the-street, who, it later appeared, applauded Eden's resort to force in much the same way as the British public throughout history has risen to the challenge offered by foreign dictators.

Nevertheless, United Nations censure, coupled with the fact that in that body most of the Commonwealth was arrayed against Britain, was deeply shocking not merely to the Parliamentary Opposition, but to many supporters of the Government as well. Though there were only two resignations from the Cabinet, the Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, Anthony Nutting, and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, Sir Edward Boyle, the indications were that only the strong tradition of cohesion in the Conservative Party prevented an open split on the issue of defiance of the United Nations and of a considerable proportion of the Commonwealth. The Government's majority in the House fell to forty on one occasion, the figure required to defeat the Chamberlain Government in 1940, and the Minister who was in effect deputy leader of the party, R. A. Butler, is reported to have asked an acquaintance when the crisis was over whether he thought he should have resigned.<sup>1</sup> The outburst of world opinion against Britain, as compared with the more qualified outcry against Russia over the Hungarian affair and the relatively minor attacks on France, was at once flattering and melancholy. The world seemed to look to Britain not to stoop so low as to conspire with other Powers to attack a weak African state and then resort to all manner of subterfuge in her effort to make the attack respectable.

<sup>1</sup> Churchill, *op. cit.*, pp. 306-7.

This leads to the decisive factor in the calling off of the Suez operation, the failure of Eden's assumption that the United States would remain passive. Fearing that the conflict would embroil the NATO Powers with Russia, or that in any case the laborious Western effort to conciliate the Arab state would be utterly foiled if further damage was done in Egypt, Washington went beyond voting against Britain, France and Israel at the United Nations and threatened economic sanctions if the action were not called off. The precise form in which this threat was levelled has not yet been disclosed, but on Eden's own account the serious loss of British reserves reported by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Harold Macmillan, in the midst of the operation forced the action in Egypt to a halt. \$279 million was lost in November, about 15 per cent of the total gold and dollar reserves. It is almost certain that the American Government were responsible for this; in any case it was easily within Washington's power to tide Britain over the crisis had the will been there. America's refusal to assist and the implied, if not explicit, threat to force Britain to desist was the most dramatic demonstration that the post-war world had seen that no British armed action on any considerable scale could be launched without the approval of the United States. Eden's greatest failure was his omission to be abundantly clear that this approval was forthcoming before the order to intervene was given.

### *Aftermath*

The Anglo-French intervention in Egypt is therefore hard to conceive as other than a serious miscalculation, apart from the deficiencies in British military preparations which it showed and the issue of its moral character. Its cost, in loss of Commonwealth and American sympathy and in the blow inflicted to the already shaking British prestige in the Middle East, was grave. It violently disrupted the long tradition of mutual consultation in the Commonwealth. In being based upon the assumption that the Canal would be less efficiently or honestly run under Egyptian than under the Canal Company's management it was mistaken, as well as deeply wounding to Arab, Asian and African pride. It achieved none of its ostensible objects and few of its secret ones. The Canal was not brought under international management or insulated from the politics of Egypt. Indeed the intervention, if anything, consolidated Nasser's grip.

Yet the unpredictability of international affairs is such that although the intervention may be criticised in the circumstances of the times, none of its after-effects was as serious as was feared and prophesied by the critics. The Commonwealth survived the shock.



The Anglo-American partnership was not irremediably shattered. Thanks to the careful nursing of the alliance by Eden's successor in the Premiership, Macmillan, and the revulsion of feeling in the United States against the anti-British sentiments of 1956, the alliance was not seriously affected. Hardly a trace of Suez was left when a heads of government meeting of NATO Powers assembled in Paris in December 1957 to discuss the British principle of 'interdependence' in the alliance and the siting of American medium-range missiles in Europe.

## Chapter 5

### THE EUROPEAN PROSPECT

We have seen in an earlier chapter how after the end of the war the Labour Government co-operated with Britain's neighbours in western Europe in economic recovery and defence.<sup>1</sup> The expression of this was British participation in the Marshall plan, the formation and work of the OEEC and the making of the Brussels treaty, as well as many other inter-governmental organs for specific needs. A British government was bound to view with concern the sight of a depressed and defenceless Europe only twenty miles away, capable of dragging the British economy into the depths if it did not actually fall victim to Communism itself. But equally convinced were British Ministers that co-operation in Europe (or as much of Europe as remained free after Russia had pushed its influence to the Elbe) must not advance to a point at which there was a risk of the loss of British independence. Let it once be suggested that western Europe might unite and form one body, with one centre of decision, and Britain was quick to withdraw.

Time and again in modern history British governments have shrunk from hard and fast commitments in Europe, preferring the policy of the free hand appropriate to an imperial Power. When, not without regret, Britain undertook to guarantee the territorial *status quo* in Europe at the Locarno conference in 1925, the pledge was limited to two frontiers, those of Germany with Belgium and France. At Locarno the peace settlement in east Europe, which a British Prime Minister had reluctantly signed, was shown to be not a firm British commitment. In May 1930, when Aristide Briand, the French Prime Minister, made his revolutionary proposal for European union, it was principally British opposition which left the scheme in the clouds. The Foreign Office wrote off the Briand proposal as 'vague and puzzling idealism'.<sup>2</sup> Ten years later, in June 1940, when France was collapsing, the British Government did make an offer of union with France, but the Prime Minister, Churchill, was at first against it and only consented to it as a 'dramatic announcement to keep France going'.<sup>3</sup> The tradition of detachment, described

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 2, pp. 49-53.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, edited by E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, Second Series, Vol. I, London, HMSO, 1947, p. 326.

<sup>3</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. II, London, Cassell, 1949, p. 183.

by Victor Hugo as '*des alliances, soit, pas de mariages*', had a basis in British interests though it tended to harden into an inert habit of the mind.

Contrary to a common suspicion abroad that Britain's European policy has always been in the spirit of divide and rule, British Governments have generally sought to reconcile the European Powers with one another and maintain a concert between them. They insisted on the restoration of France to the concert as soon as possible after 1815 and did the same for Germany after 1918. The assumption was that intra-European feuds were dangerous to peace, which has been a basic interest since the Empire reached its maximum extent at the end of the Napoleonic wars, and that the alignment of Britain with one group of European Powers against another endangered national unity, jeopardised Britain's role as a mediating influence and reduced her power to defend overseas interests. But while good feelings between the European states was a British interest, complete unity was more doubtfully so. Unity might be unity *against* Britain, and in any case the process of attaining unity in Europe would present Britain with the awkward choice between forming a part, and hence endangering its position as a world Power, and standing aside, with the risk of losing its power to influence European affairs to its own advantage. The awkwardness of this choice was all the greater after 1945 for two reasons. First, British foreign policy in the inter-war years had been constantly influenced by the need to retain the general sympathy of the now independent Dominions; since their attitude to European affairs was generally isolationist, this meant that every British commitment in Europe placed a strain on the co-ordination of British and Dominion policies. After 1947, with Ceylon, India and Pakistan now independent countries in the Commonwealth, it was even more vital to ensure that Britain was not too tied by European connections to help in the creation of a common outlook on world affairs in the Commonwealth. Secondly, it was becoming clear that the main centre of decision in world politics had shifted from Europe and might well come to be divided between an Asia in which the Soviet Union was dominant and a North America centred upon the United States. This migration of power encouraged some British politicians, mainly Labour but including some Conservatives as well, to favour British membership of a politically uncommitted west European union, but the main effect was to suggest that a Britain, stripped of its Empire and reduced to a mere unit in a European federation, might be wholly unable to influence those larger forces outside Europe which were coming to shape affairs in the world as a whole.

These factors of tradition and interest were reinforced by the

notorious emotional detachment of British people from mainland Europe which was at once a consequence of tradition and an impediment, as time went on, to the proper appreciation of national interest. For British public opinion Europe had tended to appear either as a picturesque holiday playground, which does not need to be taken too seriously, or as a welter of political quarrels, none of them entirely healthy or innocent, which constantly threaten to involve this country. Costly wars which Britain has fought have generally begun in Europe; Britain's allies in these wars have sought to implicate it, so the British think, in the maintenance of vindictive peaces holding the seeds of future conflicts. From the European scene British politicians have been apt to turn with relief to their fortunate island just outside the rim of chaos, have often been deeply ignorant of European affairs and have been able to speak to British audiences as though knowledge of Europe was not an essential part of political *savoir-faire*. Stanley Baldwin, of whom Churchill wrote that he 'knew little of Europe and disliked what he knew', Neville Chamberlain, who referred to Czechoslovakia as a 'faraway country of which we' (it is often forgotten that he did not say or mean 'I') 'know nothing', even Churchill himself once said it was 'an Englishman's right' to pronounce foreign names just how he liked, have all in their various ways expressed British distaste for too intimate a connection with those people across the Channel. These feelings were not weakened by the Second World War. It is true that the occurrence of two wars within twenty-five years led many British people to think that without the abandonment of sovereignty there would be no lasting peace; that Churchill insisted that European revival and unity were vital in the face of the new Soviet threat; that the shrunken resources of Britain seemed to demand some revision of the traditional image of the country as a lofty mediator. Nevertheless the mere fact that Britain had survived the war with its sovereignty intact heightened rather than diminished the 'Channel complex', as Salvador de Madariaga has called this British insularity.

Here is a paradox. Although European unity has always cast its spell on political visionaries, from Charlemagne to Briand, the presence of some definite threat to European values has generally been required to bring the concept into practical politics. Fear of war and the economic depression were the forces making for the French plan in 1930, the threat of Communism provided whatever voluntary assent there was to the Nazi blueprint for a united Europe, dread of reversion to militarism was the major force behind the European idea in post-war West Germany. The most important corresponding factor in 1945 was the loss of national faith in western Europe which resulted from the German occupation and the

liberation by Anglo-American forces. This fall in national self-confidence, a temporary inner defeatism in people who had been overrun by alien superior force and then freed mainly by alien superior force, sometimes took the form of conversion to Communism, or neutralism, or the time-honoured chauvinism of a Charles de Gaulle. But its most lasting and constructive form was the yearning for a united Europe. It was precisely this aspect which not only had no appeal to Britain but was positively distasteful. Britain had never been occupied since 1066; it had had no collaborationists worth speaking of; for a vital twelve months it had been Hitler's only serious opponent and had played a major part in the destruction of a Europe united by the Nazis. It was therefore natural that, when the crisis of national self-confidence led continental Europeans to call for political unity after the war, Britain should show a somewhat patronising interest, always provided that the movement for European unity did not go too far. It was hard to believe that Britain's situation was so desperate that it was best for her to commit suicide in order to be born again into a European federation.

The fact that Britain had a Labour Government in 1945 did not change these basic attitudes. The British Labour Party has always had a vaguely federalist complexion, which is in fact reflected in its constitution, and some of the strangest British advocates of federal union, whether in Europe or the world as a whole, have belonged to the Left in British politics, if not actually to the Labour Party. Attlee himself had made a powerful attack on national sovereignty in a speech in November 1939, when he uttered the words 'Europe must federate or perish' which were to dog him so much when he became Prime Minister. His Foreign Secretary in the 1945 Government, Ernest Bevin, apart from his close association with the European trade union movement, had been a firm advocate of British membership of a European customs union in the 1920s.<sup>1</sup> But federalism in the British Labour Movement, like socialism, has generally been a fluid creed, splendidly evocative but practically circumspect. British Labour politicians never saw eye to eye with their continental colleagues on the question. Office, too, had its effects. Possibly the strongest basis of mass support behind the Labour Government in 1945 was the result of its undertaking to rid Britain of unemployment and social insecurity. This could only be fulfilled, in the Labour view, by firm control of the national economy through the state machinery. Once in possession of that machinery and seeing the effects of its use in terms of better living standards and welfare services for the worse-off groups in Britain, a natural

<sup>1</sup> Alan Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*, Vol. I, London, Heinemann, 1960, pp. 361, 371, 387-8.

pride in British social achievements clearly developed in Labour leaders. 'We are determined,' said Hugh Dalton in 1950, 'not to put these gains in peril through allowing vital decisions on great issues of national economic policy to be transferred from the British Parliament at Westminster to some supra-national European assembly. . . . We intend to hold what we have gained here in this island.'<sup>1</sup>

This pride in the peaceful victories of the British people did not prevent some Labour critics of Bevin's foreign policy, especially the *Keep Left* group, from supporting west European unity in the immediate post-war years, when it looked as though socialism might spread on the continent, bringing with it the same pattern of controlled use of national resources for public welfare.<sup>2</sup> But when, as from 1948, a definite swing to the moderate Right took place in western Europe and the Christian Democrat parties there became the leading advocates of European union, even this support turned to hostility. In practically all major sections of the Labour Party ideology, national pride and anxiety not to lose control of the planned economy joined hands so as to set British Labour against participation in European union. It was indeed asking a great deal of the Labour Party, when they at last had the opportunity to apply the state machinery to the defeat of the social evils they had fought so long, that they should forthwith agree to hand over these powers to a European federal body largely controlled by forces which, in Labour's view, had yet to learn the lessons of the long years of economic depression.

Moreover, the cause of European union often seemed to draw to its defence champions who were far from being innocent in Labour's eyes. The foremost British advocate of European unity, Churchill, was clearly actuated by intense anxiety over Russia's incursions into Europe; his call for European unity at Zurich in September 1946 followed logically after his appeal at Fulton, Missouri, in March for resistance to the Soviet menace by the English-speaking peoples. For all Bevin's bitter experience of dealing with the Russians he remained loathe to resign himself to the conclusion that the world was irremediably divided and continued to hope that patient work would in the end find a way through. Besides, a Labour Government which sought to co-operate with Churchill in the European movement must be reconciled to his being its leader, on

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the 49th Annual Conference of the Labour Party*, Margate, 1950, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> *Keep Left*, a manifesto proposing 'a more drastic Socialist policy' than that of the Government, was drawn up by a group of Labour MPs led by R. H. S. Crossman, Michael Foot and Ian Mikardo and published in April 1947.

account of his prestige and support for European union, going back to the war years. This would have placed the actual British Prime Minister, Attlee, in a difficult position, all the more so because it was never quite clear just where Churchill stood on the European issue and how far he was prepared to go to commit Britain.

Sometimes Churchill spoke, as at Zurich, of European union with Britain outside but acting, along with the United States and possibly Russia, as its 'friend and sponsor'.<sup>1</sup> At other times, as in his speech at the Congress of the European Movement at The Hague in May 1948, Europe and the British Empire were somehow united in his mind. He spoke of the 'gradual assumption of a larger sovereignty' and yet was at all times sure that a definite federation was not within the scope of practical affairs. Such groping was not improper in a statesman temporarily out of office and chiefly concerned to rally opinion on the continent to the larger perils of the day. But it was not possible for a government which had to decide whether or not to commit the country to engagements for which there was by no means a majority of opinion in Britain. None of this made co-operation between the Government and Churchill on the European question easy. It is true that many socialist leaders on the continent were as enthusiastic about unity as the Right; prominent among them were Spaak of Belgium, Guy Mollet and André Philip in France, and Van der Goes Van Naters in Holland. But in meetings held by European socialists after the war national differences proved to be more important than party differences, British socialists standing with their Scandinavian colleagues against continental socialists who had become firm advocates of European union. At the Baarn conference of European socialists in May 1949 this split came into the open and remained a dominant feature of the European international relations of the Left.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that European union with British membership was powerfully and persistently pressed for by the United States Government and public opinion was not a recommendation of it to Labour Ministers. The United States gave no enthusiastic welcome to Labour's social programme; it was suspected that the terms of the American loan to Britain were all the harsher because a Labour administration was at the receiving end. America could not want European union for the same reason as Left-wing dissidents in the Labour Party in 1947, namely as a model of social democracy intermediate between communism and capitalism. American sponsorship of United Europe, British Labour MPs tended to conclude,

<sup>1</sup> *The Sirens of Peace*, edited by Randolph S. Churchill, London, Cassell, 1948, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> *The World Today*, October 1950, pp. 415-23.

could have no other aim than that of binding Europe together in opposition to Soviet Communism. Such consolidation might be necessary if it should prove beyond doubt that Russia meant to try military conclusions with the West. But it was not proposed to allow the United States to decide the tempo of consolidation. But there was an even stronger reason for not accepting charges by the United States that Britain was 'dragging her feet' and American pressures to merge with Europe. British politicians had long been familiar with the tendency of Americans to be so spellbound with their own history as to wish to press other countries into the same mould. This often made them blind to the idiosyncrasies of national outlook which were real enough on the other side of the Atlantic. To argue that Europe could soon end its quarrels by drafting a federal constitution with division of powers and a Supreme Court, ignored, and in a way humiliating to Europeans, the long histories of other countries and their many connections with peoples and affairs outside the continent in which they happened to be situated.

The United States Government made clear where they stood. In August 1948, when Britain was resisting federal tendencies in the drafting of the statute of the Council of Europe, the State Department declared that the Truman administration 'strongly favours the progressively closer integration of the free nations of western Europe . . . it does not make sense to us to contemplate a democratic Europe attempting economic unity without political agreement, at any rate on broad lines'.<sup>1</sup> In general, however, the American Government refrained from the cruder types of open public pressure. The Marshall offer of June 1947, for instance, was linked with an invitation to the European states to form an association for the collective definition of their requirements, but this was probably more of a recommendation of the offer to American public opinion than a statement of conditions. Nevertheless, European union continued to figure as the aspiration of Congress, as expressed in its resolutions, and Senators made their speeches rebuking Britain for sloth. Little of this was a stimulus to the British Government. It was realised that behind much of this pressure, perhaps at the subconscious level, was an American assumption that if Europe could settle its problems through adopting the federal solution, the need for American assistance, in goods, troops and arms, would be less. It was the suspicion that this hope lay behind American support for European union which chiefly determined the British Government not to yield to it.

The aim of British policy was thus to promote European co-operation for practical purposes, short of federation which would

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *The Times*, 28 August 1948.



present Britain with the impossible choice already referred to, but to do so if possible within the larger framework of the Atlantic community as a whole. No one who remembered Stalingrad or General MacArthur's victories over the Japanese in the Pacific could believe that Europe could still provide for its own security without a permanent relationship with the United States. This was the theme to which Bevin constantly returned. As he said in May 1948: 'The organisation of all the west European democracies, excellent and necessary as it is, can hardly be accomplished save within the framework of an even larger entity. I am not content to confine either propaganda or speeches or action to the assumption that western Europe alone can save itself.'<sup>1</sup> Throughout the inter-war years uncertainty as to how the United States would act in an emergency had bedevilled all British thinking about security. Now that America was committed to Europe, through Marshall aid, the Truman doctrine and, after April 1949, the Atlantic Pact, the British Government wished to give isolation no pretext to return. Ironically, this end could best be served, so they considered, by frustrating America's policy for Europe.

### *The Council of Europe*

It is not surprising then that the strongest opposition to the first post-war essay in the construction of a common political framework for Europe, the Council of Europe, should have come from Britain, supported in this by the Scandinavian countries which shared to a greater or less extent the British feeling of being in, but not of, Europe. The project for a Council of Europe arose from the acceptance by the French Government of the proposal made by the Congress at The Hague in May 1948 in favour of a political and economic union to be expressed through a Consultative Assembly drawn from the Parliaments of member states. The case for an all-European assembly was put by Bidault, the French Foreign Minister, at the Consultative Council of the Brussels Treaty Powers in July and opposed by Bevin. The Foreign Secretary held that the roof could not be erected before they had the building and argued that Europe still had a long way to go by way of co-operation in defence and in the economic and other fields before representative political organs were created 'to deal with the practical things we have accomplished as governments'.<sup>2</sup> He proposed instead a mere committee of Ministers drawn from member states. When the Consultative

<sup>1</sup> 450 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1110 (4 May 1948).

<sup>2</sup> As explained by Bevin in the Commons on 15 September 1948; 456 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 106.

Council appointed a sub-committee to consider these proposals, the Government appointed Hugh Dalton, a well-known opponent of federalism, to represent them. Britain agreed to a consultative assembly, provided it was overshadowed by a committee of Ministers in order to ensure governmental control, but a further difference sprang up between Britain and the federalists, represented by France and Belgium, at meetings of the sub-committee in November when the composition of the assembly was considered. Britain wanted delegates to the assembly to be appointed by governments and to vote strictly as national blocs, while France and the Benelux countries preferred election by Parliaments and voting on an individual basis. A compromise was eventually adopted at a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Brussels Powers in January 1949; this authorised governments to decide the method of appointing delegates to the assembly for themselves and placed no restrictions on individual voting.

The Statute of the Council of Europe was finally signed in London on 5 May by the five Brussels Powers and five other European countries which had been invited to join them.<sup>1</sup> It bore in every phase the marks of the British resistance to federalism of the previous year, which was fully endorsed by the Scandinavian signatories. The Committee of Ministers, representing the governmental element in the Council, was to meet in private and was simply an inter-governmental conference on the traditional model. The principle of unanimity, in other words the veto, was preserved on all but procedural and administrative questions, and in any case the Committee's resolutions had only recommendatory force when addressed to governments. The Committee clearly dominated the Consultative Assembly, the parliamentary element. The Assembly was to report, not to governments or electorates, but to the Committee and then only in the form of recommendations. It could discuss nothing without the consent of the Ministers, who decided its agenda, and could not even meet for longer than a month at a time without the Ministers' permission. The admission of new members to the Council and the Council's budget were within the scope of the Ministerial body. To complete the emasculation of the Council the Statute expressly forbade any discussion of defence and instructed the Committee of Ministers, in deciding the Assembly's agenda, to have regard to the work of *other European inter-governmental*

<sup>1</sup> Ireland, Italy, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, Greece and Turkey were admitted to the Council in August 1949. Iceland joined as a full member in 1950 and the German Federal Republic and the Saar as associate members in the same year. The Federal Republic became a full member in 1951. Austria joined the Council in 1956.

organisations (the wording is significant). The Council, in other words, was warned not to trespass on the territory of such bodies as the OEEC and the Brussels Treaty Organisation.<sup>1</sup>

Thus it was clear that when the Consultative Assembly met for its first session at Strasbourg in August 1949 it was, so to say, 'all dressed up and nowhere to go'. The Churchillian call 'Fiat Europa?' of 1946 had ended in a mere talking shop. For this Britain was widely held responsible. Bevin, it was noted, told a meeting of the Foreign Press Association in January, when the main lines of the Council's Statute became generally known, that the 'solid work of European unity' still rested on co-operation between the governments in economics and defence.<sup>2</sup>

But what Britain was doing was merely to state the obvious. In none of the countries which were taking part in the movement towards European unity had a clear mandate been given to the government to submerge the national identity in a definite federation. The question had never been put to the vote in Britain. The function of the Council, more particularly of the enthusiasts for union who sat in the Consultative Assembly, was therefore to help to create the frame of mind in the public for the giving of this mandate. With this, however, they were not content, and instead they pressed forwards at once with the aim of converting the Council into a legislative body. Various proposals with this end in view were referred to its Committee on General Affairs by the Consultative Assembly at its first session but it soon became evident in the Committee's discussions that those who wished for a definite step towards federation to be taken, chiefly delegates from France, Italy and the Benelux countries, were in a minority. The majority of delegates, many taking their cue from Britain, preferred to move more cautiously through functional co-operation in specific fields until the habit of thinking and working within a European framework had become firmly established in the various countries. Hence the Committee's report, which was considered by the Consultative Assembly at its second session in August 1950, was cautious, and the Assembly's own recommendations, after discussion of the report, even more so. Apart from insisting on greater Parliamentary control over existing inter-governmental organisations and repeating the plea it had made the year before for more authority for itself, the Consultative Assembly confined itself to stating the general principle of 'limited functions but real powers' for the Council.

Even so the Committee of Ministers at its sessions in November 1950 and May 1951 made quite clear that there was no immediate

<sup>1</sup> Treaty Series No. 51 (1949). Statute of the Council of Europe. Cmd. 7778.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *The Times*, 29 January 1949.

future for any increase in the political authority of the Council. Britain was firmly opposed to the idea. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Ernest Davies, told the House of Commons on 13 November 1950 that 'there cannot be any delegation of general powers to an outside body, to an outside authority which might not necessarily share the view of HM Government or with which compromise was impossible, and which might even deprive HM Government of powers without which they could not carry out the wishes of the electorate'.<sup>1</sup> There was certainly no support by Britain or the other anti-federalists on the Committee of Ministers for the recommendation in favour of giving executive and legislative authority to the Council which had been received from a special committee of seven appointed by the Consultative Assembly to consider a plan to that effect drawn up by the British Labour delegate and well-known federalist, R. W. G. Mackay. Kenneth Younger, the British Minister of State at the Foreign Office, said in a written answer in the Commons on 24 January 1951 that the proposal had such far-reaching political and constitutional implications that it could not even be taken as a basis for discussion without careful study.<sup>2</sup> At a meeting of the Committee of Ministers in Paris in March the British delegate disclosed that the careful study had resulted in the unsurprising negative.

The British position was strongly criticised in a debate held in Strasbourg in November 1951, when fourteen United States Congressmen discussed the future of Europe with an equal number of members of the Consultative Assembly. The intention of the critics may have been to encourage the Conservatives in Britain, who won the general election held in October, though with an overall majority of only eighteen seats and on an actual minority of votes cast. During the Labour administration Conservative delegates to the Consultative Assembly, who included such leading figures as Churchill and his son-in-law, Duncan Sandys, Harold Macmillan, David Eccles and Robert Boothby, had always seemed more close in spirit to the continental federalists than Labour MPs, who, with some striking exceptions, followed the line of their Government. It was therefore not unnatural for federal enthusiasts to assume that under Conservative rule British policy would seriously move forwards. These hopes were, however, belied at the following session of the Consultative Assembly. On 28 November the chief British delegate, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, the Home Secretary in the new administration, plainly said that it was unrealistic to expect Britain to join a European federation. The utmost it could do was to send

<sup>1</sup> 480 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1402.

<sup>2</sup> 483 H.C. Deb. 5s. Written Answers Col. 29.

a permanent delegation to the headquarters of the newly formed European Coal and Steel Community and consider a form of association with the proposed European Defence Community.<sup>1</sup> As if this was not enough to disillusion European federalists, the new Foreign Secretary, Eden, told a Press conference in Rome the same evening that Britain could not join the Defence Community, though there might be some association. This was after General Eisenhower, then the Supreme NATO commander in Europe, had told Eden that the United States understood and agreed with the British position.<sup>2</sup>

Personality played some part in the attitude of British Ministers on the European question. In the Labour Government Herbert Morrison, who took over the Foreign Office in March 1951 when Bevin was forced to resign on account of ill-health, was somewhat less hostile to the idea of European union than Bevin, though he did criticise the Council of Europe because of its cost.<sup>3</sup> Morrison joined the United States in a declaration issued in Washington on 14 September 1951 just before the Labour Government's fall, in which the two countries welcomed the Schuman plan for a coal and steel pool and the plan for a European army. Britain, so Morrison agreed in this declaration, desired 'to establish the closest possible association with the European continental community at all stages of its development'.<sup>4</sup> Eden, on the other hand, though seasoned in European diplomacy, had much of Bevin's mistrust of abstract federal schemes; his great emphasis, like Bevin's, was on the Atlantic community. He had accordingly always carefully dissociated himself from Churchill's championship of European union when the Conservatives were out of office. Nevertheless, Eden was under strong pressure to take more interest in the Council of Europe. Conservative leaders had been active at Strasbourg and the Rome speech was a shock to them. Moreover when Eden returned to the Foreign Office in October 1951 the inner ring of members of the Council, the Benelux countries, Federal Germany, France and Italy, were pressing ahead with their plans for closer integration in limited fields. By the time the Consultative Assembly met for its fourth session in May 1952 the Little Europe of the Six was forging ahead. The treaty for a European coal and steel pool had been signed and ratifications were almost complete. The Bonn agreements restoring West German

<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe, Consultative Assembly, Third Session (Second Part) Official Report, Vol. III, pp. 512-14.

<sup>2</sup> *The Memoirs of Sir Anthony Eden. Full Circle*, London, Cassell, 1960, pp. 32-3.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Morrison, *Herbert Morrison, an autobiography*, London, Odhams, 1960, p. 279.

<sup>4</sup> Germany No. 10 (1952). Cmd. 8626, p. 3.

sovereignty were signed on the day of the opening of the Strasbourg session, 26 May, and the treaty for a European army (EDC) on the following day. This movement among the Six was threatening to leave Britain and her friends in the Council of Europe far behind.

The British solution for this widening gap took the form of the so-called 'Eden proposals' (though the basic work was done by Eden's Under-Secretary of State, Anthony Nutting, and his Foreign Office staff). These were submitted to the Committee of Ministers by the Foreign Secretary on 19 March and adopted by the Committee at its tenth and eleventh sessions in March and May 1952. The purpose behind them, Eden said, was to save the Council of Europe from being stranded between the 'two streams' of the Atlantic community and the Six by linking the functional organs under construction by the Six with the Council. The Council's two main instruments, the Committee of Ministers and the Consultative Assembly, were to act in the same capacity for the coal and steel pool, the defence community and any other supranational enterprises of the Six, but in that event only representatives of the Six should have voting powers, while the other nine members of the Council would have only observer status, if they wished to share in these new activities of the Council at all.<sup>1</sup>

The Eden proposals seemed to be acceptable to the Consultative Assembly when explained by Nutting and were adopted in principle in a resolution of the Assembly on 30 May. But it was clear that considerable suspicion existed among the Six that the proposals had only been put forward in order to give Britain a voice in the supranational communities of the Six, and perhaps enable her to put a brake on their development, without undertaking any of the obligations involved in membership. Spaak told Nutting at the Consultative Assembly in May that he and his friends 'had waited too long for Britain to get aboard the European bus . . . the Eden plan was a neat half-way house arrangement which might suit Great Britain, but half-way houses were not enough for Europe'.<sup>2</sup>

The result was that when the Assembly reconsidered the plan in September, on the basis of a report by its Committee of General Affairs, the British notion of the Council as the parent body of the new supranational communities was whittled down to that of 'organic links' of an innocuous character between the Council and the only supranational organ then in being, the coal and steel

<sup>1</sup> For the text of the Eden proposals see Report of the Committee of Ministers, Documents, 1952, Doc. II. For Eden's explanation see 498 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 32-4 (24 March 1952).

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Nutting, *Europe Will Not Wait*, London, Hollis and Carter, 1960, pp. 44-5.

community. Even so the degree of integration actually achieved between the Council and the community was less than that contemplated in the Consultative Assembly's 'Opinion' on the matter.<sup>1</sup> The Six thus presented a clear choice to the Council between supranationalism and inter-governmental co-operation by securing in effect the rejection of the Eden proposals. They then went on to try to form the political community which they had failed to create through the Council of Europe. The drafting of a treaty to establish this community was entrusted to a so-called '*ad hoc* Assembly' consisting of representatives of the Six together with observers from other members of the Council. This move was deprecated by British delegates to the Consultative Assembly as it would certainly consolidate the segregation of the Six from the rest of the Council.

### *The Schuman plan*

Considering that Britain had sided with the functionalists at the Council of Europe, that is, those favouring a piecemeal approach by co-operation in specific fields, as opposed to the all-out federalists, it might have been supposed that it would have warmly responded to the proposal made by the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, in May 1950 for placing the French and German coal and steel industries, together with those of as many other countries as agreed to join, under a common higher authority. In his note of 9 May Schuman seemed to echo the familiar British argument that 'Europe,' to quote his words, 'will not be made all at once, or according to a single general plan'. France, taking the line so often heard from British speakers at Strasbourg, realised that Europe must be built 'through concrete achievements, which first create a *de facto* solidarity' and because it did so proposed to attack the problem at 'one limited but decisive point', namely the heavy industrial complex of north-western Europe, which should be brought under supranational control. In fact the Labour Government's reaction, stripped of the formal tones of welcome, was cold, and when the treaty embodying the plan was signed by the Six in April 1951, Britain, the traditional leader, with Germany, in the heavy industries of Europe, was not among the signatories. An agreement was eventually signed in London on 21 December 1954 defining the relation between Britain and the coal and steel community, which had come into existence in July 1952, but this merely provided for a

<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe, Consultative Assembly, Texts Adopted, September 1952; *European Yearbook*, Vol. 1, p. 451; A. H. Robertson, *The Council of Europe*, London, Stevens, 1956, pp. 100-1.

Standing Council of Association for consultative purposes only.<sup>1</sup>

Some attempt was made by the Conservative Opposition in the House of Commons to attribute this negative attitude to the socialist prejudices of Labour Ministers. Undoubtedly Labour delegates had never been comfortable at the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, where they were in a minority of one in four. The fact that the governments of the Six were predominantly Right-wing was no recommendation of the Schuman plan to Labour. A certain amount of evidence for the existence of these prejudices was provided by a pamphlet published by the Labour Party, entitled *European Unity*, which was completed shortly after the announcement of the Schuman plan and appeared on the same day, 18 June, on which Attlee gave the House of Commons the Government's provisional views on the plan. The pamphlet restated the Government's preference for inter-governmental co-operation since Britain's position in the Commonwealth and as the centre of the largest multilateral trading system in the world ruled out membership of a tight federation in Europe.

Looked at in another light, however, the Labour pamphlet, in its insistence that only through planning of the national economy could full employment and high living standards be maintained, could serve to justify British entrance into the Schuman plan as well as to oppose it. The whole emphasis in the plan as presented by the French was on the expansion of production under the centralised direction of the higher authority. This, according to Schuman, would be charged with the task 'of securing in the shortest possible time the modernisation of production and the improvement of its quality; the supply of coal and steel on identical terms to the French and German markets and those of other member countries; the development in common of export to other countries; and the equalisation as well as improvement of living conditions of workers in these industries'. Though there was a hint of preference for the free market in these words, the spirit was clearly that of economic *dirigisme* such as was an article of faith with the Labour Party. This seemed to be conceded in the Labour pamphlet, which appeared to grasp the Schuman plan rather as a challenge to social democrats.

Until M. Schuman's historic proposal (it read) to pool the steel and coal resources of France, Germany and the Saar under a single authority appointed by the governments, the unwillingness of many governments to control their own basic industries made European planning of coal and steel impossible. The opportunity

<sup>1</sup> A. H. Robertson, *European Institutions*, London, Stevens, 1959, Appendix, pp. 286-92.



now exists to fill the greatest gap in European economic co-operation.

These words might still be taken as implying British detachment but an important role in the plan seemed to be assigned to Britain in the sentence which followed: 'It is the duty of all who have European unity at heart to see that the Schuman proposals are shaped in the interests of the peoples as a whole. The decisive part in co-ordinating Europe's basic industries must be played by the governments, as trustees for their peoples.'

It would hardly be true to say then that socialist prejudices were what caused the Government to hold back, though no doubt fear of socialist legislation in this country being disturbed by the Schuman plan won support for the Government's decision among its Parliamentary supporters. The reasons were more fundamental and would probably have operated with equal effect had the Conservatives been in power. First, there was the form in which the French proposed to announce the summoning of a conference on the plan. This obliged participating countries to declare before the conference that they had 'assigned to themselves as their immediate objective the pooling of coal and steel production and the institution of a new high authority whose decisions will bind'. This was asking Britain to buy a pig in a poke, or, in the more diplomatic language of the British reply to France of 31 May, to sign a communiqué which took decisions 'prior to, rather than as a result of, inter-governmental discussions'.<sup>1</sup> The Conservative position was that the communiqué could nevertheless have been signed and the conference attended in the hope of modifying the proposals in a sense more acceptable to Britain. They referred to the case of Holland, who took precisely this course at the Paris conference. But there are reasons why this scheme was not open to a British government. There was no real parallel, either in international standing generally or in the production of coal and steel, between Britain and Holland. For Britain to attend a conference on the basis of the acceptance of the principle of supranational control of basic industries, with which neither Labour nor the Conservatives agreed, would have been fraudulent.

The most important reason, however, for the failure of the Anglo-French exchanges on the Schuman proposals in May 1950 was that no British government was able to accept the principle of supranationalism by which the control of basic industries would have moved out of British hands. Supranationalism meant to the French,

<sup>1</sup> Miscellaneous No. 9 (1950). Anglo-French discussions regarding French proposals for the Western European Coal, Iron and Steel Industries, Cmd. 7970, p. 11.

first, that the coal and steel pool was a step on the road to a federal Europe, as well as a means for making any future war between France and Germany 'not merely unthinkable', in Schuman's words, 'but materially impossible'. But the federal road was not one which either the Labour or the Conservative party was ready to follow. The reference to the Schuman plan by Attlee in the Commons on 11 May, which entirely omitted the federal aspect mentioned in the Schuman note and concentrated on the scheme as a means for speeding Germany's entry into the European comity of nations, might equally have been made by an Eden or Churchill.<sup>1</sup> But the Schuman proposal was supranational in a second and more immediately important sense. According to the original French note of 9 May the proposed high authority over coal and steel production was intended as a sovereign body, whose decisions would bind member governments, though the ownership of the industries themselves was not to be affected. The high authority's decisions would have 'executive force'; it would be 'independent of governments' and would constitute a 'partial fusion of sovereignty'.<sup>2</sup> It is true that when the coal and steel community treaty was signed by the Six in April 1951 these revolutionary undertakings were not quite fulfilled.

By the 1951 treaty, the high authority, to consist of nine independent persons appointed by member governments for six years, was indeed to make its decisions by majority vote, which meant that its will could be imposed on minorities. But it was to be concerned, less with the day-to-day running of the industries, than with the removal of quantitative restrictions and discriminatory practices. The authority was buttressed by a Special Council of Ministers instructed to harmonise the action of the authority with that of governments 'which are responsible for the general economic policy of their countries'. It was answerable to a Common Assembly to consist of seventy-eight members appointed every year by the Parliaments of member states from their own number, which could dismiss the authority by a vote of censure passed by a two-thirds majority. It was subject to a review of the exercise of its powers by a court of justice and although it was granted authority to tax coal and steel enterprises which is generally considered to be the right of governments, these levies could not exceed one per cent of the average value of production unless the Council of Ministers otherwise decided.<sup>3</sup> When all is said, nevertheless, the supranational

<sup>1</sup> 475 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 587.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 7970, pp. 5, 11.

<sup>3</sup> The text of the treaty is printed in *European Yearbook*, Vol. I, pp. 359-453. On the structure of the Coal and Steel Community generally see A. H. Robertson, *European Institutions*, Chapter 5.

element was distinctly there, and, what was much more important, might grow.

The Six were firmly insistent on this. The idea that they could be talked out of it by British delegates at the conference to draft the treaty sprang from the characteristic British illusion that in the last resort continental governments would abandon their wild schemes and come down to earth. How remote from the truth this assumption was became abundantly clear at the Consultative Assembly's session in August immediately following the announcement of the Schuman plan in May. There Harold Macmillan unfolded the kind of alternative to supranationalism which a Conservative government would no doubt have put forward had they been represented at the Paris conference. The essence of the proposal was that the veto should be retained on the committee of Ministers to supervise the coal and steel pool. Macmillan described this as retaining the principle of pooling the coal and steel industries. He was followed by Schuman himself who utterly rejected the Macmillan formula. 'He who agrees with me in principle,' the French Foreign Minister said, 'disagrees with me in fact.'<sup>1</sup>

During the Commons debate on the Schuman plan on 26 and 27 June there was no disagreement between Government and Opposition on the rejection of any European machinery which would take out of British hands control of the basic industries on which the export trade, full employment and the economic health of the country generally so vitally depended. The Government had no mandate for such a step. The Opposition were unwilling to ask the electorate to give them one. Hence, it was not surprising that the Conservatives should have placed European unity third among their foreign policy aims at the general election in October 1951, the first two being the defence of the Empire and Commonwealth and the maintenance of Imperial Preference respectively. Their manifesto did not raise the issue of the Schuman plan or of similar European supranational authorities.<sup>2</sup>

#### *A European army?*

Although the British rejection of the Schuman plan was in many ways a turning point in the relations between Britain and the Six, there were intelligible reasons why British opinion could not be wildly enthusiastic about the coal and steel pool. But the case was

<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe, Consultative Assembly, Second Session, Seventh Sitting, 14 August 1950, pp. 436-8.

<sup>2</sup> D. E. Butler, *The British General Election of 1951*, London, Macmillan, 1952, p. 45.

different with the next supranational proposal to come from France, the suggestion made by the French Prime Minister, René Pleven, in October 1950 for a European Defence Community for the joint control of European military forces within the framework of Atlantic defence. In the first place the idea, if it had not originated with Churchill, had been publicly aired by him at the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe in August 1950, when he proposed a European army in which 'we would all bear a worthy and honourable part'. Churchill accepted an amendment to the proposal, which was then adopted by the Assembly, envisaging a European Minister of Defence with responsibility over the army. This may well have carried him further than he wished to go. Both the European army and the European Defence Ministry were rejected by the Labour Government as duplicating the NATO defence system, which covered the western part of Europe to which Churchill referred, and as proposing to hand over responsibility for defence to a non-governmental body, the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in the months following the outbreak of war in Korea in June 1950 it was feared in the West that Communist aggression might be repeated in Europe and since the United States was bearing far and away the greatest burden in Korea, it was evident that Europe must begin to look more seriously into its own resources for defence. If a Soviet attack in Europe were to come, it would have to be met as far to the east of the Rhine as possible. All this raised the vexed question of a German contribution to defence.

The three Western Foreign Ministers, Acheson, Bevin and Schuman, in a declaration issued in New York on 19 September 1950, agreed that the creation of a German national army was undesirable. But they went on record as being interested in the principle of German participation in an international force for the defence of Europe.<sup>2</sup> Grave doubts continued to exist in Britain about the wisdom of putting arms in any form into German hands, and also, though for somewhat different reasons, in France. The French solution to the dilemma of German rearmament, which they knew that, as European allies of the United States, they would eventually have to accept, was the Pleven plan for a European army to include German contingents. From the French point of view this had the treble advantage of avoiding the creation of an independent German force, of allowing for the incorporation of German units of the smallest size and thus insuring against the return of corporate

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Davies in the House of Commons, 13 November 1950; 480 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1408.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Documents on International Affairs, 1949-50*, London, 1953, p. 335.

military feelings in Germany, and of challenging Britain to enter the European army and thus help to control the Germans. Outside France, however, the Pleven proposal aroused suspicion. Washington inclined to regard it as threatening delay in the organisation of Germany's defence contribution. In British official quarters the plan was seen to raise again the well-nigh insoluble problem of political control, while in Federal Germany fear was expressed that the scheme might prove to be a device for recruiting German manpower while Germany was still divided and denied the attributes of a sovereign state. But the French had their way. Their resistance to German rearmament in any other form was such that the United States agreed that no decision should be reached in the talks to be held in Bonn on a German contribution to defence between the three Western High Commissioners and the Adeptauer government before the conference called by the French to consider the Pleven plan had arrived at conclusions. In the event the Bonn discussions failed and no alternative, for the time being, was left to the French plan.

The conference duly met in Paris on 15 February 1951 and was attended by representatives of Belgium, France, Italy, Luxemburg and West Germany. Britain was represented only by an observer, as were also Denmark, Holland, Norway and Portugal. The Canadian and United States Ambassadors in Paris were present as observers. According to an interim report issued by the conference on 24 July, the structure of the proposed defence community provided for a Defence Commissioner (or Commissioners), a Committee of Ministers, a parliamentary assembly and a court, thus following the lines of the Coal and Steel Community. The problem of control remained obscure, however, and, as we have already seen, Article 38 of the treaty as eventually signed envisaged the meeting of a constituent assembly to prepare a European political community, for it was clear that without some new type of fused sovereignty among the participating states the European army would remain leaderless. The other major problem was the delicate matter of the size of the national units. In the final report of the Paris conference, issued in November, it was planned to create an army of a million and a quarter men by 1953, to be composed of forty-three units of 30,000 men each (corresponding to a division of combat troops). France was to contribute fourteen units, Germany and Italy twelve each and the Benelux countries a total of five. Early in 1952 the EOC treaty was submitted to the NATO Council meeting in Lisbon for approval since the European army was to serve under the supreme NATO command in Europe. On the assumption that EOC provided a solution of the dilemma of German rearmament the Bonn agreements providing for the restoration of German sovereignty and the ending of the

Occupation were signed on 25 May 1952. They were not to be effective, however, until the EDC was established. The EDC treaty itself was signed on 27 May.<sup>1</sup>

The French had come to regard British membership of the Defence Community as fundamentally essential to its success; without British membership the Community, France feared, would in all likelihood come under German domination, especially if French military strength was drained away in the struggle against nationalism in the oversea territories. Yet it was clear that Churchill's apparent offer of a British contribution to a European army would falter when the issue was put. If a British government could not permit the country's basic industries to be run by a supranational authority, it was even less likely that they would make an exception for military forces, all the more so since British Ministers had always resisted with clenched teeth continental commitments which might interfere with the defence of Commonwealth and colonial interests. Hence Eden's rejection of EDC membership for Britain in Rome in November 1951, soon after the formation of the Conservative Government, and hence the statement by the Prime Minister, Churchill, in the House of Commons on 6 December, which was equally negative. The implication of both was the same: that Britain would remain a benevolent spectator of the progress of EDC. On the same day as Churchill's statement Paul Reynaud, in a speech at Trier, said that the British refusal meant the collapse of the whole scheme.<sup>2</sup>

Towards the end of 1951 it was evident that the cold British attitude was having its effect in the marked decline of support for EDC among the Six, especially in France, and once the decline set in it increased at an accelerated rate. General de Gaulle and his party, the Rally of the French People, ridiculed it, and the French Communists, with their hundred seats in the Chamber, and powerful elements among the Socialists, for their own reasons, were against it. Moreover, the more EDC was decried in France the weaker its popularity in Federal Germany since much of the strongest opposition to EDC in France derived from the openly expressed fear that it would be dominated by Germany and the Germans were not to be trusted. It was therefore all the more vital for the two Powers outside EDC, the United States and Britain, to go to the utmost in defining their relationship to the Defence Community if it was not to find itself without a friend in Europe. One solution, which in the event had little influence on France, was to reaffirm the Anglo-American agreement to maintain forces in Europe to assist the Defence

<sup>1</sup> The text of the treaty is printed in Miscellaneous No. 11 (1952). The European Defence Community treaty, Cmd. 9217.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 7 December 1951.

Community in the protection of the Atlantic area. This was the burden of a joint declaration by the British and United States Foreign Ministers issued in London on 19 February 1952.<sup>1</sup> This was far from satisfying French opinion since it seemed to underline the impression that Germany was France's problem within EDC, while Britain stood aloof and fancied herself on the same level of world power as the United States. Nothing was beginning to irritate the French more than the 'special relationship' which British governments claimed with the United States.

France, supported by Holland, kept up the pressure on Britain and in the result a further step was taken in London in April, when Britain undertook to assist members of EDC if attacked in Europe, using her right under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which legalised individual and collective self-defence. This undertaking was to last as long as Britain remained a member of NATO.<sup>2</sup> Eden explained the commitment by saying that 'we have established a formal and special relationship between the United Kingdom and EDC. This clearly shows that, although we cannot join that community, we are linked with its future and stand at its side.'<sup>3</sup> In practice, however, the undertaking did little more than extend to West Germany the commitment Britain had assumed towards her European allies by the North Atlantic treaty to come to their defence against armed attack.

By this time the situation was complicated by two new circumstances which served only to depress the prospects of EDC in France and to drive a deeper gulf between that country and Britain. The first was the decision of the United States Government to intensify the pressure on France to complete the ratification of the EDC treaty since West German rearmament had already been held up in deference to France and the undisguised arming of the East Germans, later drawn into the 1955 Warsaw Pact, was increasing the perils of the military vacuum west of the Elbe. Fearful, as always, that America might return to her own fortress in disgust with Europe, the British Government joined in this turning of the heat on France. Eden and Dulles issued a joint statement in Washington in March 1953 plainly stating their hopes that the EDC treaty would be ratified soon. This pressure reached a climax in December when, at a Press conference in Paris, an angry Dulles spoke of an 'agonising reappraisal' of United States policy should the EDC scheme collapse. This was as much a warning to Britain as to France since a swing of

<sup>1</sup> Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Documents on International Affairs*, 1952, London, 1955, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Miscellaneous No. 5 (1952), Cmd. 8512.

<sup>3</sup> 499 H.C. Deb. 5a, Col. 24 (21 April 1952).

American opinion over to hemispheric defence would destroy all the assumptions on which British foreign policy had been built since the war. At the end of June in the following year a troubled Churchill joined President Eisenhower in a final warning from Washington against further delays in getting the European army into being. Even Dr Adenauer, realising that West German sovereignty hinged upon EDC, added his voice, reminding France that the failure of EDC would not, in the long run, deprive Germany of an army of her own, and that German armed forces organised in EDC offered a much safer prospect for France, and for democratic forces in Germany too, than a purely national Wehrmacht. These various urgings unfortunately coincided with the worsening situation in former Indo-China, which was temporarily halted by an armistice but not until the summer of 1954. The Far Eastern crisis was a reminder to France that, with her oversea commitments, she could not hope to prevent a European army falling under German control.

The other notable event was the death of Stalin on 5 March 1953, with its immense consequences in the form of the reconsideration of policies and reassessment of the probable future by all states in all continents. No movement taking place on the international stage could continue as before after the passing of the Soviet leader and the age of East-West relations symbolised by his name. The first signs of a thaw in Russia after the long winter of Stalinism naturally led the British Government, among others, to weigh the possibilities of sounding the new men in Moscow on a better state of relations. Churchill, though he had detected the nature of the Soviet military threat at the end of the war more quickly than any other Western statesman of note, had already chided the Labour Government in February 1951 for reluctance to talk with Russia at the highest level on the nuclear threat to civilisation. With Stalin's death the prospect seemed ripe again, especially as the outlook of his successor, Malenkov, was wholly unknown in the West. The result was Churchill's speech in the House of Commons on 11 May 1953 which took the world (and the Foreign Office) completely by surprise and proposed an informal meeting at the heads of government level between a few of the greatest Powers.

The idea of a 'summit' meeting with the new rulers of Russia, however, not only opened up a new prospect in world affairs after the seemingly endless Cold War. It also threatened to throw out of gear the building of the economic and defensive strength of the Western world which had begun as far back as 1947 and was proceeding at an intensive rate after the outbreak of the Korean war in 1950. For this reason Churchill's suggestion had a varied reception among Britain's allies. The United States Government, mindful of



the aversion of Congress for the use of a 'summit' meeting as a means to delay German rearmament, were nervous and insisted on the most careful preparation of the ground if parleys with Russia were held. The official feeling in West Germany tended to be that the process of exploring the path to rapprochement with Russia might hinder the building of Federal Germany as a sovereign state and that if agreement with Russia were reached it might be at Germany's expense. In France, however, the 'summit' meeting proposal had a much warmer welcome. It held out possibilities of escape from joint imprisonment with menacing Germany in EDC. Despite Russia's crushing of a rising in East Germany in June 1953, the seeming improvement in East-West relations promised to reduce the pressure for German rearmament and thus give France more time to negotiate safeguards for herself in EDC. At the same time a rapprochement with Russia might have the effect of relieving the position in Indo-China. On the other hand, the French saw British interest in EDC shrinking even more as the grand vision of wrestling at the conference table with Russia seemed to grip Churchill. He had said, after all, in his 11 May speech, referring to the EDC Powers, 'we are with them, but not of them', and this with some asperity.

Unfortunately at this time Eden was absent from the Foreign Office from June until October with a critical illness. His place was taken, first by Churchill, then, after the Premier himself stepped down with a temporary stroke, by Lord Salisbury. On instructions from Churchill Salisbury persuaded the Americans to accept a meeting with Russia at least at Foreign Minister level, though contrary to Churchill's wish Washington insisted on a strict limitation of the agenda to the questions of Germany and Austria, where progress was most doubtful. Salisbury himself was no 'summit' enthusiast, but his position hardly enabled him to do much to prevent the hopes of the Defence Community from continuing to fall. The French Government led by Laniel until its collapse on the Indo-China crisis on 10 June 1954 did succeed in winning two major concessions from France's allies to help with ratification, but these were not enough. In November 1953 Laniel obtained from France's EDC partners additional protocols giving her a privileged position in the Community. These permitted her to withdraw troops from the European army virtually as she wished without her voice in EDC affairs being affected. In the second place, after the failure of the four-Power Foreign Ministers' meeting on Germany in Berlin in January 1954, Britain consented to sign a co-operation agreement with EDC which had in fact been worked out the previous summer but was kept in cold storage until the opponents of German rearmament in Britain and France had been convinced that there was

no road to four-Power agreement on Germany. The agreement, which, like all previous British offers, fell far short of French hopes, was signed on 13 April and provided for consultation with EDC in the event of a British decision to reduce British forces on the continent (four or five divisions) and for a British Minister to attend the EDC Council, but only when co-operation between Britain and EDC was actually under discussion.<sup>1</sup>

Neither concession sufficed to win the necessary support for EDC in the French legislature. The writing became clear on the wall when the treaty was rejected by majorities in the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committees of the National Assembly since the pattern of party strength was the same in the Committees as in the Assembly. Undoubtedly one of the main reasons which had contributed to this result was the British refusal to undertake stronger commitments towards the Defence Community. Jules Moch, the socialist rapporteur of the Foreign Affairs Committee, let it be known that he and five other socialist opponents of the treaty would have voted the other way, which would have reversed the Committee's unfavourable decision on the treaty, had the British attitude been different.<sup>2</sup> But this is probably not the whole story. French foreign and colonial policy since the failure of EDC has not proved beyond reasonable doubt that the French were ever ready for complete political fusion with their partners in the Six at any time in the 1950s. Even after the conclusion of the Common Market treaty three years later, launched under entirely happier omens, the French continued to hesitate on the brink of federation. EDC had been embarked upon by France less as a premeditated step towards federal Europe than as a means for avoiding a Germany army; yet EDC, of all unity proposals since the war, demanded almost complete surrender of sovereignty, and almost at once.

### *The end of EDC and the British intervention*

Isolated at Brussels, the French Prime Minister, Mendès-France, saw Churchill and Eden at Chertwell on 23 August and told them he was quite definite that EDC would be defeated. The British Ministers replied that in that case Germany must receive political equality immediately and be included into some acceptable defence framework, preferably NATO, shortly afterwards.<sup>3</sup> These last-minute threats were of no avail. The question was put to the vote a week later

<sup>1</sup> Miscellaneous No. 10 (1954). Memorandum regarding United Kingdom association with the European Defence Community, Cmd. 9126.

<sup>2</sup> Nulling, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> The Eden Memoirs, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-9.

in the French National Assembly and wafted to defeat by a majority of 319 to 264. Among the thirty-four abstentions was the French Cabinet led by Mendès-France. All this had long been foreseen, but the practical effect was to leave the issue of German sovereignty suspended in doubt since the Federal German Republic had been created as a sovereign state by the Bonn agreements of 1952 conditionally upon the entry into force of the Defence Community. A German defence contribution remained unavoidable in view of the increasing strain of the arms burden on the West. But, even in the United States, any such contribution was hard to accept without some means for bringing it under the common control of the Western Alliance. In Britain there was general agreement with the so-called 'Attlee conditions' for German rearmament, formulated in February 1951; one of these insisted that German military units must be integrated in Western defence in such a way as to rule out a recurrence of German militarism. According to a pamphlet issued by the Labour Party in 1954, entitled *In Defence of Europe*, these conditions had been largely met, with the failure of the effort for four-Power agreement on Germany and the re-election of Dr Adenauer, the pledge of a democratic West Germany, the previous September. But the collapse of EDC opened up the most intractable 'Attlee condition' again, that of Germany's external control.

A possible solution was that Federal Germany should enter NATO as an ordinary member, there being no question of 'junior status' in a coalition of equals. This had never been acceptable to France, though the United States was no longer in a mood to listen to her. The chief objection was that in NATO there had never been (nor could there logically be) a system for limiting the maximum forces to be contributed by each ally. On the contrary, every NATO Power had an interest in the maximisation of the forces of all the others. Alongside the NATO structure, however, was the older system, out of which NATO had grown, the Brussels Treaty organisation, as a possible framework for a controlled German contribution to Western defence. It had the distinct advantage for France that Britain had been a member and had shared the same responsibilities as the other parties since the treaty was signed in March 1948. Moreover, it had none of the supranational features of the Defence Community which France herself had in the end found impossible to swallow. The Brussels Treaty alternative had occurred to Eden, by his own account, 'in the bath on Sunday morning'.<sup>1</sup> After completing his toilet, the Foreign Secretary, with his flair for the timely expedient, quickly inserted his alternative into the vacuum created by the French non-ratification of EDC.

<sup>1</sup> Eden, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

It required more than the choice of the alternative to make a success of the operation. Eden's diplomatic style, at once persistent and deft, was never displayed to better effect than in the autumn of 1954, when he first determined to raise the British military commitment to Europe and then managed his announcement of it in such a way as to dispel all doubt about the solution proposed. He began with a lightning tour of the west European capitals, Brussels, Bonn, Rome and Paris in that order, in September and, having secured the agreement of the first three to the Brussels Treaty organisation as the framework of German rearmament, provided it was revised and strengthened, put the question to France. Mendès-France at first held out for a probationary period before Germany was admitted to NATO as part of the Brussels system. But he was now left with little bargaining power since the United States was prepared to rearm Germany with little in the way of safeguards. At length he agreed to the Eden plan, but continued to plead for the retention of British troops on the continent until the end of the century. Eden, bent on securing French acceptance of the main proposal, gave no definite answer.

The Foreign Secretary then summoned the six EDC Powers, together with the United States and Canada, to meet him in conference at Lancaster House, London, on 28 September in order to negotiate the revision of the Brussels Treaty and Germany's entry to NATO. Dulles reluctantly consented and opened the London meeting with a gloomy funeral oration on EDC, which included, however, a promise to ask President Eisenhower to renew the American pledge made to EDC if a satisfactory substitute for the Defence Community emerged from the conference. Eden then timed his own announcement to fall with masterly effect after the curtain had thus been raised. The pledge he gave was as far-reaching as that given by Austen Chamberlain at Locarno thirty years before. 'The United Kingdom [Eden said] will continue to maintain on the mainland of Europe, including Germany, the effective strength of the UK forces now assigned to the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe—four divisions and the Tactical Air Force—or whatever the Supreme Commander regards as equivalent fighting strength.' This was substantially the same assurance Britain had repeatedly given to the EDC Powers. Now it was backed by an undertaking which would have put the champions of EDC in France in an immensely stronger position, even if it had not carried them to victory. Eden continued:

'The United Kingdom undertakes not to withdraw those forces against the wishes of the majority of the Brussels Treaty Powers, who should take their decision in the knowledge of the Supreme

Allied Commander's views. This undertaking would be subject to the understanding that an acute overseas emergency might oblige HM Government to omit this procedure. If the maintenance of UK forces on the mainland throws too heavy a strain on the external finances of the UK we would invite the North Atlantic Council to review the financial conditions on which the formations are maintained.<sup>1</sup>

This revolutionary pledge, principally levelled at French opinion, did not commit Britain as much as membership of EDC would have done, though, once Britain had gone as far as this, the extra obligations in EDC might have been justified in return for the political advantages. Britain was in effect handing over to the other Brussels Treaty Powers authority to demand the retention of the forces named on the continent. But the two reservations Eden mentioned were important. The 'acute overseas emergency' justifying a withdrawal or reduction of the forces would be judged by Britain alone, who would have to decide whether or not she should seek her allies' consent. As far as the reservation concerning the financial burden was concerned, the final decision would not lie with Britain, but the allies would have little alternative but to give their consent if Britain insisted that she was unable to foot the bill. This was in fact the position reached in April 1957, when Britain applied for and received authority to reduce the force levels on financial grounds. Above all, the *Eden pledge*, unlike *EDC membership*, extended supranationalism to British forces only in so far as their minimum strength on the mainland of Europe was concerned. There was certainly no implication that British forces as a whole, save with exceptions such as those negotiated in the additional protocols by France, should come under the control of a common European authority in which Britain might be outvoted.

The Final Act of the nine-Power conference, signed on 3 October incorporated Eden's pledge, together with an undertaking by Britain and the United States to join France in dealing severely with any German failure to carry out a promise not to try to achieve reunification by force or to recover the lost territories annexed to Poland.<sup>2</sup> The essence of the London agreements, which were later embodied in the treaties signed in Paris on 20-23 October, was that the Federal German Republic should become a sovereign state, as already agreed at Bonn in 1952, and should simultaneously join NATO and a revised Brussels Treaty organisation. The Allied High

<sup>1</sup> Miscellaneous No. 28 (1954). Final Act of the Nine-Power Conference held in London, Cmd. 9289, pp. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 9289.

Commission in Germany and the Occupation Statute were both to disappear. German forces, which were not to exceed the twelve divisions fixed under the EDC treaty, were to be placed under the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR). No increase in German forces was ever to be sanctioned without the consent of the Council of the Brussels Treaty organisation, now, with the addition as members of Germany and Italy, to be called West European Union (WEU). A parliamentary organ, on the lines of the abortive EDC assembly, was to be created and was to receive reports from the WEU Council. The most important new addition to the Brussels structure, however, was a special agency for the control of armaments. The function of this was to supervise the peacetime maxima of arms and arms stocks of the member states and to exercise surveillance over Germany's undertaking not to manufacture atomic, chemical or biological weapons or, at least during the early years, such armaments as guided missiles or large naval vessels.

After further hesitations on the part of France, only overcome after Churchill had firmly told Mendès-France that ratification of the agreements this time must come before any further talks with the Soviet Union, the London and Paris arrangements finally came into effect on 6 May 1955. Russia, the sustained efforts of which to prevent West German rearmament by blandishments and threats had now failed, retorted by annulling the Anglo-Soviet treaty of 1942 and the Franco-Soviet treaty of 1944. This did not prevent the Soviet Government from attending a 'summit' conference with the three Western Powers in the summer of 1955.<sup>1</sup>

### *The ebbing tide*

The movement for European unity, from the Marshall plan to the Paris agreements of 1954, thus represented a widening breach between Britain and her West European allies. WEU which might have served to lessen this breach, was not in fact subsequently exploited as much as Eden had hoped. Continental opinion concluded from this experience that the British principle of association with, rather than membership of, Europe was still intact and that only to preserve the Atlantic defence system could Britain be prodded into cautious steps forward. British Ministers continued to believe that they could influence world affairs more effectively by detachment from Europe, an assumption no doubt influenced by scepticism as to the capacity of continental Europeans to bring their visions out of the clouds.

There was also no doubt that the Commonwealth, and more particularly perhaps India, could do a great deal both as a bridge

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 8 below

between the Western camp and the newly emerging countries and also to moderate the dangerous asperities of the Cold War. Commonwealth conferences repeatedly welcomed trends towards closer unity in Europe and appeared to raise no difficulty about British participation in these tendencies. But there is hardly any doubt that Britain could not have played quite the same role as she did in the Commonwealth had she been a mere unit in the process of federating Europe, and that the effect on Commonwealth unity would have been quite unpredictable. There was very little serious disagreement on this point amongst British politicians. Moreover, the Europe of the Six as Schuman's reference to the development of Africa in the original outline of his plan showed, tended to regard the new world emerging from European colonialism rather as a prospect for European enterprise than as the birthplace of free and equal states.

On the reverse side of the account the policy of patronising detachment certainly had its cost, especially in that the gathering of forces towards unity among the Six after the failure of EDC left Britain stranded and increasingly cut off from one of the most notable forms of political change in the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Nor did this necessarily serve to consolidate the Anglo-American relationship on behalf of which British governments had sacrificed so much of their influence in Europe. The picture which more and more Americans tended to form of Britain in the second half of the 1950s was of an ageing, self-satisfied prima donna who insisted on holding the limelight though the glory and beauty of her youth were long passed, while her friends were forming successful business partnerships after their retirement from the political theatre. That little of this could be foreseen during the early years of the Council of Europe, and even as late as the death struggles of EDC, was evident from the similarity in attitude towards European union of Conservative and Labour politicians in Britain. The Right was certainly more sensitive to European opinion than the Left, but the lengths to which it was prepared to go when in office were not markedly different from those of Labour.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of British policy at this time was not so much the refusal to join the Six pilgrims on their golden road but the apparent unwillingness even to work out and discuss publicly the gains and losses of various forms of membership or association. British Ministers, as we have seen, rightly felt that the electorate gave them no authority for the abandonment of national independence. But rarely if ever were the possible implications of the loss of independence set before the electorate for them to choose. This was partly due to the ingrained habit of British foreign policy of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 11 below for developments in Europe after 1954.

step-by-step decisions, of 'judging events on their merits', or 'never crossing a bridge until you come to it', without the need being felt to range ahead in thought or imagination. But it was also due to the assumption that if the electorate does not actually press for a change in policies which have worked reasonably well hitherto things can be safely left to go on as before. This assumption can be dangerous in a rapidly changing world society.



## Chapter 6

### THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

After the Second World War British politicians had a habit of saying that Britain belonged to three overlapping circles, the Commonwealth, the Atlantic community, the dominant member of which was the United States, and Europe.<sup>1</sup> One distinctive feature of the Atlantic community as a group which Britain sought to keep in a close relationship with itself was its recency compared with the other two. It is true, of course, that the British connection with the Western Hemisphere goes back to the acquisition of Newfoundland in the fifteenth century. But it was not until the First World War that the strategic interdependence of Britain and the United States was really accepted by British politicians, and even so not until the collapse of Russia in 1917 showed that the survival of Britain and France, certainly their victory in the conflict, depended on American assistance. Not until the Anglo-French deadlock over German reparations which ended in the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 was the necessity of American financial help to European recovery understood in London. The history of Anglo-American relations since then could be written as a struggle of British and American public opinion against accepting and acting upon those facts.

The strategic interdependence of Britain and the United States passed, from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth, through two main phases and then began to hover on the brink of a third. The first was the period of the British two-Power naval standard, when British dominance of the Atlantic provided a shelter behind which the United States could proclaim the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 and fight the Civil War of 1861-5 without interference from Europe. This phase ended with the acceptance by Britain of naval parity with the United States in 1921 in order to avoid a naval arms race with that country. Thereafter it was clear that no major British action could be brought against an enemy at sea without the benevolent neutrality of the United States. The assumption on which Britain went to war in 1939 was that the blockade of the Axis Powers would be sympathetically accepted by the American

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chapter 11, p. 328.

Government as being as much in America's interest as in Britain's, and that the Pacific could be written off for the time being as an effective theatre of British naval operations. In June 1940, when Germany overran Western Europe, New Zealand was confidentially told that in the event of war with Japan no British fleet could be sent to the Pacific and that New Zealand would have to look to the United States for its naval defence. In 1942, after America's entry into the war against Japan, Britain was unable to defend Singapore and lost some of its most powerful battleships in encounters with Japan. These events foreshadowed the Anzus pact of 1951, from which Britain was excluded and through which the United States assumed the chief responsibility for the naval defence of Australia and New Zealand.

Despite this dramatic change in status, however, British security continued to be vital to America's continental defence. Once Russia established itself as a military threat to Western Europe at the end of the war, little doubt was felt by responsible American leaders, Democrat and Republican, that the security of the United States could not be provided for without Britain, France, Italy and later Western Germany. The symbol of this was Marshall Aid and the Atlantic Pact. This phase, however, when Britain and other European allies, though definitely the junior partners, were as necessary to America as America was to them, began to be challenged by a third, marked by the development of missile weapons and the rivalry between America and the Soviet Union in the conquest of outer space which began with the launching of the first artificial space satellite by Russia in October 1957. These developments broadened the gap between American military capacity and that of Europe and raised questions in the United States as to whether the issue of war and peace, with its potentialities of utter destruction for America, should not be solely for her to decide on behalf on the non Communist world as a whole.

↙The sharp decline after 1945 in the contribution which Britain was able to make to the defence of the Atlantic community was not accepted by British opinion without distaste amounting at times to positive disregard of the facts of the case by politicians out of office and sometimes even in office. The most outstanding example of this occurred as late as October 1956, when military action was initiated by Britain in company with France against Nasser's Egypt in the Suez Canal dispute, despite intense American disapproval. A feature of the psychology behind this action seemed to be the feeling of exasperation with a situation in which Britain, only a generation previously acknowledged as the greatest Power in the world, was now unable to enforce its rights upon a country of no military

consequence without permission from Washington.<sup>1</sup> Similar exasperation was felt after the creation of NATO when an unduly large number of senior posts in the military structure of the organisation seemed to be given to Americans, culminating in the announcement in February 1951 of the appointment of an American admiral to the Supreme Command of NATO forces in the North Atlantic. The only sop to British pride was the appointment of a British deputy to the American commander and of a British admiral to command the Eastern area of the Atlantic command.<sup>2</sup> The Labour Government, which agreed to these appointments, were roundly denounced by the Opposition in the House on 19 April; Churchill argued that the appointment of a Supreme Commander was unnecessary and that an American admiral would be able to switch naval forces from the eastern to the western Atlantic without the concern for the security of the western approaches to the British Isles which actuated British seamen.<sup>3</sup> When the Conservatives returned to power in October 1951 they declared that they would secure a revision of the agreement. The subject was discussed during Churchill's first post-war visit to Washington as Prime Minister in January 1952, but he was unable to reverse the American decision.

### *The British nuclear programme*

The reluctance of British Governments to accept the supremacy of the United States in Western defence, if this meant that in the last resort only Washington could decide the ultimate issue of peace or war, also accounted for the Labour Government's decision, which the Conservatives endorsed, to embark on a separate nuclear arms programme. This resulted in the test explosion of the first British atomic bomb on Montebello island, off the Australian coast, in October 1952 and of the first British hydrogen bomb in 1957. Behind the decision to create an independent nuclear deterrent was a feeling of resentment with the United States for attempting to monopolise a weapon which was to a large extent a joint wartime achievement of Britain, Canada and the United States. In October 1945, two months after the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, President Truman issued a statement declaring that the United States would preserve its monopoly of the manufacture of the bomb and the technical knowledge essential for its production. This

<sup>1</sup> See the interesting analysis of this psychology by Geoffrey Crowther in 'The reconstruction of an alliance', *Foreign Affairs*, January 1957, pp. 174-83.

<sup>2</sup> 484 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1459 (22 February); Col. 1755 (26 February). *Cmd.* 8214 of 1951.

<sup>3</sup> 486 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 2017-36.

was reflected in the MacMahon Act, which received the President's signature on 1 August 1946; it created a civilian body, the Atomic Energy Commission, to own and operate all atomic energy plants on behalf of the United States Government. At the same time it drastically curtailed, if it did not stop, the flow of information on the exploitation of atomic energy between British and American scientists.

Britain reacted to this measure by protesting that it infringed both the agreement signed by Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill at Quebec on 19 August 1943, when they pledged themselves to 'full and effective interchange of information and ideas' in scientific research and development of atomic energy,<sup>1</sup> and the Agreed Declaration signed by President Truman, Clement Attlee and the Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, on 16 November 1945, which provided for 'full and effective co-operation in the field of atomic energy' between the three countries. This was the burden of a letter sent by Attlee to Truman on 16 April. Truman replied that the expression 'full and effective co-operation' applied only to basic scientific information and not to the construction and operation of atomic energy plants. This interpretation was denied in Attlee's rejoinder on 7 June, but the President delayed his reply until the MacMahon Act became law and rendered further exchanges pointless.<sup>2</sup> The British Government had certain means to hand for modifying the complete closure of scientific information from America, namely an Anglo-American agreement on July 1946 for the division of uranium from the Belgian Congo. Since the American share was proving inadequate by the end of 1947 a new agreement, the so-called '*modus vivendi*', was signed on 7 January 1948. Under this the United States was to give Britain information in nine specific fields of atomic energy production, none of which included the manufacture of atomic weapons, in return for Britain's agreement that all uranium produced in the Congo in 1948 and 1949 should go to America. Britain was pledged not to pass the information on to any other country with the exception of New Zealand.

A new agreement was worked out in the summer of 1949 but President Truman, who seemed to want a full partnership with Britain, provided all uranium coming into British hands was stored in America, found that strong mistrust of British security controls prevailed among Republican members of the joint Atomic Energy Commission of Congress and was obliged to instruct the American delegates at the talks for revising the agreement to confirm the

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 9123 of 1954.

<sup>2</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope, 1946-53*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1956, pp. 15-17.

exclusion of atomic weapons from the fields in which exchange of information might take place. The arrest of outstanding figures in British atomic establishments on charges of espionage, coupled with the rapid strides made in atomic development in the Soviet Union, served to entrench the MacMahon Act. In 1946 a leading British scientist, Dr Alan Nunn May, had been arrested in Canada as a Soviet spy. In February 1950 Dr Klaus Fuchs, a German-born scientist in British pay, was arrested on a similar charge. American nervousness as a result of these ruptures in the British security curtain was such that when the American scientist Dr Cyril Smith was sent to Britain at the end of July 1948 to convey information under the *'modus vivendi'* of January a panic was caused among American senators when it was found that he had with him information on the basic metallurgy of plutonium, a prohibited item under the agreement. Frantic telephone calls to Dr Smith, who was touring in Scotland, ended when it appeared that he had not yet communicated the forbidden information.<sup>1</sup>

When British protests against the MacMahon Act produced little effect, the Attlee Cabinet secretly decided that the exploitation of atomic energy for military as well as peaceful uses must continue in this country if Britain was not to be left behind in research and development techniques and if American legislation was to be encouraged to relax as the British nuclear effort grew. There was also the feeling that in the post-war world the atomic bomb was a symbol of international status and that, so long as Britain kept this weapon in her armoury, her voice would speak more loudly in the world's capitals. But perhaps the strongest reason impelling the Labour Government to make the bomb was the recognition that Britain might be forced to fight in self-defence when the United States was unwilling to do so, or, as in 1939, before American opinion had accepted the necessity of fighting.

None of this, however, altered the conviction of British politicians, whether Labour or Conservative, that only within the framework of the Atlantic community, based in the last resort on American military and economic strength, was it possible to provide for British and West European security. The real question was whether, since Britain and the United States were inevitably bound together in the post-war world, decisions might be taken in Washington which committed Britain to war before the possibilities of negotiation were exhausted or forced it into conflicts not central to its interests as

<sup>1</sup> *The Forrestal Diaries*, edited by Walter Millis, New York, Viking Press, 1951, pp. 470-1.

<sup>2</sup> 568 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 71 (1 April).

it saw them. The greater the nuclear armament stockpiled by the United States the greater was this fear. It was intensified by the fact that Britain's pre-war appeasement policy suggested to many Americans (though their own hands were far from clean during that period) that it would shirk a Soviet challenge when it came, and hence that the United States should make up its own mind how to reply. American thought moreover, unlike British, tended to prefer the quick solution to the strategy of patiently living with a problem. As it happened, the threat to the democratic states in the post-war world was not that of direct military aggression as practised by Hitler. The form it took was tireless pressure against the soft places in the Western world, a pressure compared by George Kennan, the leading adviser to the State Department on Soviet affairs, to that exerted by water against a porous surface. This was precisely the kind of struggle for which the American mind was least prepared and in which it might be tempted to cut the Gordian knot in relief. 'The indecisiveness of the Cold War', wrote John Foster Dulles, who became the American Secretary of State in 1953, 'is its most baffling aspect for the American temperament.' A considerable part of British diplomacy was therefore to be spent in urging restraint on the various American government departments which made their sometimes conflicting contributions to foreign policy. This advice was often taken but not without the irritating feeling that Britain was more active in applying brakes than in providing the motive power for the machine.

During the Berlin airlift in 1948, when President Truman's Cabinet agreed that the atom bomb must be used if war broke out with Russia, Britain accepted two groups of American B29 bombers, equipped to carry atomic weapons, and was willing to have them fly from British soil on missions to Russia. Nevertheless the then British Foreign Secretary, Bevin, constantly urged Washington to continue negotiations and secured a postponement of the reference of the question to the United Nations until the latest possible moment since he feared that taking the issue to the Security Council would be read in Moscow as closing bilateral discussions.<sup>1</sup> A more critical instance of British restraint came in December 1950, when Attlee flew to Washington to caution President Truman against using the atomic bomb to repel Chinese forces which had come to the assistance of the North Korean communist army against United Nations forces under General MacArthur's command. In visiting Washington in person and immediately after Truman had given an ambiguous answer at a Press conference on 30 November on the use of the atomic bomb in Korea, Attlee sought to impress on the President

<sup>1</sup> *The Forrestal Diaries*, pp. 487-91.

the alarm felt by British opinion and expressed in the Commons on 29 and 30 November. In the conversations with the Prime Minister Truman maintained that it lay within the discretion of the United States Government what type of weapons they authorised American forces to use. In a communiqué issued on 8 December he was recorded as having expressed the hope that the atomic bomb would never have to be used and as being willing to inform Britain of circumstances which might change the situation.<sup>1</sup> Attlee's expression of British alarm at the possibility of war with China may have served to strengthen Truman's determination to repress General MacArthur, which he did by recalling him (and appointing Lieutenant-General Matthew Ridgeway in his place) in the following April.

When Churchill visited Washington as Prime Minister in January 1952 he was not able to modify the American refusal to allow a foreign veto over the use of weapons by American forces. But it was agreed that consultation would always take place between the American President and the British Prime Minister of the day when American bombers took off with atomic bombs from bases in Britain and also that no order to release the bombs could be made effective without the British consent.<sup>2</sup> This arrangement was later extended to the firing of rockets with nuclear warheads from American bases on British soil. This being as far as British restraint on the actual use of atomic weapons by American forces could go, hence-forward British policy concentrated on the effort to influence American foreign policy more generally towards negotiation with the Communist world.

#### *Economic co-operation and conflict*

6 The second important form of interdependence underlying the Anglo-American partnership was the economic. Here again the closeness of the association between the two countries tended to engender friction, while making such difference as arose all the more difficult to resolve. In the years immediately after the war the American market, owing to the high tariff traditional in that country and the greater industrial efficiency of American industry as compared with European, was not important to British exporters. During 1949-50, when British export trade was reviving after the war, only 4 per cent of British exports were marketed in the United States, as compared with 5 per cent in Canada alone and over 40

<sup>1</sup> Visit of the Prime Minister to the United States, Cmd. 8110, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 10 January 1952.

per cent in the rest of the Commonwealth. By 1956, however, as a result of the drive by British industry to penetrate dollar markets, the United States had become the biggest single export outlet for British goods.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the American economy had grown in power to such an extent by 1945 that economic conditions in the rest of the world, outside agrarian countries living on a subsistence basis and the closed societies of the Communist bloc, moved in accordance with American economic life. This was strikingly shown at the end of the war when the sole prospect of the economic recovery of Britain and Western Europe lay in the grant of American dollars to tide over the period in which domestic industry was being started up again and international trade revived. The rapid exhaustion of the loan to Britain after eighteen months, largely owing to the rise in American prices, and the lack of balance between American surpluses and shortages elsewhere showed that without substantial subventions American allies could not hope to rise to their own feet and play their part. This sensitivity of the economy of the democratic world to the supply of American dollars was further shown both during slight recessions in the American economy, which had magnified effects outside, and during the period of intense rearmament in the West which followed the outbreak of the Korean war in June 1950.

The British rearmament programme, introduced at the end of 1950, contemplated an increase in defence spending of the order of £1,500 million a year, a figure which it was widely reported the United States had insisted upon, contrary to the original judgement of the British Labour Cabinet. The strain of rearmament of these dimensions and the world-wide demand for raw materials which accompanied it placed exceptional hardship on Britain, whose recovery from economic depression in the early 1930s had depended on low prices of primary raw materials. One effect was sharp dissension in the Labour Cabinet on the question whether a reduction in the outlay on social services was necessary in order to finance rearmament. When the budget embodying the new defence proposals was being prepared by Gaitskell, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who intended to raise extra revenue by introducing charges for false teeth and spectacles provided by the National Health Service, Aneurin Bevan, a former Minister of Health and now Minister of Labour, resigned in April 1951 in protest. Harold Wilson, the President of the Board of Trade, also gave Attlee his resignation and so did John Freeman, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Supply. Bevan, giving the reasons for his resignation in the

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Shonfield, *British Economic Policy Since the War*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1958, p. 82.



House of Commons on 23 April, bluntly stated that 'we have allowed ourselves to be dragged too far behind the wheels of American diplomacy'.<sup>1</sup>

The formation of a distinct rebel group within the Labour Party under Bevan's leadership, which played an active role out of proportion to its actual support in Britain until Bevan and Gaitskell were reconciled in 1957, had adverse effects on Anglo-American relations. It provided a platform for Labour critics of the United States, and since many of the prophecies of Bevan on the economic effects of rearmament were proved right, the effect was to lower respect for America in Britain generally. On the other hand, the Bevanite movement underlined the fears of Americans who accepted the allegations of Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin that America's efforts to retain her freedom were being sabotaged by Communists in high places in the United States and her allies. One serious effect of the xenophobia to which McCarthy appealed was the passage by Congress over President Truman's veto of the McCarran Act in late 1952. This subjected British nationals, including seamen when they put in at American ports, to the indignity of security checks on entering the United States. On a more material level the rise in the price of primary commodities effected by rearmament jeopardised the gold and dollar reserve which British Chancellors of the Exchequer had husbanded with such care since the post-war years of stress. Between June and December 1951 Britain lost approximately £850 million in gold and dollar assets.<sup>2</sup> The resulting balance of payments crisis in the autumn of 1951, which seemed to confirm Bevan's warnings, unseated the Labour Government and left the Conservatives to deal with the problems of an over-strained economy in a world reflecting at every turn the movement of the steering wheel in Washington.

Given that the American economy was bound to be a dominant influence on economic conditions throughout the non-Communist world, it was vital that British and American economic policies should harmonise as far as possible. The difficulties of achieving this lay in the fact that American thinking tended to run in political and moral grooves, whereas British thought, reflecting the greater British stake in world trade, was more influenced by economic considerations. This was despite the frequent American claims that 'business' principles were of prime importance and should prevail over political objects. When the reality of the Cold War with the Communist Powers was accepted in the United States, especially after the failure of the Foreign Ministers' meetings on Germany in 1947 and the

<sup>1</sup> 487 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 38.

<sup>2</sup> F. W. Paish, 'The Sterling Area Crisis', *International Affairs*, July 1952.

formation of Cominform in the same year, United States Congressmen applied intense pressure for the cutting of foreign trade with the Communist states in materials useful for military purposes. With the creation of the Atlantic Pact an inter-allied committee (COCOM) was formed to regulate this trade. The most effective inducement resorted to by Congress, however, in order to line up America's allies behind the trade embargo was the Battle Act passed by the Senate and House of Representatives in August and signed by President Truman in October 1951. This threatened to stop American military and economic aid to countries exporting goods 'of primary strategic value' to the Communist bloc states. This blockade bore more hardly on Britain than on any other American ally.

The disability Britain suffered through the trade embargoes was possibly even greater in the matter of trade with China, where the Communists had finally triumphed over the Kuomintang, or Nationalist, regime in 1949 and established the Chinese People's Republic. Britain afforded *de jure* recognition to Communist China in January 1950, while the United States held aloof and continued to regard the Nationalist leaders, under their President, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, as the legitimate government of China, even though they were confined after the civil war to the island of Formosa and had less and less prospects the years passed of returning to the mainland. If anything, American hostility was even greater towards the Chinese than towards the Soviet Communists. A great deal of American effort had gone into missionary and educational work in China and the triumph of Communism in that country left Americans with the feeling that China had not only embraced a wicked faith but had bitten the hand that fed it, especially as the foremost propaganda target of Communist China was American 'imperialism'. The United States therefore insisted upon a much harsher restriction of trade in strategic materials with China than with the Soviet Union. The instrument of this control was CHINCOM, a consultative committee of NATO allies and Japan sitting in Paris and based on a UN General Assembly resolution of May 1951.

During the inter-war years it was the Left in Britain which tended to call for economic sanctions against disturbers of international peace and accused the National Government of subordinating respect for League Covenant obligations to profitable trade with the Axis. Now it was the Left wing of the British Labour Party, together of course with the unimportant Communist Party, which denounced the Battle Act, COCOM and CHINCOM as America's pursuit of a private anti-Communist vendetta at the cost of British trade and employment. On the American side, British complaints about the

trade embargoes seemed, not only to McCarthyites, but to all those genuinely shocked by the price America was paying to defeat Communism in Korea, to be evidence of British 'softness' in the struggle, if not distinct sabotage by an ally. The issue was well suited for recriminations and counter-recriminations across the Atlantic; British anti-Americans accused Washington of tailoring the list of forbidden exports to suit American business interests, while anti-British Americans charged Britain with conniving with exporters to defeat the blockade. Yet for all the rancour they provoked, it is doubtful whether the embargoes really reduced Communist bloc military power, or if they did, whether other consequences did not outweigh these gains.<sup>1</sup>

When the Korean armistice was signed in July 1953 the British Government pressed for the equalisation of the strategic embargo between China and the Soviet bloc. Prolonged discussions in the Consultative Group in Paris, however, produced no agreement between the British and American points of view. When Americans asked Britain to appreciate the state of public feeling in their country in relation to Communist China, which had been responsible for the deaths in Korea of many young Americans, the British retorted that the same public opinion was insisting upon the rearmament of West Germany and Japan, countries which had taken a much greater toll of British lives during the war. It was clear that the deadlock could not be resolved and the British Government, largely as a result of pressure in Parliament, unilaterally decided to equalise the British strategic embargo between the Soviet bloc and China on 30 May 1957.<sup>2</sup>

While the strategic control of trade with the Communist bloc was a politically explosive issue without much real economic importance, difference of attitude between Britain and the United States on general commercial policy sprang from entrenched economic doctrines. For Britain the governing factor was her experience during the inter-war period, when the chief source of long-term unemployment was the failure of basic exporting trades to revive after the 1914-18 war. This led to the determination of the Labour Governments of 1945-51 to safeguard full employment and to refuse to allow British export trade to suffer the 'anarchy' of unrestricted international competition. In practice this meant three policies: adherence to a system of mutual Commonwealth Preferences, which had provided the climate of British economic recovery in the

<sup>1</sup> See Susan Strange, 'Strategic Embargoes', *The Yearbook of World Affairs*, 1958, London, Stevens, 1958, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> 571 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols. 618-20 (30 May 1957). Statement by the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd.

1930s; maintenance of the sterling area, in which a number of countries including the Commonwealth (but not Canada) agreed to hold their gold and dollar earnings from foreign trade in London and received liquid sterling assets in return; and a range of foreign trade and exchange controls the object of which was to adjust the foreign trade balance to the optimum level of activity within the country. These policies derived from an economic experience entirely different from that of the United States. They also ran counter to cherished American axioms of international trade. American opinion continued to revere classical theories of unrestricted multilateral trading, with their liberal political overtones, even though these theories had long been abandoned even in America.

As between British insistence on foreign trade controls and American pressures for a return to the multilateral system a head-on clash was inevitable. British opinion felt that there was something inconsistent in repeated American pleas that Britain should get to its feet economically and at the same time abandon supports such as Commonwealth Preference which history had shown to be essential to its solvency. Apart from the American tariff, the massive American export surplus after the war, reflecting the higher efficiency of American industry, with its great internal market behind it, and the relatively minor after-effects of the war, resulted in a shortage of dollars in the outside world which unavoidably led to some control of the relations between the non-dollar and the dollar economies. The only alternative was that the American taxpayer should provide the missing dollars on the scale required. This was neither acceptable to him as a permanent policy nor was it consistent with the full independence of the recipients. But what tended to obscure these facts from American opinion was the imperialistic connotations of Commonwealth Preference.

On the British side, there was readiness to co-operate in international organisations which, it was wishfully hoped, would gradually steer the non-Communist world towards multilateralism, provided loopholes were left for second thoughts on the way. Britain took a leading part in the negotiations at Geneva from April to October 1947 from which sprang the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the purpose of which was to negotiate tariff and quota reductions.<sup>1</sup> It also took a prominent role in OEEC, originally set up for the distribution of Marshall Aid funds but subsequently used for negotiation tariff reductions in Europe. On the whole, however, Britain made few real concessions to American multilateralism and when it did, as in the negotiation of the American loan in 1945, events showed that to do so in face of the facts was

<sup>1</sup> Report on the Geneva Tariff Negotiations, Cmd. 7258 of 1947.

unwise. During the Labour Governments of 1945-51 economic recovery from the war seemed to require the kind of state controls which ruled out multilateralism. When the Conservatives returned to office after the general election in October 1951, they found themselves in a balance of payments crisis for which multilateralism was to some extent responsible and for which it was certainly no cure. Since a strong gold and dollar reserve was thence-forward the symbol of successful government and quarterly figures of the size of the reserve were read as barometers of Ministerial popularity, there was little disposition to take risks by conforming to American trade doctrines. Moreover, by the middle 1950s Americans began to look apprehensively at the rate of growth in the Communist bloc and a world-wide competition in economic prowess between Russia and the United States developed. The encouragement of multilateral trading therefore began to take a lower place in American policy requirements.

#### *Imperialism and post-colonial neutralism*

In the light of this military and economic interdependence between Britain and the United States, it is now possible to review the points at which British and American policies met in the post-war world. Historically by far the greatest issue in Anglo-American relations was the conflict between British imperialism and American ideals of self-determination, though this issue played a less important role after 1945. At the end of the war it seemed as though the disestablishment of the British Empire was the first object of American policy. According to Lord Halifax, the British wartime Ambassador in Washington, almost the only positive proposal which Franklin Roosevelt ever made to him was that Hong Kong should be restored to China.<sup>1</sup> At the Yalta conference in February 1945 Roosevelt evoked some of Churchill's strongest indignation by his demand to convert the Empire into international trusteeships. The British, Roosevelt told his Secretary of State, Edward Stettinius, 'would take land anywhere, even if it were only rock or a sandbar'.<sup>2</sup> It was largely on account of mistrust of British imperialism that American politicians did not warmly respond to Churchill's appeal in his Fulton, Missouri, speech in March 1946 for an Anglo-American partnership in the face of Russia's menacing attitude. The influential Senator, Claude Pepper of Florida, opposed America's 'ganging-up' with British imperialism against Russia.<sup>3</sup> But, while suspicion

<sup>1</sup> *Fulness of Days*, London, Collins, 1957, pp. 249-50.

<sup>2</sup> Stettinius, *Roosevelt and the Russians*, London, Cape, 1950, p. 212.

<sup>3</sup> *The Forrestal Diaries*, p. 154.

remained, the ending of the Empire as an object of policy soon faded before two interrelated facts: Britain's decision to end the Empire herself and the dropping of British commitments, especially the commitment to assist Greece and Turkey, owing to financial stringency. The former, dramatically illustrated by the grant of independence to the Asian dominions in 1947, was widely applauded in the United States, though it provided an odd comment on the common American allegation that post-war Britain was too 'feather-bedded' to stand up for her rights. The latter led straight to the Truman Doctrine which for the first time brought the United States into a peacetime relation with smaller countries not unlike that of a metropolitan Power with its colonies.

The effect of these developments might have brought British and American attitudes towards imperialism so close to each other as to be practically identical. In certain instances this did happen, as for instance in the firm American support of British operations against Communist guerrillas in Malaya. On the whole, however, British and American attitudes operated on different wavelengths. One reason for this was the unwillingness of many Americans to agree that the maintenance of British interests in the non-European world was necessarily helpful to the Western cause, and their suspicion that this cause was often weakened by a British tendency to hold on to positions when local opposition forces were too strong. There was thus little American sympathy for British resistance to the Greek demand for the union of Cyprus with Greece, which took the form of open Greek Cypriot warfare against British forces in 1955. When the conflict threatened to embroil Greece and Turkey, which had joined NATO in 1952, American pressure was thrown on the side of an early British withdrawal from Cyprus. Another example was the British conflict with Egypt between 1951 and 1954 on the status of British forces in the Suez Canal zone and the future of the Sudan. When Churchill visited the United States as Prime Minister in January 1952 he appealed in an address to Congress for American forces to be sent to help British troops in the guerrilla warfare in the Canal zone.<sup>1</sup> This appeal was wholly without effect, partly because, with the Korean war still continuing, America had no forces to spare, but also on account of resistance in Congress to the idea of shoring up Britain's tottering foreign estate. Again, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, American policy during the troubled last years of the British mandate in Palestine seemed to be moved by pro-Zionist considerations which derived much of their appeal from the always latent American belief in British territorial greed. How easily American distaste for British efforts in support of client states and

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 8468 of 1952, p. 7.

dependencies could be aroused was also shown in the Buraimi oasis dispute when Britain, in the autumn of 1955, supported the occupation of the area by the forces of the Sultan of Muscat and the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi. The United States Government, who for their own reasons backed the opposing claims of King Saud of Saudi Arabia, privately told two countries friendly to Britain, Australia and the Netherlands, that they considered the British action 'an act of aggression'.<sup>1</sup>

But by far the largest influence tending to divide British and American attitudes towards countries either newly freed from Western imperialism or in process of being freed was the dominant place occupied by the world struggle against Communism in the American mind. The United States, especially after the accession to office of President Eisenhower in January 1953, when the State Department fell into the hands of the dedicated but unbending John Foster Dulles, tended increasingly to centre its policy on this conflict. To some extent this reflected a lack of confidence on the part of Americans in their own diplomatic skill; having less experience of diplomacy than an old Power like Britain, they seemed determined to make up for this by resolution to win the battle with Communism at whatever cost. It should also be remembered that Britain and America, during their periods of leadership of the democratic world, have not been in equally secure positions. During Britain's primacy there was always the consciousness that, at the eleventh hour, America might throw in its weight against Britain's enemies of the day. For America in the world after 1945 there has never been any such assurance. Hence Americans tended to feel that if they lost this struggle all was lost and no one remained to come to their aid.

The result was that when Britain resisted colonial nationalism American opinion tended to fear that allies were being created for the Communist side, and where Britain encouraged newly independent countries to follow their own policies, or placed no difficulties in the way of their doing so, Americans expressed irritation if these countries did not line themselves up in the anti-Communist front. The former was illustrated in differing British and American attitudes to Middle Eastern nationalism. British Governments, sensitive to the tendency of regimes in the Middle East to exploit signs of weakness among Western Powers, generally assumed firm attitudes in the face of nationalist challenges to Western rights, even though Parliamentary and public pressures in Britain had the effect of softening these attitudes. Critics of the policy of toughness, more often on the political Left than the Right, found themselves in a strange alliance with American Secretaries of State and diplomats

<sup>1</sup> Eden, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

who accused Britain of driving anti-colonial nationalists into the arms of the Communists. Thus, in the Iranian oil crisis of 1951-3 the American Government persistently urged restraint on London lest Dr Moussadig open the gates of Sovietism in Iran; moreover, according to Eden, the British Foreign Secretary of the time, the agreement finally signed in 1954, after Moussadig's fall, would have been impossible without America's good offices and quiet assistance to both sides.<sup>1</sup> Although on the whole Washington showed somewhat more sympathy during the British difficulties in Egypt in the early 1950s, much the same fears of nationalism taking on a Communist form were expressed. The United States appeared to support the unilateral Egyptian declaration of October 1951 placing the Sudan under the Egyptian crown and applied very strong pressure on Britain to come to terms with Egypt in March 1952.<sup>2</sup> The underlying American anxieties behind these moves provided perhaps the strongest motive for Washington's firm dissociation of itself from the Anglo-French armed action in Egypt in 1956, even though the incident which had precipitated the Suez crisis, the withdrawal of the offer of a World Bank loan to finance the projected Aswan Dam, was in effect an American reprisal for Colonel Nasser's receipt of military assistance from Moscow. Two years later, in 1958, after a revolution in Iraq in July which swept away the pro-Western regime of King Faisal, it was now the United States which seized the initiative. American forces were landed in Lebanon, while a British airborne contingent was dropped on Jordan, both actions being defended on the ground that these countries were prospective victims of indirect aggression from Egypt, now combined with Syria in the United Arab Republic.

These shifts in the American attitude to anti-colonial nationalists, from protectiveness in order to keep them in the Western camp to hostility if they received aid and comfort from the Communist camp, reflected the dominance of the tension with Russia in American thought. British opinion, on the other hand, was apt to regard local nationalism within British oversea territory or along the routes of British communications as a separate issue to be dealt with on its merits. There was less fear in Britain that strong-arm tactics would produce new recruits for Communism and less suspicion that nationalist movements, if they showed interest in receiving help from Russia, would finish as pawns in the Communist game. At the same time, it was perhaps the changes in American attitudes to anti-colonial nationalism, rather than the attitudes in themselves, which caused irritation in Britain. It was vexing to find that the United States, having encouraged the formation of the Bagdad Pact, signed

<sup>1</sup> Eden, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 231-3.



in 1955, thereupon stood aside from it, presumably not wishing to be branded as imperialist by Arab nationalists. This left Britain, which had joined, to bear the brunt of Arab hostility.

From these differences of approach to anti-colonial nationalism sprang an Anglo-American dispute about neutralism, especially as manifested in countries formerly belonging to the British Empire and now independent countries in the Commonwealth. If the ideological divide between Russia and the West was the most alarming feature of the post-war world, the feeling of detachment from this conflict on the part of states newly freed from European control was perhaps the most hopeful, since these countries provided a theatre of peaceful competition for the two main power groups, diverting their efforts from a purely military struggle. These newer states, consisting mainly of Arab countries in the Middle East and former colonies in south and south-east Asia, were too suspicious of Western capitalism and too resentful about the racial discrimination practised in many Western democracies to wish to join the containment belt formed by the United States around the Sino-Soviet heartland. Whatever their Governments may privately have thought, alignment with the West was too much like a return to the colonial nexus to make it a practical policy. Moreover, the intense demand in these countries for economic growth ruled out the massive rearmament required by membership of the Western bloc. On the other hand, there was not much more inducement for these countries to join the Soviet camp, which in any case Russia did not press them to do. The result of the West's inability to attract and the East's encouragement to inactivity was the growth of a group of neutralist states. Their efforts to combine, as at the conference held at Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955, generally produced only statements of innocuous principles such as the Panch-Shila or five principles of co-existence. Nevertheless, their resistance to American attempts to align them against Communism was wholly successful.

Neutralism suggested to American politicians not only the blindness to facts from which they themselves had suffered in the 1930s, but indifference to great moral issues in terms of which Americans were apt to visualise all political conflict. Their reaction during the Korean war, when neutralists like the Indian Prime Minister, Mr Nehru, took an ambiguous stand and sought to confine United Nations action, for which America paid by far the highest price, to merely restoring the position to what it was when the North Korean attack occurred, was one of intense anger. It was as though conspicuous evil was being denied by Asians who otherwise sermonised so much on the need for morality in politics. When India and other Asian neutrals stood aside from the South-East Asia Collective

Defence Treaty, signed at Manila in September 1954 on American initiative, neutralism became a word of contempt in the United States. For Mr Dulles, until the last few months of his life at least, the neutralist was more dangerous than the Communist because his function as a friend of Communism was veiled.

Britain could not share this view, even had the struggle with the Communists assumed for British people the intense aspect it had with Americans. The assumption in the Commonwealth was that, while members might complain about one another's policies in private, each country had a perfect right to pursue the policy of its choice. There was little doubt where the countries of the 'old Commonwealth', Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa, stood in the East-West conflict. Canada was one of the pioneers of NATO and a partner with the United States in the defence of North America. Australia and New Zealand were, after 1951, linked with America through the Anzus pact and, after 1954, through the South-East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO). Both feared China's ambitions in southern Asia equally with the United States. South Africa, though relatively isolated from world politics, could not be faulted on its anti-Communism by any American Russophobe. Pakistan, too, which stayed in the Commonwealth after independence in 1947, opted for the Western connection when she joined the Bagdad Pact in 1955 and received American military aid. This decision reflected in part Pakistan's fear of India in Kashmir and partly her suspicions of Soviet designs on Afghanistan. India and Ceylon, however, belonged decisively to the neutralist group.

For Britain the position of India was decisive. To attempt to bully India into a pro-Western alignment would have been to invite serious consequences for the Commonwealth.<sup>1</sup> It would have defeated Mr Nehru's efforts, which were otherwise successful, to show that Commonwealth membership left India entirely free to pursue her own foreign policy without being forced into an unwelcome military alliance. It would have discouraged those British colonies which were soon to attain their independence from following India's example and remaining in the Commonwealth. It might also, had it succeeded, have removed an element from the international stage which British opinion considered vital, namely a group of intermediaries, of which India was the natural leader, which offered some hope that the globe would not be ground to powder between the two armed camps. The British Government further believed that China's reluctance to offend India, so long as India remained neutral, provided the West with a means to influence Chinese policy.

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Gaitskell discusses this point in his article 'The Search for an Anglo-American Policy' published in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 4, July 1954.

For these reasons Britain refused to take the American view during the Korean war that holding aloof from the war was a form of disloyalty. It associated itself with Afro-Asian efforts to secure a hearing for Communist China in so far as it was possible for an ally of the United States to do so. At least until the Suez crisis in 1956 Britain refused to believe that Asian neutralists must be positive enemies if they found they could not be positive friends. This attitude was strongly criticised in the United States.

### *America, Britain and Europe*

A second area of discord in British and American policies was European union, to which reference has been made in the previous chapter.<sup>1</sup> Although American opinion generally favoured European union on the same federal basis as the United States and saw no reason why Britain should not be included, the strength of this opinion varied from time to time. In the early months of the Korean war, when bipartisanship in American foreign policy broke down and Republican leaders attacked President Truman's policy of alliances, a movement seemed to be gathering force for cutting adrift from Europe and retaining only the tie with Britain. The strength of the Communist parties in France and Italy, French resistance to the American pressure for German rearmament and the evident European interest in a settlement with the Communist bloc made their contribution to this feeling. In a notable broadcast on 19 October 1950 Herbert Hoover, the only living American ex-President at that time, said that only Britain and Japan could be relied upon. These anti-European sentiments were brought under control so long as Truman remained in office, thanks largely to the valiant defence of NATO before Congressional committees by the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson. They revived with the return of a Republican administration under Eisenhower at the elections in November 1952.

But this tendency in its turn proved to be short-lived. With the renewed movement towards European integration after the signature of the Rome Treaty for an economic community and common market in 1957, American policy reverted to its federalist position and Britain came under criticism for its reluctance to merge with the Six. Americans hoped that the British proposal for a European Free Trade Area, put forward in 1958, would prove acceptable to France. When this failed, their alarm at the political consequences of a divided Europe was increased by the remarkable change in the American balance of payments towards the close of the 1950s. The dollar shortage of the immediate post-war years now disappeared and

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 5, pp. 147-49.

American exporters met with stiffer competition in foreign markets. This gave the United States Government a new interest in European unity since the fracturing of Europe into competitive economic blocs was likely to increase the obstacles to American trade.

British Governments took note of American disapproval of their failure to enthuse over European union. When Ministers visited the United States they were expected to explain their position and they did so by arguing that the world-wide interests of the United Kingdom gave it a special place in the alliance which was profitable to America as well. Thus in January 1952 Eden, then Foreign Secretary in the newly formed Conservative Government, said in a speech at Columbia University that

'The American and British peoples should each understand the strong points in the other's national character. If you drive a nation to adopt procedures which run counter to its instincts, you weaken and may destroy the motive force of its action. This is something you would not wish to do—or any of us would wish to do—to an ally on whose effective co-operation we depend. You will realise that I am speaking of the frequent suggestions that the United Kingdom should join a federation on the continent of Europe. . . . We know that if we were to attempt it we should relax the springs of our action in the Western democratic cause and in the Atlantic association which is the expression of that cause.'

The true framework of Western security, in British eyes, was the Atlantic community, whatever smaller unities might be formed within it. But one of the most effective links between the Atlantic community and the wider world of uncommitted countries surrounding the Communist bloc was the Commonwealth and this, it was argued, could not remain the same if Britain joined federal Europe.

So long as France was in political turmoil and the problem of a German contribution to Western defence was unsolved, American Governments were bound to respect this argument. The picture of Anglo-American relations which prevailed during the first Conservative Government (1951–5) was thus one of a United States continuing to press a sluggish Britain into European affairs and of a Britain successfully resisting. Once the Economic Community created by the Rome Treaty in 1957 began to show signs of life, however, and promised to become the most rapidly expanding area in the non-Communist world, the position changed. France seemed to derive renewed strength from the return to power of General de Gaulle in June 1958 after the civil and military uprising in Algeria, while Dr Adenauer untiringly presided over an economic boom in West

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, 12 January 1952.

Germany which markedly contrasted with periodic alarms in the British economy. The apparent firmness of these two apostles of Franco-German rapprochement on the main issues in dispute with Russia also recommended them as allies to Washington.

*Asia in British and American eyes*

In discussing the European issue with Americans British politicians had always to remember the attractive force which Asia and the Far East exerted on the American mind and how it threatened to separate the United States from a Europe which, through unity, might give the deceptive appearance of being able to stand on its own feet. American 'Asia-firsters' had in their make-up a strong element of isolationism and were known to critics in their own country as 'Asialationists'. British Governments considered that, without the restraint applied by an independent Britain, these elements might destroy the alliance between America and Europe which British policy had always sought to build.

During the 1930s Americans were more concerned about Japanese aggression against China than with Axis aggression in Europe. Even so forceful an opponent of appeasement as Winston Churchill agreed with the National Government that it would have been wrong to side with American appeals for a stand against the Japanese attack on Manchuria in 1931 so long as no promise was forthcoming of American assistance in Europe.<sup>1</sup> After the outbreak of war in 1939 not even the overrunning of Western Europe by Hitler prevented a Presidential contest being held between Roosevelt and the Republican Wendell Willkie in November 1940 in which both candidates promised 'to keep the boys off the transports'. It required a Japanese attack on the American fleet in Pearl Harbor in December 1941 to bring America into the war. In the course of the war Roosevelt constantly had to fight strong pressures for giving greater priority to the Pacific theatre and after the conflict, though the American Government intended to relieve itself of European commitments as soon as possible, they determined to continue in an active role in the Far East. The three elements in this policy were the retention of a monopoly of occupation in Japan; the encouragement of a strong coalition government in China with full control over Manchuria, which Russia occupied during her brief war against Japan after the Potsdam conference; and the taking over of the islands formerly under Japanese mandate in the Pacific in the form of American trusteeships under the United Nations.

This policy was largely frustrated through the unexpected success

<sup>1</sup> Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. I, 1948, p. 68.

of the Chinese Communists in overthrowing the ruling Kuomintang regime in a civil war which broke out into the open after the Japanese surrender. The Communists received certain assistance from Russia whose forces handed over to them territory which they had overrun in Manchuria and placed difficulties in the way of the National Chinese Government landing troops at Manchurian ports in the struggle with the Communists. In providing this help Stalin himself appeared to have little expectation that the Communists would soon take over the entire country. Unlike their European counterparts, the Chinese Communists were not a minority party within the state but had in fact been administering a part of China, the province of Yenan, since the 1930s. They were a highly disciplined and united group, of impeccable personal integrity, and formed a sharp contrast with the inefficient, quarrelsome and corrupt Kuomintang leaders.

United States policy in the Chinese conflict, at first expressed through the American Ambassador, Patrick Hurley, and subsequently through George Marshall, later Secretary of State, whom President Truman sent to China in December 1945, was to press for a ceasefire and the formation of a coalition government which would give recognition to Communist strength in the country. These efforts were without effect, much of the responsibility for this falling upon the Kuomintang, though it is extremely doubtful whether the Communists were ever likely to be content in a partnership with their bourgeois and landowning opponents. By the end of 1949 the Communists were in possession of all Chinese mainland territory and the Nationalist Government and army had retired to Formosa. The status of this rich island was uncertain. It had been wrested from China by Japan in 1895 and, in accordance with an inter-Allied declaration issued at Cairo in November 1943, should have been retroceded to China when the war ended. The civil war in China prevented this being done, with the result that Formosa (and the adjacent island group called the Pescadores) was in a state of legal suspension. As far as the new Chinese Communist regime on the mainland, now called the Chinese People's Republic, was concerned, Britain accorded *de jure* recognition in January 1950 consistently with the traditional British policy of accepting seemingly irreversible changes in the *status quo* however undesirable they may be. The United States, in keeping with the American practice of using recognition to express moral or political approval of new regimes, continued to accept the Nationalist Government under Chiang Kai-shek as the lawful authority in China, even though it was confined to territory which had not yet been formally retroceded to China.

In deference to American wishes Britain continued to recognise

the representatives of the Formosan regime as Chinese delegates at the United Nations and repeatedly voted against consideration of the Communist claim to take China's seat in United Nations organs. This involved Britain in a double inconsistency. It was obliged to recognise one Chinese Government for general purposes and another for particular, or United Nations, purposes. At the same time it had agreed in 1945, and again mainly through American pressure, to giving China a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, even though this was as much a defiance of the facts of China's strength and unity as the American refusal to recognise the Chinese Communists after 1949 was a defiance of the fact of their effective occupation of the country. An entirely unrepresentative Chinese regime on Formosa thus came to have a veto on substantive questions before the Security Council to which China itself, by the test of physical power, was not yet entitled. The absurdity of this was tempered by the fact that the Chinese delegate from Formosa at the Security Council was hardly like to vote except in accordance with American wishes, since without American support the Formosan regime itself would collapse.

The events in China drove the deepest wedges between Britain and the United States since the end of the war. The feeling in America of having been betrayed, either by the Chinese Nationalists, many of whom had received American weapons only to desert with them to the Communists, or by the Chinese peasant, now an ally of Russia, who had had so much American help in the past, created intense hostility towards all concerned: towards the Chinese People's Republic which, being planted in a region of ancient American hopes and fears, seemed far more dangerous than the Soviet system; towards the allies and especially towards Britain, which seemed to Americans to have joined hands with Communist China for the worst possible motives of improving its own balance of trade; and towards people in high places in America itself, who were widely accused by Right-wing isolationists of having 'sold China down the river' through ineptitude or pro-Communist leanings. This mental atmosphere was fully exploited by Senator McCarthy who found, quite by accident, that insinuations against the loyalty of American policy-makers and America's allies gave him access to the inmost ear of a country shocked by the Communist triumph in China and desperately anxious for clear lines of battle, with Good on one side and Evil on the other, to be drawn. British legalism was apt to seem intolerable, especially, as we have seen, since Britain took a different view of the neutrals than was customary in America. The Asian neutrals, led by India, were less hostile in their attitude to the revolution in China than American opinion, at least until the

Communist Chinese attack on the semi-independent state of Tibet in March 1959.

Such was the context of the attack by Communist-dominated North Korea on the pro-Western Republic of Korea, based on the southern half of the country on 25 June 1950. Korea was one of the territories liberated from Japan in 1945 after having formed a part of the Japanese Empire since 1910. Like Germany it represented the failure of East-West agreement on the nature of the regimes to be set up in areas overrun by Allied troops. A United Nations Commission created to supervise free elections throughout the country had been denied access to the Communist-held region north of the 38th parallel and Korea split into two. In the south the regime of the Republic of Korea was formed under the intemperate nationalist Syngman Rhee in August 1948, while a so-called Democratic People's Republic was created in the more industrialised north in September. Though the two regimes were equally bent upon the destruction of each other, observers from the United Nations Commission in fact reported that the attack on 25 June came from the north and this seems probable in view of the almost uninterrupted movement of northern forces to the south after fighting began. American spokesmen had to some extent invited the attack by repeated statements since 1947 that Korea was not an essential part of the United States containment belt in the Pacific, running from Japan to Formosa. Nevertheless, President Truman's response was prompt and decisive. On his initiative the United Nations Security Council met at once, called for a ceasefire and, when this was unheeded, asked United Nations members to assist South Korea on 27 June. On the previous day Truman instructed General MacArthur, in charge of American forces in Japan, to go to the aid of the Republic of Korea and thus was formed a United Nations Command in Korea under MacArthur. This was not an enforcement action by the Security Council, although, owing to the absence of Russia from the Council's meetings in protest against the non-recognition of Communist China, the Council's decisions were held to be valid. It was rather a form of general assistance by United Nations members to South Korea, an American general being placed at the head of a single command since the United States made by far the largest contribution.

The United Nations was firmly supported by Britain, but after a brilliant landing of United Nations forces at Inchon on the west coast which drove North Korean forces back across the 38th parallel dispute arose between London and Washington as to the wisdom of extending United Nations operations to the frontier with China in the north. Britain voted on 7 October for a United Nations General



Assembly resolution which called for free elections throughout the country and this seemed to endorse the crossing of the parallel by South Korean forces the previous week and by American forces two days later. Strong warnings were received from Peking, however, that China would not 'stand idly by' if MacArthur's advance continued. The British Government were urged by Mr Nehru to heed these warnings, versions of which had reached him through his Ambassador in Peking. No sooner had this advice been transmitted to Washington than MacArthur's offensive of 24 November, designed to bring the rest of the country under United Nations control, ran into strong opposition and counter-offensives by Communist Chinese 'volunteers' were launched which drove MacArthur back to the 38th parallel.

This presented the United States with its most searching test so far in the post-war world. It was natural for Americans to express their feelings by securing a resolution in the United Nations General Assembly on 1 February 1951 condemning China for aggression. The British delegate, Sir Gladwyn Jebb, at first doubted whether this was a practical way of demonstrating that aggression did not pay; he said it would drive China into isolation and was therefore contrary to the opinion voiced at a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference in London on 12 January that 'we must do what we can to understand those who appear to differ from us'. In the end, after making the provision for sanctions in the resolution dependent on further efforts to come to an agreement with China, Jebb reluctantly voted for the resolution.<sup>1</sup> The more immediate question, however, was whether, as General MacArthur seemed to wish, all-out force, including perhaps the atomic bomb, was to be used to drive the Chinese Communists out of Korea. MacArthur argued that the force required merely to hold the 38th parallel was no less than that needed to drive the Chinese back into their own country, provided he was allowed to raid their bases in Manchuria.

All this was deeply disturbing to Britain. MacArthur was not merely a politically inept general who stole the newspaper headlines owing to his services in the Pacific during the war, but a mouthpiece for powerful groups in America who wanted to turn a deaf ear to allies and do the right thing by their own consciences. In the event Mr Truman, who had been returned to office in November 1948 against all forecasts to the contrary, felt strong enough first to caution MacArthur about his expressions of dissent from government policy and then to recall him in April 1951 after one of his messages, advocating the bombing of Manchuria and the despatch of Chinese forces from Formosa to Korea, had been read out in Congress by

<sup>1</sup> Korea No. 1 (1951), Cmd. 8159.

Representative Martin. Truman's courageous action was certainly not the result of British pressure, though the adoption of MacArthur's views would almost certainly have placed an unbearable strain on Anglo-American relations as well as on the Commonwealth. The fact was that MacArthur was widely recognised by the President's own advisers as likely to plunge America into what General Omar Bradley, chairman of the United States Chiefs of Staff, called 'the wrong war against the wrong enemy in the wrong place at the wrong time'. It was a further instance of the capacity of the United States to hover on the brink of war, and yet turn back to sanity at the eleventh hour. In this retirement from catastrophe Britain's influence undoubtedly played a part.<sup>1</sup>

American uneasiness at the indecisiveness of the Korean struggle, however, remained. It was not appeased by the long-drawn-out negotiations for an armistice which began at Kaesong in 1952 and were then transferred to Pannunjom. There on 27 July 1953 an armistice was at last signed, after long and angry debates on the question whether prisoners-of-war should be repatriated against their will, as the Communists desired, or allowed to decide their future for themselves, as the Western representatives contended. The frustrated feelings aroused in America by the war in Korea continued to overhang relations with Britain and expressed themselves in the Presidential elections of November 1952. The victor in that contest, General Eisenhower, formerly the Supreme NATO Commander in Europe, was elected largely as a strong character who was believed to be able to hold his own with the Communist Powers, even though his political views were so imprecise that for some time he had seriously considered standing for the Democrats. With the return of the Republicans to power the more extreme 'go-it-alone' elements in the party which had rallied round General MacArthur and the isolationist leader Senator Knowland of California were brought under control. Nevertheless, the emotional aftermath of Korea and the armistice talks strengthened the inclination of the Eisenhower administration to recruit all available anti-Communist forces in the Far East, however dubious their liberal character, and increased their mistrust of neutralism.

Under the Truman administration peace had already been made with Japan in 1951 and full sovereignty was restored to that country in April 1952. Then, after the signing of a mutual security treaty between Japan and the United States at the same time as the signature of the peace treaty, the way was open for the gradual building up of Japan's military strength on the basis of American financial support. Rearmament, however, proved to be a much

<sup>1</sup> Korea No. 2 (1951), Cmd. 8366.

slower process than the Americans had hoped and the curious situation arose in which American officials urged Japanese Ministers, some of whom had served terms of imprisonment as war criminals, to raise their military sights, while the latter gave the American-imposed constitution, with its renunciation of war, as a pretext for their unwillingness to increase taxation burdens in the country.

The British Government accepted the American decision to rearm Japan as the inevitable corollary of a fiercely anti-American China. But the return of Japan to an independent position in international relations was bound to arouse anxieties in London, all the more so since the American emphasis on the world conflict as a moral struggle compared strangely with the allies the United States was acquiring in the Far East, such as Chiang Kai-shek, Syngman Rhee and now the new converts to democracy in Japan. Australia and New Zealand, which had bitter memories of Japan from the war years, had little to fear from Japanese militarism so long as the Anzus pact continued. But the American injunction to Japan forbidding official relations with China meant that Japan's 90 million people might not always be content with their restricted position and might look elsewhere for opportunity and livelihood. Above all, the assumption by Japan of a favoured position in American esteem threatened to expose Britain to trade competition with that country which had proved so ruinous in the 1930s, especially as Japan's exports could no longer find their natural outlet in China. Hence, on the insistence of MPs representing British textile manufacturing constituencies, Britain continued to oppose Japan's entry into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade as a full member and the extension to it of Article 35 of the agreement, which provides for most-favoured-nation treatment to all the parties.

### *The new order in China*

- 2) It was, however, on the issue of the 'two Chinas' that British and American policies were most seriously divided, especially since certain members of the Eisenhower administration were reported as talking vaguely of the need to 'take the wraps off Chiang' and let him do his worst on the mainland, all presumably under the protection of the American Seventh Fleet, which had been sent to form a protective cordon round Formosa at the outbreak of the Korean war. British opinion was almost unanimous that giving encouragement to the Nationalists in the hope of unseating the Communists was the last word in reckless adventurism. Nor was it considered that the Nationalists would prove any more representative of the Chinese people or more capable of providing honest and capable government

than they had in the past. Nevertheless, it was out of the question to press the case too strongly in Washington. In the first place, the Peking Government continued throughout the 1950s to threaten an invasion of Formosa. Reality seemed to be about to be given to this threat in 1955 and again in 1958 when shelling from the mainland was directed at the island of Quemoy and the Matsu group, just off the south China coast, which Nationalist forces had retained after the civil war. Had the threat to invade Formosa been carried out, Britain would have been bound to support American action in resisting it, since she did not admit that Formosa was part of the territory under the jurisdiction of the mainland government, although Quemoy and Matsu were so accepted. A second factor in British restraint on the two Chinas issue was the fact that American public opinion and especially the Congressional groups which championed the Nationalists would clearly not allow the administration to abandon the Formosa authorities or accept the suggestions frequently made in Britain concerning a possible United Nations trusteeship for Formosa. Towards the end of his life, Dulles appeared to be feeling his way towards some such solution. On one occasion he said America might consider recognition of the Peking regime if it ended its aggressive policy. Shortly after this statement was made, however, the Chinese invasion of the priestly state of Tibet in March 1959 and the outbreak of Sino-Indian differences over their common frontier removed the prospect of an early change in American policy.

Britain's position as a junior partner with the United States in the Far East was therefore wholly and dangerously anomalous. Had war resulted from the offshore islands issue, Britain would have been committed to a conflict for a cause which aroused little sympathy at home and which, in the Government's own view, was clearly illegal. Fortunately the situation was eased by restraint on both sides. The United States plainly intimated to Formosa that the offshore islands were to be regarded as part of the defence of Formosa, not a springboard for attacking the mainland. The Chinese Communists on their side, perhaps under pressure from Moscow, evidently decided that Formosa would fall to them in time as age and receding hopes destroyed the Nationalist regime and as the People's Republic grew in strength and became an object of pride in the eyes of all Chinese people.

Formosa was a matter of national prestige for the mainland Chinese and its recovery by them could be regarded as inevitable in the course of time. But Communist China's designs on south-east Asia, the ancient *Lebensraum* of Chinese rulers, were far more dangerous in that penetrations into the area would bring immense riches into Communist bands. For this reason Mao Tse-tung, the

architect of the Communist revolution in China, saw great possibilities in the civil war intermittently going on in the three states of former French Indo-China, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, since the grant of independence within the French Union in 1947. By the nature of the terrain a difficult problem was presented to any external Power which sought to prevent Communist exploitation of this warfare. Pro-Communist guerrilla forces, especially in Laos and North Vietnam, could be quietly fed from south China across the border without world opinion being alerted, while the Western Powers were unable to supply the other side without being accused of open intervention. Defences against Communist encroachment could only be provided in the last resort by armies recruited from the local peasant population, but these had little knowledge of the issues at stake or much desire to risk their lives in order to replace one set of rulers by another. It was from every point of view a conflict to which the standard American policy of organising a military front of democrats against Communist aggression was unsuited.

This was the argument urged by Eden on Dulles in the crisis in the spring of 1954 when French forces were besieged in the fortress of Dien Bien Phu in North Vietnam. Dulles was insistent on some form of Anglo-American action, possibly by bombing enemy forces at Dien Bien Phu, to relieve the French, while Eden replied that intervention would be rejected by British opinion and by the Asian neutrals and would turn both Russia and China against a political solution while hope of such a solution still existed. But it was the Asian neutrals which occupied the critical position. Eden was concerned to use India's influence in order to bring China to the conference table and he therefore urged Dulles to postpone the formation of a collective defence organisation for south-east Asia since this would deter India from lending its assistance. Dulles for his part believed that only a strong military front would deter Communist advances and regarded the neutrals as doing a disservice to peace in so far as they blurred this fact. When the SEATO treaty was finally signed at Manila in September, however, only three Asian states joined, namely Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand, and neither these nor the five other parties, Australia, Britain, France, New Zealand and the United States, were able to provide permanent forces in the area to make the treaty more than a symbol of solidarity.<sup>1</sup>

The quarrel between Eden and Dulles represented the differing psychological attitudes of Britain and America in all their relations, in particular the persisting search for accommodation on one side and the precise conception of good and evil in politics on the other.

<sup>1</sup> Eden, *Full Circle*, *op. cit.*, Chapter V.

To which was added a personal element. Eden, though younger than Dulles, had had a long and distinguished diplomatic record going back to the early 1930s. In method and even appearance he suggested to many Americans the devious old-style diplomat seeking a form of words to accommodate conflicting positions and thus, to a person of strong religious faith like Dulles, obscuring the basic question of who is right and who is wrong. At the Geneva conference on Indo-China and Korea in 1954 Eden fought his way through many weeks' negotiation with the Russians and the Chinese from 1 May until 21 July until agreement was reached on armistices in the three states, the division of Vietnam into a Communist north and non-Communist south, and a neutral status for Laos and Cambodia. Dulles, whose wish for a military intervention before the conference began had been outmanoeuvred by Eden, retired from the conference after a week and left the American case in the more pliable hands of Bedell Smith. The resulting sense in the Secretary of State's mind of having been frustrated by Eden may have contributed to his behaviour during the Suez crisis two years later, when roles were reversed and Dulles played the same accommodating part which Eden had filled in Indo-China in 1954. Another legacy of the Geneva conference was American pressure towards the establishment of a Right-wing regime in Laos after the failure of efforts to integrate the pro-Communist Pathet Lao forces with the Royal Laotian army, as provided for at Geneva, and to form a coalition government. In the autumn of 1960 Prince Souvanna Phouma gave up his attempts to form a neutralist administration and the capital, Vientiane, was seized by American-backed elements led by General Phoumi Nosavan. The neutralists then retired to join Pathet Lao in the north and their combined success against the Right led to a new crisis, with the United States and China openly supporting opposite sides. A second Geneva conference met in May 1961, but by this time the Western position in Laos had much deteriorated. American policy, which shared some responsibility for this, therefore concentrated on preventing the adjoining state of South Vietnam following the same course as the Communist north.

#### *Cold War diplomacy: the two approaches*

This pattern of Anglo-American differences, with the British emphasis on accommodation and the primary American concern with resistance to Communist encroachments, reproduced itself in East-West relations generally. While neutralism, in the sense of withdrawal from Western military pacts, was never acceptable to more than an unimportant fringe of British opinion, British

Governments constantly looked for ways in which disagreements with the Communist bloc might be adjusted by negotiation. Americans, conscious of their major responsibility for the security of the West, regarded these British efforts with anxiety. Churchill's suggestion for a 'summit' meeting with Russia in May 1953 had a cold reception in America and British misgivings over the building up of West German military strength, lest Russia be provoked, were regarded as unrealistic. When the Geneva 'summit' conference finally met in July 1955 American officials looked with suspicion on the proposal put forward by Eden, who had become Prime Minister in succession to Churchill in April, for a controlled *status quo* in respect of forces in central Europe, which had always won favour in the Foreign Office. A form of this proposal was taken by Eden's successor, Harold Macmillan, to Moscow in February 1959, when he sought to prepare the ground for an arrangement with the Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, after the latter had issued his demand the previous November that Berlin should be made a demilitarised Free City. At meetings of the four Foreign Ministers in Geneva in the summer of 1959 called to consider the Berlin problem, the British Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, did his utmost to secure an interim arrangement for Berlin, pending German reunification, which would lessen the alleged 'provocativeness' of West Berlin to East Germany in return for a Communist reaffirmation of Western rights in the city.

Policies of accommodation never came easy to the United States. They jarred with the American desire for a clear moral pattern in affairs. They were hard to practise for a country which had to hold the allegiance of many allies, some of which, as Americans thought, might be tempted to flirt with the other side if it became known that Washington was prepared to bargain about their interests with Moscow. These considerations sometimes led American Governments into inconsistencies, when they acted contrary to their habitual insistence on the rule of law in world affairs and in conflict with their claim, often urged against Britain, that treating small countries with a big stick would drive them into the Communist fold. This was especially apt to occur in the Western hemisphere, where American fears were heightened by territorial insecurity. Thus United States action against the Left-wing regime in Guatemala in 1954, when a *coup* was engineered from outside so as to instal a more loyal ally, and the disastrous support given by the United States Central Intelligence Agency to an abortive landing in Cuba by exiles bent on unseating the anti-United States regime of Fidel Castro in April 1961 were widely criticised in Britain. Behind these actions was the American contention that in the struggle against Communism there

was no room for shades of opinion. If Communist aggression threatened, then, as Dulles said in a famous speech in January 1954, there must be 'massive and instant retaliation'. If Communist imperialism overran free countries, as in Eastern Europe, the West should not accept the result as a *fait accompli* but should work for the day of liberation. If the struggle against Communism was recognised for what it was, an undeclared war, it mattered little whether Franco's Spain or Chiang Kai-shek's Formosa stood on one's side, so long as they fought the common enemy.

Many of these Anglo-American differences appeared more at the level of public discussion than that of official contacts. The fact that both countries were democracies in which foreign policy was often a matter of intense debate tended to sharpen differences and sometimes forced the leaders on both sides into stronger expressions of their viewpoints than they wished. It could also be argued that the differences in themselves testified to the strength of the alliance in that only those who know that they cannot separate can afford open quarrels. All in all, the impressive thing about Anglo-American relations at this period was not so much policy differences but the fact that the transfer of primacy in the democratic world was effected so smoothly, despite its running against the grain of sentiment in both countries. By the 1960s British opinion readily accepted the dominant position of America, as was shown by its attitude to President Kennedy's visit to London in June 1961, though there was still a tendency to smile secretly at American reverses. On the American side, the feeling of discomfort with allies and the hankering to travel alone were being outgrown. However much Americans wrestled uncomfortably with the danger and uncertainty of being in the front line, the community with Britain remained firm.



## IN THE WAKE OF EMPIRE

'England', wrote Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador in London in 1914, 'is an island: that is all that needs to be said on the subject.' But England, or to use its official title, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was much more than an island in 1914, and in 1939, and even in 1945. It was an Empire, the largest the world had ever seen, embracing a quarter of the world's population and covering a quarter of its land surface, extending over every continent and including people of every race and many nationalities. The British Empire was even more than the territory directly governed from London: it included dozens of protectorates and semi-independent states like Egypt, spheres of interest and influence in which Britain exercised paramount or exclusive control, treaty ports formally under the sovereignty of other states, leases and concessions round the world. The Empire in 1945 was governed by three departments of state, the Dominions Office, which became the Commonwealth Relations Office in July 1947 and dealt with the then self-governing white-settled countries, Australia, Canada, Newfoundland,<sup>1</sup> New Zealand and South Africa; the India Office, responsible for the 'brightest jewel in the British Crown', a sub-continent of 400 million people; and the Colonial Office, with an oversight over the rest of the dependent empire. Foreign affairs, that is, relations with states not subject to the British Crown, were handled in London by the Foreign Office, headed by the Foreign Secretary, invariably a senior Cabinet Minister, and the network of diplomatic missions in foreign states throughout the world.

Foreign and imperial policy overlapped at many points. Firstly, the geographical extent of the Empire made it contiguous to a great many foreign states, and this affected British relations with them and their attitudes towards Britain. Then again, with the creation of the mandates system in the League of Nations at the end of the First World War Britain became responsible for the administration of former German territories in Africa, German islands in the Pacific and non-Turkish territories forming part of the old Ottoman Empire in the Middle East. As a mandatory Power, Britain was answerable to the League, a diplomatic institution consisting of

<sup>1</sup> Newfoundland became a Canadian Province in 1949.

fifty-odd states, and their attitudes towards British policy in the mandated territories affected their foreign policies towards and hence their relations with Britain. Thirdly, the British Empire was at all times in process of change, a notable example of which was the attainment of complete sovereign independence by the Dominions in the early 1920s. This meant that whereas in 1914 Britain could declare war against the Central Powers with immediate legal effect on the Empire as a whole, this was never possible afterwards, at least as far as the white Dominions were concerned. No step could be taken in British foreign policy after 1918 without careful account having to be taken of possible reactions from the Dominions. This obviously became more true of the Empire as a whole as successive parts of it received their independence after 1945.

There were other ways, too numerous to mention here, in which imperial and foreign policy had their interrelations with each other. By January 1973, when Britain joined the European Communities, the vast apparatus of Empire had been disestablished so that only some seventeen minor dependencies remained.<sup>1</sup> Constitutionally this was reflected in the merging of the Colonial Office with the Commonwealth Relations Office to form the Commonwealth Office on 1 August 1966. By this time the fusion of imperial and foreign policies was almost complete. In effect, and with some unimportant exceptions, colonial policy disappeared with the passing of the colonial empire. Relations between Britain and the now independent states of the Commonwealth were then conducted through the new Foreign and Commonwealth Office, formed by merger in March 1968, in the same way as relations with any other state.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Commonwealth system*

The associative arrangement linking all these peoples and territories together was that peculiar institution, the Commonwealth, or, as it was known in 1939, the British Commonwealth of Nations. It was peculiar in that it was like no other international institution with the possible exception of the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe. Its most pronounced feature was its almost complete absence of formality. In the British tradition there was no Commonwealth constitution or charter; the only pertinent document describing the nature of the Commonwealth is the Statute of Westminster adopted

<sup>1</sup> Including the Bahamas which became independent in July 1973.

<sup>2</sup> On the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Offices see Harold Wilson 770 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 380 (16 October 1968) and Michael Stewart on the same day, *Ibid.*, Cols 388-9.

by the British Parliament which became law on 11 December 1931 and simply stating, in a negative British way, that no legislation adopted in any Commonwealth country (that is, in 1931, in Britain or one of the four white Dominions) was valid in any other Commonwealth country. There was no permanent secretariat or administrative machinery until a small office directed by a Commonwealth Secretary was set up in London by the Commonwealth conference in June 1964.<sup>1</sup> Nor was there any fixed arrangement for regular meetings of Commonwealth Ministers except that a habit grew up—there is no more definite way of describing it—after the Second World War for regular get-togethers of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, generally in London in the early years but later frequently elsewhere. There was not even complete agreement at all times about basic terminology. When the dependent Empire existed before, say, the Second World War, the Empire was sometimes conceived as a vast conglomerate of people with their metropolis in London, part dependent and part independent, the independent part being known as the 'Commonwealth' or the 'British Commonwealth'. When a dependent country became independent it was sometimes said, logically enough, to 'join' the Commonwealth. But it was not unknown for the whole conglomerate to be called the Commonwealth or the Commonwealth of Nations, with dependent and independent sections, the former being known as the Empire. However, after the spate of decolonisation during the twenty years after 1948, when Burma, Ceylon, India and Pakistan received their independence from the Labour Government, until the late 1960s, when the last African colonies received theirs, the name Commonwealth came to be attached to the international association of former British dependencies as a whole.

Earlier efforts to give something in the nature of form and structure to the Commonwealth, or the old Empire, failed almost as soon as they were made and they did so mainly because of the strength of nationalism in the old Dominions which was the very force which gave the Commonwealth its peculiar character. The publication of Sir John Seeley's famous book The Expansion of England in 1885, which favoured an organic connection between Britain and at least the colonies of white settlement, was the signal for the federalists who desired that the Empire should form one state among the other states in the world. By 1918, however, when nationalism in the white Dominions had been powerfully stimulated by the First World War, the argument for a federated Empire was as good as lost. Even attempts to co-ordinate the foreign policies of Britain and the Dominions at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 2441 of August 1964; Cmd. 2713 of July 1965.

and in the inter-Allied conferences after the First World War made little progress.<sup>1</sup> During the Second World War the idea of closer post-war links between Commonwealth countries was favoured for a time by Australia and there was some support for it in Britain, as one means of offsetting the gigantic stature of the United States and the Soviet Union in the post-war world. But these voices were stifled by the great wave of decolonisation which followed the war, and this seemed to show that the prospect of all the heterogeneous wills of the thirty-odd Commonwealth states being harmonised in a common political authority, however weak in itself, was so small that it could be discarded. Even the proposal for a single Commonwealth court of law put forward in the mid-1960s received little support and the Australian Government's move in 1973 to secure the abolition of appeal from a Commonwealth law court to the Privy Council in London echoed the general demand for independence and the avoidance of all suggestion of being in any way subordinate to London.

One striking example of the extreme flexibility of Commonwealth arrangements was the way in which after the Second World War they were made to adjust to all varieties of internal constitution in the different member-states. It had always been assumed, for example, that the British Crown was the supreme sovereign authority within the Dominions, the dependent Empire and Britain itself, and that the British monarch symbolised the unity of the Commonwealth as an international institution and was the highest source of law in the individual states of the Commonwealth at one and the same time. This might, and did, create certain difficulties when the Crown was supposed to be at war with another state in respect to one of its Commonwealth countries but not in respect to another; this occurred for a few hours in September 1939 when the British declaration of war against Germany failed to coincide with that of all the other Dominions. But this was not felt to create any substantial problem for the working of Commonwealth arrangements. The real problem arose with the grant of independence to the Asian and African colonies beginning with the independence of India and Pakistan in 1948.

For the old Dominions in the inter-war period, with the exception of South Africa with its Dutch-Boer population, the fact that the British monarch was also their internal sovereign, was fully and even proudly accepted. Australia, Canada and New Zealand had to a large extent been settled from Britain and even in South Africa there was a sizeable British element. To these settlers allegiance to

<sup>1</sup> See *The Dominions and British Foreign Policy, 1919-1923*, an unpublished Ph.D. thesis for the University of London by M. D. Henderson, 1970.

the Crown was not only as natural as it was to the people of Britain; it gave them, in their remote situation from the home islands, a feeling that links with the old country were still strong. But for the coloured Empire, though the children might wave flags when royal cavalcades moved past, there was no such natural allegiance. For the colonial intellectual and politician actively involved in the nationalist struggle for independence the Crown symbolised out-moded and even hated subjection to Britain, not the nationalism of people who regarded their independence when achieved as the revival of a national life which went on long before the British came. A republican form of constitution was therefore inevitable for these new Commonwealth states on the attainment of independence. Beginning with India and Pakistan in 1948 all the decolonised states chose to refocus their people's loyalty on their own national leaders when independence arrived. One old Dominion, South Africa, became a republic in 1960 and applied to rejoin the Commonwealth as such in 1961 but eventually quitted it owing to independent African opposition to *apartheid*. In August 1973, at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference in Ottawa, even the Australian Prime Minister, Mr Gough Whitlam, forecast that his country would become a republic though not in his lifetime. He also said that Canada would do so too and, considering the strength of French Canadian national feeling, perhaps that is not remarkable.<sup>1</sup>

The question therefore arose as to whether a republic could become and remain a Commonwealth state, bearing in mind that the formal description of the Commonwealth in the so-called Balfour resolutions of the Imperial Conference in 1926 spoke of common allegiance to the Crown as one of its distinguishing features. It was because Burma, when declared independent in 1948, opted for republicanism at a time when this question had not been resolved that that country left the Commonwealth or, in another interpretation of what the Commonwealth means, failed to join. The question was, however, finally resolved in February 1953, when the British Government disclosed that consultations on the subject had taken place between the Commonwealth capitals followed by discussions between Prime Ministers and other representatives at the Commonwealth Economic Conference in London in December 1952. These had concluded, the British statement went on, that 'each member country should use for its own purposes a form of title (of the sovereign) which suits its own particular circumstances . . . (but) agreed that the various forms of the title should have . . . as their common element the description of the Sovereign as Queen of

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 10 August 1973.

Her other Realms and Territories and Head of the Commonwealth'.<sup>1</sup> What exactly is intended, however, by the designation 'Head of the Commonwealth' and what rights, functions or powers, if any, it assigns to the Crown has never been quite clear. It is remarkable, for example, that the Queen should have kept discreetly away from the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference in Singapore in 1971 and did not open the Ottawa conference in 1973 though present in the city; it was evidently unthinkable that, though in title Head of the Commonwealth, she should actually have taken her place in that capacity at its meetings.

‡ The essential point is that by this constitutional device India could remain a Commonwealth state and by far the most populous one, though still under a republican form of government, and India's example was followed by all the coloured states as and when they became Commonwealth countries as independent entities. The lesson was underlined that almost any constitutional self-contradictions and anomalies are supportable provided that the practical usefulness of the Commonwealth remains. That is essentially the true and only test. If a state considers that it derives no benefit whatever from Commonwealth membership then not even allegiance to the Crown can serve to keep that state in the Commonwealth. But if there is mutual benefit to be derived, both by existing members and by any new member, from the latter's membership of the Commonwealth, there seems no good reason why a republican form of government should disqualify it from membership. In the final resort it is the substance, not the form, which matters.‡

### *Commonwealth rules*

If there are no, or hardly any, written rules to regulate inter-Commonwealth relations, even the unwritten rules are remarkably few, and these have become even fewer as differences of opinion have developed among Commonwealth states. One of the most important unwritten rules was to respect the privacy of each other's internal affairs; it was perhaps not unknown for a Commonwealth Minister, in the well-preserved intimacy of a bar or coffee table, to express himself discreetly on such matters for the ears of a colleague from another Commonwealth country. But since the test of independent statehood within the international system has always been freedom from outside interference in its internal affairs, it is not surprising that the old Dominions should have claimed this as one of the first rights attaching to sovereign independence. (The extreme national pride and particularity of the new Commonwealth states in Africa

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 8748 of February 1953.

and Asia after 1945 ensured that the rule of non-interference should be loyally adhered to. But there was a dilemma here which strained and for all practical purposes destroyed that rule, and the dilemma lay in the fact that the new states, while claiming full independence for themselves, also regarded themselves as engaged in a struggle for racial equality throughout the world and throughout history. This led inevitably to a situation in which the chief subject of discussion at Commonwealth conferences was the fight to eliminate any practice of racialism throughout the Commonwealth and for that matter in countries outside that association as well. In addition, the mere fact that, until the middle 1960s at least, Britain was regarded by the new African and Asian States as one of the chief bastions of race prejudice and also the friend and ally of other dominant white states, especially in southern Africa, made its position extremely vulnerable.

Throughout the 1960s the Commonwealth as an international institution increasingly concerned itself with the question of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms in the white-dominated territories in southern Africa, especially in the Portuguese oversea territories, Angola and Mozambique, the British dependent territory of Rhodesia which illegally declared its independence in November 1965, and South Africa and its subject territory, South West Africa or Namibia. The asperity of this conflict was chiefly focussed on Britain, thus contributing to a noticeable lack of interest in the Commonwealth among the British people, although this seems to have been somewhat less the case at the Commonwealth conference in Ottawa in August 1973. A striking feature of that conference was the tacit acknowledgement on all sides, and by no means in the British delegation only, that Britain was no longer the chief guiding spirit of the Commonwealth, the old and experienced leader to which respect should be paid when all the controversies had been silenced. It was now evident, and the same was true of the relations between Britain and Europe, on one side, and the United States, on the other, that Britain was no longer even *primus inter pares*, though still one of the very considerable Powers in the Commonwealth by reason of its productive capability (if often unrealised) and moral influence.

When South Africa left the Commonwealth on becoming a republic on 31 May 1961 owing to attacks by the Afro-Asian member-states on its long-entrenched *apartheid* system, some regret was felt in Britain, especially among Conservatives, that this warning of the fragility of the Commonwealth if the rule of non-interference was infringed should have been necessary. The Prime Minister, Mr Macmillan, told the Commons that he thought the Commonwealth was right to accept the withdrawal because South Africa had initiated

it and because the race question was an international one. But he then went on:

'Is it right then—I asked myself—to cut South Africa away from the Commonwealth? Our two countries have links forged in history. We have known what it means to fight each other. We have also known what it means to fight side by side in defence of freedom in two world wars. There are the close connections of our countrymen, hundreds of thousands of whom will deeply regret the severance of the Commonwealth ties. But, apart from all these strong considerations of sentiment, I was not satisfied that the exclusion of South Africa from the Commonwealth would best help all those European people who do not accept the doctrine of *apartheid* and the growing body whose opinions are in flux. Nor, as far as I could see, would it help the millions of Africans. . . . In my view, and I am not ashamed to say so, it was better to hold out our hands and help than to avert our eyes and pass by on the other side.<sup>1</sup>

The South African affair was a portent, perhaps a dangerous one. It was clear that the Asian and African states which stood most vehemently for racial equality would never permit interference in their internal affairs on behalf of some other cause. Nor could Britain always look to the Commonwealth for support when Afro-Asian states on their side adopted practices in defiance of widely accepted moral ideas.

A significant instance was Uganda. After seizing power in that country on 25 January 1971, Major-General Idi Amin embarked upon a policy of Africanisation in August 1972 which resulted in the systematic expulsion of Uganda's Asian minority and the expropriation of their property; under its obligation to accept Commonwealth immigrants carrying British passports Britain was bound to admit them, with some serious accommodation problems. But the thirty-two-member Commonwealth did by no means at once echo the British argument that President Amin's action was just as much a form of racism as South Africa's and Rhodesia's practices.

A second unwritten rule of the Commonwealth which came under increasing pressure in the years following 1945 was that of consultation between member-states. Consultation has always been a rule of international relations between supposedly friendly states, though consultation has, of course, never meant that the state consulted has a right to object to, much less to veto, what the consulting state proposes to do. Courtesy alone demands that one consults one's friends, or at least informs them, about one's intentions, especially

<sup>1</sup> 637 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 444-5 (22 March 1961).



when their interests may be affected by those intentions being carried out. But the Commonwealth rule of consultation was far more than a matter of courtesy. If in the period between the two world wars Britain looked to her Commonwealth partners for support in her diplomatic ventures, as she undoubtedly did, and especially in time of war, it was vital that they should be instructed about her policies on a day-to-day basis during the whole time leading up to the making of major British decisions. Hence the long-standing practice whereby the British Government forwarded every day to Commonwealth capitals copies, not only of their own correspondence with British missions abroad, but also reports from the latter on foreign situations, involving the despatch of perhaps 3,000 telegrams a day to Commonwealth capitals.

This practice continued in the enlarged Commonwealth after the Second World War, though, since Britain now became firmly committed to a military alliance, the North Atlantic treaty of 1949, in which there were many diplomatic, military and scientific secrets, other Commonwealth countries, the majority of whom followed a neutralist policy in the Cold War, could hardly continue to expect full information about British policies. But as it happened it was not on an issue arising directly from the Cold War that Britain herself most dramatically broke the rule of Commonwealth consultation. In 1956, when Britain was concerting with France and Israel plans for using force if necessary against Egypt in view of President Nasser's decision of 26 July to bring the Suez Canal under his own control, it was in the nature of things difficult if not impossible to keep the Commonwealth countries fully in the picture. The consequences for mutual trust in the Commonwealth have been well described by an authority on that institution:

'For a Commonwealth accustomed to thinking of consultation, or when time did not allow it, of the prompt communication about immediate intentions, as the foundation of its informal system of interstate co-operation, the deliberate failure to consult by the senior partner marked a departure from principle and a breach in practice which signalled lack of confidence on the part of the British Government in its power to persuade its Commonwealth partners even to acquiesce in the enterprise on which it was resolved to embark, and added to the sense of outrage in which many of them first received news of it.'<sup>1</sup>

But the Commonwealth, though its dissolution was forecast as a result of the Suez misadventure, did not break up. The Suez

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969, pp. 346-7.

crisis of 1956 was in fact merely one more example, though an undoubtedly dramatic one, of the parting of the ways between Britain's view of the world and that of the overwhelming majority of Commonwealth states. It was this divergence rather than the failure to consult in itself which symbolised the growing lack of cohesion in the Commonwealth in the later 1950s. Before the Second World War there had been a broad identity of viewpoint on world affairs between British Ministers and their opposite numbers in the four capitals of the Dominions, the peculiar position of South Africa always constituting something of an exception. Britain and the Dominions were all liberal democracies and cherished the freedoms characteristic of western democracy, the rule of law, a free press, freedom of association and so on. Economically they were tied together by the system of mutual trading preferences instituted by the Ottawa agreements of July 1932 and the vast market provided by Britain for the raw materials and farm produce exported by the Dominions.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally the Dominions looked to Britain and the British navy for their defence; they knew that so long as Britain survived and prospered their position was likely to be incomparably better than it would be otherwise. Foreign and defence policies accordingly which made sense in London were likely to make similar sense in the Dominions, and Britain, by consulting the Dominions on major issues of defence and foreign policy was, in a manner of speaking, communing with itself. It was giving information and asking for advice in its own interests, which, as it happened, were on all major issues practically identical with theirs.

The position could hardly be more different with the almost thirty dependent territories of the Empire which, after 1945 and increasingly so after 1957, entered the Commonwealth as independent states. They did so with a recent memory of subjection and subordination, the master-slave rather than the senior-junior partner relationship. Their cultural background was almost entirely different from that of Britain. Though some members of their new ruling classes were Westernised in education, dress, and speech, the great mass of the population were in no way Western. Economically they were backward as compared with Britain and Europe and their greatest need was for substantial imports of capital from abroad in order to achieve their economic 'take-off', capital which in its weakened state after the Second World War Britain was in no position to provide, certainly not in anything like sufficient quantity. As far as national defence was concerned, most of them were too remote from Europe, the original theatre of the Cold War, to perceive any real threats to themselves from the Communist world. Threats

<sup>1</sup> The text of the Ottawa agreements is given in Cmd. 4174 of 1932.

to their independence they saw, not in the form of an expansionist Communism, but in that of relics of Western imperialism which they claimed to perceive all round them, and sometimes in the policies of close neighbours of similar economic and social structure to themselves, as India saw in the policies of Pakistan and Pakistan in those of India. The idea therefore of Britain and the majority of the new Commonwealth states being bound together by a common political *Weltanschauung* was utterly out of the question: at times some of the Asian and African countries thought of their relationship with Britain more in terms of enmity than friendship and in these circumstances the notion of sharing information and continuous consultation hardly arose. One does not normally ask one's enemies for advice and counsel on how best to deal with them. In this sense the dwindling of inter-Commonwealth consultation reflected the declining sense of political partnership in the association as a whole rather than the other way about.

#### *Factors in decolonisation*

When we turn to consider the forces which created the post-war Commonwealth we can see that some of these factors lay within the Commonwealth itself and some in the general features of the world political situation with which British foreign policy in all its aspects had to work. The former group of factors is divisible into two: those arising within Britain itself and those arising within other Commonwealth countries. The dominating factor in Britain after the Second World War was the country's sheer financial inability to provide the physical force to keep distant countries in a relationship of dependence when they were bent upon becoming free. The case of India in 1947 was quite crucial: no serious case could be made out then, nor was it made out later, for any British effort to keep India under British control when the people of India, in so far as their will was expressed by their native leaders, were as bent on achieving their independence as the British were on maintaining theirs in the Second World War. Then, as the war receded into the past and Britain's economic troubles proved to be endemic rather than transient, the effort to keep unwilling colonial dependencies under the yoke seemed more and more futile and intolerably expensive. After the grant of independence in 1957 to Ghana, the former Gold Coast, the first African state to receive its independence in the post-war years, the rush to shed colonies, even under the Conservative governments of 1951-64, became precipitate. The question of decolonisation became a matter, not of 'whether?' but of 'when?' and the answer to the question 'when?' was invariably 'as soon as possible'.

Ideologically, of course, if the British could ever be described as having an ideology, there was nothing strange about decolonisation for this country. That the Empire would eventually disintegrate into its various national units was anticipated as far back as 1838, when the famous Durham Report envisaged independence for Canada. There was little support either in Britain or elsewhere in the Empire, for the idea of relating the separate parts of the Empire, as they became independent, into some kind of organically inter-related whole, as in a federation or confederation. But above and beyond this there was in Britain in the twentieth century a certain split-mindedness in relation to empire which in fact caused decolonisation to be as smooth and bloodless as it eventually proved to be. The fact was that although the Empire was a subject of abiding interest and emotional attachment for a relative minority of ex-colonial civil servants, soldiers who had served in the colonies or India, Conservative politicians and the like, the people at large in Britain had never seemed to conceive of this vast conglomeration, the Empire, as anything of vital importance to their own lives. Many of them had never set eyes on its territories or had any contact with them except perhaps at exhibitions such as the Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924. The economic experience of millions of them in the period between the two wars was so dismal and harsh that they had little time or energy to consider the plight of ordinary people in the distant Empire, whose situation might well have been worse. Hence there grew up in Britain, especially after 1918, a distinct sense of psychological detachment from the Empire and, after 1945, a perceptible feeling of grievance at the anxieties and burdens of empire, a desire to be rid of the imperial mantle and to begin a quieter life at home.

For these and similar reasons there was little in Britain of a desire to struggle to retain the Empire, and not much wish for *revanche* after it had all fallen away. In fact when Britain joined the European Communities in January 1973 some of the territories still dependent on Britain, notably Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands, clung to their dependent status, not because Britain gave them no alternative, but because they gave themselves no alternative to remaining British. That, for the rest, almost a quarter of the world's population could pass in a few years from colonial to independent status with hardly a drop of blood shed, except perhaps in fighting between themselves, is possibly the most remarkable example of peaceful change in the history of the international system.

The other factor internal to the Commonwealth itself which helped to precipitate decolonisation in the post-war years was the force of nationalism in the dependent territories themselves. The Second

World War, like the First, gave an immense impetus to national independence in the non-European world and, unlike the First, gave an even stronger impetus to nationalism because Europe, the birthplace of nationalism was devastated and thrown into vast economic and political confusion. In the Far East especially Western imperialism was cast from its pedestal by the Japanese army and this exploit, like the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905, further helped to convince colonial subjects throughout East Asia and the Pacific that Western imperialism was a giant with feet of clay. Moreover, colonial nationalist leaders could rightly feel that they were pushing at an open door. After all, what was the Second World War supposed to have been about if not to allow subject peoples, like everyone else, to 'choose the form of government under which they will live', in the famous words of the Atlantic Charter? Whether the major western belligerents in the war really meant what they said when they called for a world of social and racial justice after the war or not, the fact was that they had gone on record repeatedly as favouring those ideals and the colonial peoples could hardly be blamed for taking them seriously. The stream of national self-determination which trickled through the League of Nations in the 1920s and 1930s became a raging torrent in the United Nations after 1945. Imperial states which attempted to resist that torrent—and Britain, if ever, only tried to do so half-heartedly—would not have sounded very convincing had they been given a hearing. But, generally speaking and especially as the 1950s passed away, they were not given that hearing.

The forces outside Britain and the Commonwealth which made for decolonisation after 1945 were equally strong. By far the most important of these were the pressures exerted by the super-Powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, together with the fact that the struggle for mastery between the two, beginning about 1947, had the effect of intensifying still more the pressure they exerted against old-style European imperialism. At the Yalta conference in February 1945 there seemed to be almost a tacit understanding between President Roosevelt and Marshal Stalin that their joint mission in the world was the elimination of every vestige of European colonialism, and of this Soviet-American compact Prime Minister Winston Churchill was the expostulating victim. The very birth of the United States in eighteenth-century revolt against British imperialism was a sufficient explanation of the President's campaign against empire. On the Soviet Union's side, its dedication to Marxist-Leninist ideas on capitalist imperialism, combined with the Soviet Government's apparent blindness to the quasi-imperialist control of non-Russian peoples within Soviet borders, sufficiently explained Marshal Stalin's

readiness to join with Roosevelt in his war against imperialism. Later on, in the 1950s, when the two super-Powers, now poised against each other, were campaigning for the world's floating vote, that is, the support of the new states in Asia and Africa as and when these became independent, the more loudly they shouted anti-colonialist slogans the better from their own point of view. The result was that Britain and other European colonial Powers, were, willingly or not, ushered into decolonisation by the combined pressures of the giant Powers. The Soviet Union could exert its influence by raging and storming at the United Nations; the United States, as for instance when Holland was engaged in efforts to repress Indonesian nationalism in 1947-8, could close its purse, or threaten to do so, to colonialist states which stumbled on the road to decolonisation. In Britain, in which there was already a solid domestic interest against colonialism and the cost of maintaining an unwilling empire soon began to look impossible, American anti-colonialism had little work to do. In Portugal, on the other hand, where there was no anti-colonialist vote, indeed no free vote of any kind, the Americans soon realised that any anti-imperialist pressure of their own would be totally ineffective.

While the Soviet Union's campaign against European imperialism hardly ever relaxed and, after the Chinese Communists established themselves in power in 1949, was supported by fellow-Marxists in Peking, American anti-colonialist pressure soon became subject to two reservations. First, there was the American recognition that a good ally, whether within NATO or any other defensive system, was not very likely to be created by constantly bludgeoning it over the head for its colonialist sins, if any. By the time the Cold War lines of confrontation began to be set in the 1950s the British no longer felt obliged to make constant explanations in Washington about hitches in their decolonisation programme, although the United States was exceptionally severe on such quasi-imperialist ventures as the Anglo-French expedition against Egypt in October 1956. The case was rather the contrary; once Britain had warmed to decolonisation in the late 1950s and early 1960s many Americans began to wonder whether the British were not scuttling so fast out of empire as to leave vacua of power all over the vast Afro-Asian spaces where the Union Jack had once so proudly and securely flown. The same applied to France. Although the Eisenhower administration in the United States was horrified by the French failure to back their own plan for a European Defence Community in 1954, it was no less horrified at the French incapacity to stem the alleged Communist tide in Vietnam, symbolised by the great French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in March 1954. Indeed, from the American switch from

single-minded anti-colonialism before 1954 to single-minded defence of ex-colonial peoples against Communist infiltration stemmed the whole tragedy of the Vietnam war. The British campaign against Communist guerrillas in Malaya was applauded in Washington and the British officer in charge of that operation, Sir Robert Thompson, later became an adviser to the White House on the containment of Communism in South-East Asia. Then, when in the late 1960s Britain was thrust by economic difficulties and the force of Afro-Asian nationalism from its military role east of Suez, alarms sounded in Washington.<sup>1</sup> Britain, it was alleged, was abandoning its old imperialist domain to Communism in much the same way as in the mid-1950s the Truman administration was charged with 'losing' China to Communism. Britain, which from time immemorial had been accused by Americans of imperialism, was now accused of appeasing Communists in Africa and Asia who were waiting to take over as soon as the British flag was hauled down. But, just as American dissatisfaction with British colonialism in 1945 had not materially affected British policy for the dependent territories, so American consternation at the speed of British adjustment to the 'wind of change' in the 1960s did not dramatically affect that adjustment. What American attitudes did on both occasions, ironically, was to provide British politicians and the press with additional arguments for retaining empire or abandoning it as the case might be at different times. It never has been a recommendation of a policy to the British people that it is favoured by the United States.

### *Britain's post-imperial role*

But, given that the Empire was being unscrambled, slowly after independence came to the Indian sub-continent in 1948 and precipitately after Ghana's independence ten years later, what sort of post-imperial relationship would replace it and what role would this play in British foreign policy in general? These questions were linked in British thinking with the larger question of Britain's role in the world. British politicians and, to a rather less extent, the public too did not seem satisfied without some mental conception of what Britain's place in the world was to be. It is a problem which quite clearly perturbs other states and statesmen, too. It is not quite a matter of the national interest. A congenial national role is unthinkable if it is positively harmful to the national interest but the idea of a role serves rather perhaps to justify or make sense of the national interest than to be identical with it. It is not enough, it seems, for states to strive and seek and perhaps to find. The striving has to be

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chapter 9.

legitimised as a role. The problem of the appropriate role was no doubt all the greater for the British in the years after 1945 in view of the fact that their place in the world and the impact they had made on world events had been so massive for more than two centuries. Not only were politically self-conscious Britons concerned about their country's role in the shaping of events after the shedding of empire; other people, too, thought it unconceivable that Britain should not have a well-defined role. Hence the remark by the former American Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, at West Point in December 1962, when he said that Britain had lost an empire and had not yet found a role. The fact that the remark was resented by many British people is an indication of how much they were preoccupied with the search for a role.

The Labour Government which came into office in 1945 and to an even greater degree the Labour Party which stood behind them seemed to have no doubt what that post-imperial role was to be. It would be to complement and perhaps to complete the social revolution which the Labour Movement regarded itself as achieving at home after its great electoral victory in July 1945 by spreading welfare throughout the Commonwealth. It may even be that Labour Ministers who recognised the limitations of the advancement to social justice at home imposed by an old and inflexible class system which they could humanise but not abolish believed that their true contribution to a classless world must now lie in the former dependencies of the Empire.<sup>1</sup> In addition, for the Labour Party the new Commonwealth had the added attraction that it was, above all else, multi-racial. From this there arose the feeling in Labour ranks that in the theoretical racial equality in the Commonwealth, in the hobnobbing together at Commonwealth conferences of men and women of every race in the world, the solution to one of the most intractable problems of the day, race prejudice and race discrimination, would be found.

But in the path of the implementation of these Labour ideals lay two harsh difficulties. One was that in Britain's endemic economic problems of the post-war years there was little chance, it seemed, of her making any substantial contribution to solving the problem of poverty in so many of the new Commonwealth countries. The fact, too, that the mass of the British people, and even a large proportion of Labour voters, were not so eager as Labour spokesmen to lower their living standards, at least in the short run, on behalf of the Commonwealth's poor did not help the Attlee Governments of 1945-51 or the Wilson Governments of 1964-70. It is true that

<sup>1</sup> See Peregrine Worsthorne, 'Class and Conflict in British Foreign Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 37, No. 3, April 1959, pp. 419-31.



some 80 per cent of British aid in the post-1945 years went to the Commonwealth but, considering that total British foreign aid was never much more than some £200 million a year, this was a mere drop in the bucket as compared with actual Commonwealth requirements. In November 1967, during Mr Wilson's second administration, when the pound was devalued 14.3 per cent, British foreign aid was permitted to absorb the full weight of devaluation, which meant that its real worth fell by some £20 million or 10 per cent. There were, of course, other forms of British aid to Commonwealth countries which were not inconsiderable, such as Commonwealth training and exchange schemes in which Britain was always prominent and the assistance Britain gave to her former colonies in East Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, in 1964 when mutinies in their armies temporarily jeopardised the stability of the state.

The other and even deeper problem affecting the Labour conception of the Commonwealth as a new theatre for the spread of welfare and equality was the very intractability of the race question. Commonwealth nationalist leaders could not reasonably doubt that British Labour politicians were at one with them in their aspirations for political independence and economic development; they knew, too, that British Conservative leaders had no wish, with one or two exceptions, to retain unwilling colonies and fully agreed that no colony should be granted independence except under guarantees of racial equality, especially in respect of the franchise, for all its people. But they seemed not to be able to help suspecting that these commitments did not run very deep even for the most radical of British political leaders. The two test cases were South Africa and Rhodesia.

### *South Africa*

There could be no doubt whatever that the system of *apartheid* or, to use the euphemistic term, separate development, introduced in seemingly definitive form by the Nationalist Government which won power in South Africa in 1948 was deeply abhorrent to the majority of the British people. Conservative, Labour and Liberal politicians hardly differed in their verbal repudiation of it, though the acclaim won by the Conservative MP, Mr Enoch Powell, when he warned of the dangers of coloured immigration into the United Kingdom in the late 1960s showed that this repudiation might be more declaratory than real. In March 1960, when the notorious 'Sharpeville massacre' occurred in South Africa the British press was fluent in its condemnation, led by *The Times*. The British Conservative

Government, however, was by no means in the lead in the resulting move to have South Africa expelled from the Commonwealth, though its Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, brusquely told the South African Parliament what he thought of its racial system when he delivered before it his famous 'wind of change' speech in January 1960. Moreover, although Mr Wilson and his colleagues respected the United Nations ban of 1963 on the sale of arms to South Africa when they were returned to office with a majority of five in October 1964 and even refused to suspend the ban in the depths of Britain's economic troubles which led to devaluation in November 1967, no British Government, Mr Wilson's included, ever agreed to the imposition of United Nations mandatory sanctions against South Africa.

While this was not unreasonable in view of the well-nigh insuperable difficulties of implementing mandatory and general sanctions against South Africa, suspicious black African leaders could not forget that Britain did profitable trade with and enjoyed the fruits of profitable investment in South Africa while verbally condemning its racial system. By 1970, for instance, Sterling Area investments in South Africa totalled £1,983 million or 58 per cent of all foreign investment in the country.<sup>1</sup> As for trade, by 1970 22 per cent of South African imports came from the United Kingdom and 29 per cent of exports went to the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

The question of Britain's relations with South Africa as a Commonwealth issue actually came to a head at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference in Singapore in January 1971, when most of the black African states tried to dissuade the Conservative Prime Minister, Edward Heath, from resuming the sale of arms to South Africa, which would have been contrary to the United Nations resolution of 1963 though it was in accordance with the Anglo-South African agreement of 1955 which provided for the joint defence by both countries of the sea routes round the Cape.<sup>3</sup> Mr Heath remained firmly resistant to these African pressures even though many observers in Britain thought the clash would break the Commonwealth even more surely than the same prediction made during the Suez crisis in 1956. The Prime Ministers' argument was somewhat assisted by the passage to and fro in the Singapore Strait before the very eyes of the conference of Soviet naval vessels. But this did nothing to lessen the suspicions of Britain harboured by black African leaders frustrated by their inability to take back home

<sup>1</sup> Ruth First, Jonathan Steel, Christabel Gurney, *The South African Connection*, London, Temple Smith, 1972, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>3</sup> Cmd. 9520 of July 1955.

with them any report of a victory at the conference in the struggle against white supremacy in South Africa.

### *Rhodesia*

The Rhodesian question, because it was a more direct British responsibility, was a far more serious threat to Commonwealth unity. 'I do not believe', wrote Mr Harold Wilson whose governments in the 1960s had to drink the bitter Rhodesian chalice to the full, 'a British Government have ever had to face a problem so complicated or apparently so insoluble.'<sup>1</sup> The Rhodesian question sprang from the failure of the Central African Federation, or Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which Mr Churchill's Conservative Government created in 1953: it broke up ten years later during the premiership of Mr Harold Macmillan, who subsequently wrote: '... the concluding years of my premiership were haunted, not to say poisoned by the growing tensions in the countries constituting the Central African Federation and the bitter feelings aroused while the seemingly hopeless struggle to reach some acceptable solution continued'.<sup>2</sup>

The failure of the Federation lay in the fundamental differences between Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia, on the one hand, and Southern Rhodesia, on the other. The two former colonies were almost wholly black in population and the handing over of power to their indigenous nationalist leaders in 1963-4, though difficult, was comparatively no problem; after the collapse of the Federation in 1963 independent black Malawi sprang from Nyasaland and Zambia from Northern Rhodesia. The heart of the problem lay in Southern Rhodesia, or Rhodesia as it then came to be called, which was governed by a privileged and rich white minority numbering some 210,000 while a black majority of somewhat more than four million remained virtually disfranchised. Since 1923 Rhodesians, that is, white Rhodesians, had 'made their own laws, were judged in their own courts, raised their own revenues, recruited their own civil service, mobilised their own defence forces, were under the jurisdiction of their own police, travelled on their own passports and controlled their own foreign commerce'.<sup>3</sup> To the south of Rhodesia lay the bastion of white domination, South Africa, to the east the flanking Portuguese territory of Mozambique, to the

<sup>1</sup> *The Labour Government, 1964-70*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson and Michael Joseph, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> *At the End of the Day, 1961-1963*, London, Macmillan, 1973, p. 295.

<sup>3</sup> Robert C. Good, *UDI: The International Politics of the Rhodesian Rebellion*, London, Faber and Faber, 1973, p. 34.

north-west the independent state of Zambia, highly dependent economically and for its communications on Rhodesia, and still further west the Portuguese dependency of Angola.

Talks between the British Government and Mr Ian Smith, leader of the ruling Rhodesian Front and Prime Minister of Rhodesia since April 1964, came to nothing. The British Government would not authorise independence on any but the following five principles and the Smith regime just as firmly refuse to accept independence on them. They were (1) the principle and intention of unimpeded progress to majority rule, already enshrined in Rhodesia's 1961 constitution, would have to be maintained and guaranteed; (2) there would also have to be guarantees against retrospective amendment of the constitution; (3) there would have to be an immediate improvement in the political status of the African population; (4) there would have to be progress towards the ending of race discrimination; and (5) the British Government would need to be satisfied that any basis proposed for independence was satisfactory to the people of Rhodesia as a whole.<sup>1</sup> These five principles were reaffirmed by the succeeding Labour Government on 22 September 1965 and were then extended by the addition of a sixth principle by the new British Prime Minister, Mr Wilson, in the House of Commons on 25 January 1966, namely that, regardless of race, there must be no oppression of the majority by the minority or the other way about.<sup>2</sup>

By the time the Wilson Government entered office in October 1964 negotiations between Britain and Rhodesia on the basis of the five principles had reached a standstill. Some intimation of what the ultimate outcome would be was given to Wilson when he visited Salisbury, the Rhodesian capital, on 25 October 1965 for six days of fruitless bargaining which failed to bridge the gap between the British insistence that independence must be conditional on definite progress towards majority rule being registered and Mr Smith's frank and undisguised lack of interest in majority rule.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it came as a bombshell at least to the rest of the world when on 11 November 1965 the Smith regime, in a statement echoing in every line the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, unilaterally and illegally announced its constitutional separation from Britain, an act known as UDI (unilateral declaration of independence). The black African member-states of the Commonwealth instantly demanded that Britain should use force to restore legal government

<sup>1</sup> Mansergh, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

<sup>2</sup> 723 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 42.

<sup>3</sup> See Wilson's report on the mission, 718 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 629-39 (1 November 1965).

in Rhodesia and Mr Wilson made what many considered to be his first mistake in ruling out armed force at the outset. This was possibly a justifiable decision in view of military advice that the logistics of the deployment of force in central Africa ruled it out of the question. In this decision, too, Britain's long-standing economic difficulties, memories of the Suez fiasco in 1956 and Wilson's wish to retain Opposition support in the Commons in view of his majority of five, and later three, seats played their various roles. The effect, however, was to make African, Asian and Caribbean Commonwealth states think that it was not feasibility (or the lack of it) but the 'kith and kin' argument which persuaded Wilson to exclude force at the outset. But an even more serious effect of the British decision was to raise doubt as to what could be done against the Smith regime in Rhodesia without actual capacity to influence events on the spot. *De jure* authority was far removed from *de facto* power.

The alternative to force was economic sanctions which the government then imposed in close collaboration with other Commonwealth states, in particular Zambia. Mr Wilson talked imprudently of a 'quick kill' and at a Commonwealth conference in Lagos (the first to be held outside Britain) on 11 and 12 January 1966 used the foolish and never-to-be-forgotten phrase that the effect of sanctions would be felt 'in a matter of weeks, not months'. This was a cruel self-deception, all the more so as Wilson determined to apply sanctions in steadily increasing doses, contrary to Machiavelli's famous advice that evil to an adversary should be done in one instalment; Wilson seemed to hope that this might induce second thoughts in the Smith regime without the entire Rhodesian economy being thrown into chaos. Matters came to a head at a Commonwealth meeting in London in September 1966 when the frustrations of the coloured states at the continuing survival of the white Rhodesian regime were vented without stint. According to Mr Wilson, it was a 'nightmare of a conference, by common consent the worst ever held up to that time. . . . There were many of us who feared for the future of the Commonwealth and doubted whether it could survive a similar traumatic shock.'<sup>1</sup> Mr Wilson undertook to appeal to the UN Security Council for mandatory sanctions against Rhodesia if agreement could not be reached on the conditions of Rhodesia's return to legality in yet one more effort. This effort was duly made in the form of talks between Wilson and Smith in December on HMS *Tiger*, a British cruiser, then anchored in Gibraltar.<sup>2</sup> When these failed, again over substantially the old issues, the Foreign Secretary, Mr George Brown, promptly went

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 278, 287.

<sup>2</sup> An account of the *Tiger* talks is given in Cmd. 3171 of December 1966.

to New York and asked for and received selective mandatory sanctions against Rhodesia from the UN Security Council; these all UN member states by virtue of the Charter were obliged to respect.

In one sense the British resort to the UN was an attempt to forestall even more precipitate action which was in preparation by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). At the same time it was a reflection upon the British claim that Rhodesia was in the last resort a British problem and it also wrecked the consensus which up to that time had existed between the Government and the Opposition, though by this time the Government had increased its strength in the Commons by winning a majority of ninety-seven seats at the general election in March. But above all the resort to sanctions raised the question, to which there could only be a negative reply, whether Rhodesian sanctions could ever be effective without their extension, to which all British Governments were opposed, to South Africa and Portugal, which, though not supporters of the original UDI, were determined to see that a black majority would never rule in Rhodesia.

The rest of the story was predictable. Sanctions proved troublesome to Rhodesia, especially the exclusion from the world money markets, but by no means fatal. The black African states persistently sought to argue Mr Wilson into committing himself to their sacred formula NIBMAR (no independence before majority rule) for Rhodesia and became increasingly hostile to him when he just as persistently refused. The Prime Minister then had further talks with Mr Smith in HMS *Fearless* off Gibraltar in October 1968 but once more without any fundamental concessions from the Smith Cabinet on the issues of distinct and irreversible advances towards majority rule and the acceptability of any agreed formula to the Rhodesian people as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Again, a month later, at the request of the Smith regime, Mr George Thomson, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, visited Salisbury for nine full-scale meetings with Smith and his colleagues. Summarising the points at issue in the House of Commons on 18 November after his return, Mr Thomson said: 'Each of these points, taken individually, is important. But more significant still is that all of them taken together indicate that the regime is not at this stage ready to commit themselves to the necessity of accepting majority rule except in an impossibly remote and indefinite future.'<sup>2</sup>

When the Wilson Government was defeated in the elections in

<sup>1</sup> Cmnd. 3793 of October 1968.

<sup>2</sup> 773 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 900. See also Cmnd. 4065, Report on Exchanges with the Regime since the Talks held in Salisbury, November 1968, 1969.

June 1970 hopes rose in Salisbury that their long-awaited independence would at last be legally achieved. It seemed indeed to be so when Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the new Conservative Foreign Secretary, visited Salisbury in November 1971 and agreed with Smith on a scheme of transition to a one-man one-vote democracy by a formula so complicated that it required mathematicians to spell out its implications and they forecast that it postponed a black political majority in Rhodesia for generations. In any event the scheme was overwhelmingly rejected by black Rhodesians when, according to the Douglas-Home settlement, their opinion was sought by a roving commission led by Lord Pearce. The British-Rhodesian deadlock, UN sanctions, however imperfect, Smith's Rhodesia, now a republic since March 1970, all remained.

For this situation a number of factors were responsible: the largely agrarian character of the Rhodesian economy and hence its comparative immunity to sanctions; the white Rhodesians' determination to preserve their supremacy at all costs; the support given to them by Portugal and South Africa, implying that white supremacy could hardly be destroyed in any one country in southern Africa without it being destroyed in all; the evasion of UN sanctions by private firms in the outside world and ultimately the decision even of the US Congress in autumn 1971 to exclude the purchase of Rhodesian chrome from the sanctions list. It much contributed to the resentment felt in Britain over the whole Rhodesian question that whereas other countries seemed positively to profit from sanctions Britain was paying, so its Ministers claimed, something like £100 million a year to support them. But this did very little to mitigate the scorn felt by some of the independent African states who failed to understand how Britain, nominally a great Power and counting itself still at the 'top table' in world affairs, could evidently do practically nothing about the illegal Smith regime.

The fury of the black African and the Asian states in the Commonwealth against British timidity towards Rhodesia, finding expression in such descriptions of Britain as a 'toothless bulldog' by one Zambian diplomat and African walk-outs at the UN General Assembly when British Ministers rose to speak on the issue, was one of the factors which cooled British enthusiasm about the Commonwealth in the 1960s and provided some of the mental background to the various British attempts to join the European Communities in those years. As time passed, British people tended to think that they had made the best efforts they could on behalf of race equality in Rhodesia and that they were now beginning to earn a retirement without dishonour. Mr Heath's Government elected in 1970, and in particular its Foreign Secretary, Douglas-Home, would

have gladly paid a high price for release from the Rhodesian millstone and grasped eagerly at every smallest indication of a change of heart in the Smith regime. Nevertheless, at hardly any moment at least before 1974 did they give any sign of wanting to abandon any one of the six principles, and it was abundantly clear how strong the outcry would be from the Commonwealth, from a substantial proportion of the British people, and possibly from the United States, had they given any indication of doing so.

Perhaps because this was abundantly evident to everyone and because the black African states now began to fear, rather than welcome, violence over all Africa arising from the unresolved racial deadlock in southern Africa, pressure against Britain from those states slackened somewhat in 1973. At the Commonwealth 'summit' conference in Ottawa on 2-10 August 1973 Mr Heath left no doubt that in the last resort Rhodesia remained a British problem; Britain, who had to bear the consequences of a total failure in Rhodesia, had the right to determine the road to what might prove at least a partial success. While the Prime Minister reaffirmed the six principles and his intention to maintain sanctions as far as Britain was concerned, he did not identify himself with the Afro-Asian demand for NIBMAR in Rhodesia. He merely took note on Britain's behalf of the votes in favour of NIDMAR and thereafter, like most British politicians, clung to the hope that there must somewhere be a middle way between abject failure and impossible success. The Afro-Asian states, partly because they had come to regard Rhodesia as a useful rallying cry for the masses but irrelevant to the stark economic problems of low national production, poverty, poor housing and disease with which they were confronted, seemed by this time to have lost much of their venom towards Britain. Realising that, after all, Britain was and had been bearing the Rhodesian burden as a whole and had committed herself to democratic rule in Rhodesia regardless of the improbability of its being put into effect within the lifetime of Commonwealth statesmen, they were content, for the present, to see whether UN sanctions, with their various loopholes closed as far as possible, would succeed in civilising the Smith regime.

### *Strains in Commonwealth unity*

In addition to the race question there were other circumstances which combined to place a strain on Commonwealth unity. The mere fact that Britain had contemplated joining the European Communities in 1961 and that the Commonwealth had been even less of an obstacle to membership when the subsequent attempts to join were



made in 1967 and 1970 showed that the Commonwealth was of diminishing credibility as an international association.)

This was steadily more and more apparent at the three levels of political, economic and strategic affairs. Politically it was evident in 1939 that the Commonwealth and Britain stood for certain liberal political values which were patently under threat both from the two European dictatorships and from the militaristic regime in Japan. When Poland was attacked by Germany in September 1939 they were, with varying degrees of promptitude, at Britain's side. In the new Commonwealth of the post-1945 period the situation was wholly different. Though Marxism-Leninism had little attraction for the former colonial states of the British Empire and most of them were well enough aware that Soviet imperialism was no better, and in some respects worse, than the British brand which they knew, they tended to look upon Western collective defence systems against Communism as arrangements for the preservation of Western imperialist privileges and none of them, with the exception of India, seemed quite satisfied that democracy as understood in the West was necessarily the most suitable form of government for itself. Above all, almost without exception they tended to identify themselves with the poor, formerly colonised peoples of the world rather than with the rich, white northern areas of the globe in which the ideological struggle in the immediate post-war years raged. Even when border disputes between China and India resulted in armed hostilities between troops of the two countries in October 1962 there was little disposition in India, as there was in the West, to act as though it were an aspect of a world-wide aggressive Communism. Subsequently, in 1971, when India was confronted with the problems resulting from the defection of East Pakistan from Pakistan to form Bangladesh, India found herself befriended by Russia while the United States, strangely associated in this with China, sympathised with Pakistan. But there was no suggestion in India that these alignments were anything more than an accidental product of the long-term conflict between herself and Pakistan.

From this followed the divergence in strategic perspectives in the new multi-racial Commonwealth. As we have seen, the Afro-Asian Commonwealth countries, with minor exceptions, perceived no common threat from the Communist world and hence saw no reason for defence arrangements with Britain or any other state against such a threat. The situation was somewhat different in the Far East; there Malaya, even before its independence in 1960, struggled with a Communist guerrilla movement which British forces eventually succeeded in stamping out; Singapore, too, which broke away from the federation of Malaysia it had formed with Malaya in August

1965, was fully sensitive under its cosmopolitan Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, to the alleged Communist threat to south-east Asia. Even so, in reality the principal strategic threat to Malaysia came, not from any external Communist state, but from Indonesia, which from 1963 until 1966 dedicated itself to crushing the Malaysia Federation which it castigated as a product of British imperialism.

For the rest, it was quite a different strategic threat which affected the new Afro-Asian states in the Commonwealth, or so at least they themselves claimed. The black African states professed to fear neo-colonialism, or the creeping dominance of Western economic interests which they regarded as making a mockery of their new-found independence; President Nkrumah of Ghana was an outstanding exponent of the theory of neo-colonialism until he was thrust from power by a *coup* in Accra on 24 February 1966 when he was on a visit to the Far East. Some African states feared internal secessionist movements, supposedly encouraged by external political and economic forces for their own profit: hence the significance read by the independent African states into the struggle between the new state of the Congo, given independence by Belgium in July 1960, and the secessionist state of Katanga, and into the civil war in Nigeria between 1966 and 1970, when the Ibo state of Biafra tried to secede from the Federal Government in Lagos. Moreover, almost all the independent African states in the Commonwealth obsessively regarded their main common enemy as being the forces of white supremacy in southern Africa. In the struggle against these forces the Communist world appeared rather as an ally of black Africa than its enemy. Above all, in the first and greatest example of British decolonisation after 1945, the Indian sub-continent, all other international tensions were dwarfed beside the vast feud between India and Pakistan, in which blood began to be shed even before the partition of India between Hindus and Muslims in August 1948 and continued to be shed until the end of the period covered by this book.

It is unnecessary to detail here the causes and history of the Indo-Pakistan conflict. The religious incompatibility between the two states, the political contrast between an Asian parliamentary democracy, India, and a theocratic state, Pakistan, the cultural and intellectual differences, even the geopolitical relationships of the two countries, disposed them to visualise each other as seemingly permanent enemies. All their other international relations were geared to this central argument between them. When Pakistan joined the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), created in Manila in September 1954, when she joined the Turki-Iraq pact in February 1955 to form the Bagdad pact, later known as the Central Treaty

Organisation (CENTO), it was as much to acquire arms and influential external friends against India as to contribute to the ostensible purposes of these alliances, and certainly that was how the Indian Government regarded Pakistan's actions. When India entered into a twenty-year alliance with the Soviet Union on 9 August 1971 it was through fear that Pakistan was about to join with the United States and China in a three-cornered pact. Washington was providing Pakistan with arms and President Nixon's special adviser and later Secretary of State, Dr Henry Kissinger, had in July 1971 first visited Rawalpindi and then Peking to arrange a meeting between the President and Chinese leaders.

In this great conflict Britain and the Commonwealth as a whole could play little part; indeed the country which helped to patch up the quarrel temporarily was Britain's post-war adversary, the Soviet Union, which provided a form of mediation at the Tashkent conference in January 1966. On the face of it, the vaunted informality and intimacy of the Commonwealth association should have furnished the ideal circumstances for good offices in the Indo-Pakistan dispute. The Commonwealth communique issued after a Prime Ministers' conference in August 1964, when referring to the Indo-Pakistan dispute, ran,

'While recognising that it was not a function of the Commonwealth to act as an arbiter in disputes between member-nations, the Prime Ministers agreed that Commonwealth countries could play a role of reconciliation and, where possible, consider using their good offices to help towards the settlement of disputes between member nations provided the parties concerned accept such mediation.'

It became obvious, however, almost as soon as India first submitted the Kashmir phase of the dispute to the UN Security Council in January 1948, that any serious Commonwealth attempt to help settle it ran the risk of alienating one or the other parties or even of permanently dividing the Commonwealth between the two states. The organisation was in fact confronted with the *arbitral task of Solomon* at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference in Ottawa in July 1973 when Bangladesh, the breakaway state consisting of former East Pakistan, was welcomed as a new member and Pakistan promptly retorted by resigning from its Commonwealth membership.

In a somewhat less dramatic sense, inter-Commonwealth trade after 1945 began to manifest the same pattern of *centrifugal* rather than unifying tendencies. The economic unity which existed in the

<sup>1</sup> Cmnd. 2441 of 1964.

British Commonwealth and Empire before 1939 derived in the main from the system of mutual Preferences adopted at the Ottawa conference in 1932, which in turn stemmed from the great economic depression of 1929-32. After the Second World War Imperial Preferences, as they still continued to be called, came under the sharpest pressure from the United States; under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), set up under strong American inspiration in 1947, all such restrictive trading systems as the Ottawa agreements were to be phased out in favour of global reduction-of-tariff agreements between signatory states on a bilateral basis. At the same time, the pattern of Commonwealth trade itself began to diversify. The developing economic strength of Japan exerted a strong gravitational pull on Australia and New Zealand; their wheat and dairy exports began to move towards Japan's 100 million people in increasing quantity. The developing countries of the Commonwealth appreciated the dangers of continuing as primary producers for Britain even if Britain, with its recurrent government-imposed restrictions on imports in the post-1945 world, could absorb any major part of their produce. Above all, although Britain continued to do about one third of her international trade with the Commonwealth, that proportion diminished year by year; after the formation of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957 more and more British exports went to western Europe. Nor was this surprising; the Commonwealth as a whole consisted predominantly of poor countries which lacked the purchasing power to buy the expensive equipment, such as electronic goods and aircraft engines, in which Britain industry had to specialise if it was to hold its own with American, Federal German and Japanese products: the Anglo-French *Concorde*, developed at a cost of £1,000 million to the British taxpayer, could do little to aid the flood-stricken people of Pakistan even if they could afford it. Hence, the very lines of production in which Britain now had to excel if she was to provide a living from foreign trade for her 55 million people were not those, as it happened, for which most Commonwealth states could provide a market; and this was true whether the pro-Commonwealth Labour Party or the Conservatives with their general indifference to the Commonwealth prevailed in British general elections.

### *The Commonwealth and British foreign policy*

If solidarity in the Commonwealth was therefore deteriorating on all the political, strategic and economic planes in the years of decolonisation, what then after all were the advantages of the Common-

wealth for Britain and British foreign policy? What was the positive side of the balance sheet to set against the brickbats Britain received from most of her Commonwealth partners in the post-war years and the problems and anxieties which Commonwealth membership brought the country?

In the first place, British people probably attached too much importance to the criticism and baiting which they received from the new Commonwealth countries. Though, as has been pointed out, there was in Britain during decolonisation no wish in any considerable proportion of the population to try to recover imperial greatness, at least by holding on to territories which claimed independence, the way in which Britain tended to be depreciated in many quarters, inside and outside the Commonwealth, in the post-war years served to induce a feeling of sub-conscious resentment which became manifest, for instance, during the Suez crisis in 1956. But in so far as these feelings caused British people to react angrily against criticism from the new Commonwealth, that criticism was perhaps misunderstood. Many of the Afro-Asian people in the Commonwealth attacked Britain over her alleged 'imperialist' policies, not so much because they thought that other great Powers were superior to her in this respect, but because they expected better things from Britain. To speak figuratively, former British colonies in Africa and Asia showed towards Britain much the same kind of angry tantrums as young children show towards their mothers; they were certainly not out-and-out rejections of the mother but appeals to the mother to live up to the idealised expectations of the children. British Ministers accused the ex-colonies of 'double standards', or overlooking sins committed by Communist states which they would have raised the roof about if committed by Britain. Thus India and other Commonwealth states did not revile the Russians for crushing the Hungarian revolution in 1956 with half the venom they discharged against Britain for her 'armed action' against Egypt which went on concurrently. Even France, an old European imperialist Power and ally of Britain in the Suez adventure, was not calumniated as much as Britain. But this was understandable, even flattering to Britain; the ex-colonies looked to Britain for higher standards of international conduct; they judged her behaviour by loftier rules. The truth of this was shown after Mr Heath formed his first Conservative Government in June 1970 and proceeded to develop a much cooler attitude towards the Commonwealth than any of his predecessors. This resulted in strains in the Commonwealth more acute than had ever been witnessed before at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference in Singapore in January 1971, but just because Commonwealth ties had been so strained the atmosphere seemed calmer at the

Ottawa conference of Prime Ministers in August 1973. It was as though the Afro-Asian Commonwealth states had undergone a downward and more realistic adjustment in what they thought Britain was capable of doing in the world. Because they had already begun to expect less of Britain it seemed that they were more willing to listen to explanations of what it was in Britain's power to do. (If Commonwealth pressures on Britain seemed to decline in the 1970s, the more material costs of Commonwealth membership remained low. For Britain and other Commonwealth members, there never was any financial burden of Commonwealth membership apart from trivial contributions to the upkeep of the Secretariat and the maintenance of delegations to Commonwealth conferences. President Amin claimed that Uganda could not afford the foreign exchange needed to convey him to the 1973 Ottawa meeting and asked for British help, but this might have been yet another personal eccentricity of the President. Economic aid from Britain to the Commonwealth states was fifty per cent in the form of repayable loans and even grants in aid were given partly as political investments which might well have been provided even had the Commonwealth institution not existed. The military assistance which Britain gave to the East African states in 1964 and to Malaysia during its confrontation with Indonesia was also to a large extent in fulfilment of political objectives wider than the Commonwealth and certainly was not accompanied by any acceptance of any legal obligation under the Commonwealth system. In any case such aid was bound to be drastically reduced after Britain's liquidation of her 'East of Suez' policy in January 1968.

Above all, the Commonwealth, quite unlike other international institutions such as the United Nations, imposed on none of its members any formal obligations to do anything or refrain from doing anything. This indeed was one of its strongest attractions to its member-states, namely that in return for the least possible financial contribution and legal obligation the Commonwealth afforded access to a generally friendly company of thirty-two states distributed throughout the world and covering about one quarter of the world's population. No one could say when that access would prove a distinct political advantage to any country facing alone its day-by-day difficulties and problems; but it was a great international circle of potential mutual helpfulness provided at practically no cost.

There were, it is true, a few unwritten obligations or conventions of the most unburdensome character. One, as we have seen, was the quasi-obligation to consult or at least to inform other members about policies and initiatives which might affect their interests.

This was a rule often overlooked in practice though it had a reciprocal function about it; a state undeterred by the harm its policies might inflict on other Commonwealth members must know that someday the tables might be turned and it might suffer from a *fait accompli* perpetrated without warning by another member-state. Again, there was the general understanding that representatives of member-states should talk in a friendly and frank manner with each other at their periodical get-togethers. This, too, had its obvious uses as well as drawbacks, the Commonwealth being a widely dispersed association geographically and hence ideally suited to act, if as nothing else, as a kind of seminar in which Ministers could educate themselves in world affairs while at the same time seeking to tutor others in the reasons for their own interests and policies.) Again, the old Concert of Europe comes to mind, with the same lack of formality and its function as a practical instrument of co-operation. Moreover, while the Concert of Europe in the nineteenth century rested on the tacit assumption of the superiority of the great white Powers to the rest of the world, so the Commonwealth in its post-1945 form rested on the opposite assumption of racial equality and the idea of fundamental rights and freedoms without respect to race.

But there never was, nor could there be, any suggestion of punishing states infringing such principles except, in 1961, South Africa, a peculiarly blatant offender. When President Amin of Uganda began his campaign against Asian residents in the country in August 1972 there was no suggestion of even a verbal Commonwealth reprimand. After South Africa, it was perhaps Britain that was chiefly in the dock, partly on account of the restrictions it imposed in August 1965 on immigration from the Commonwealth,<sup>1</sup> but more particularly because of its alleged failings in regard to racism elsewhere, especially in Rhodesia. A few extremists in black Africa talked about the expulsion of Britain from the Commonwealth but this was never taken seriously. By 1973 the tone of Afro-Asian criticism of Britain was rather one of sorrow than anger.

An important factor holding the Commonwealth together in the 1960s and even more in the 1970s against all the forces of disintegration was undoubtedly the psychology of the association rather than the profit-and-loss account. Commonwealth states, even the Afro-Asian members, knew that however much Commonwealth ties weakened, however much Britain failed to take the expected lead in the struggle for race equality, they were likely to get a friendlier hearing and, if small and weak, a more sympathetic reception in Britain than in any other major country in the world. Britain's

<sup>1</sup> See Cmnd. 2739, *Immigration from the Commonwealth*, August 1965.

power to assist them, after giving them that hearing and reception, was certainly not what it was; it was shrinking more and more as British economic troubles mounted and the hopes of a stronger Britain after it entered the EEC in 1973 were still elusive. Yet the country remained a state of considerable significance and influence in the world and for a weak and small Commonwealth state to have that influence on its side was still important.

On the British side, despite the sense of remoteness from and disillusionment with the new Commonwealth which grew in the 1960s, there remained the conviction that to be and remain on good terms with an association of nations of every kind, scattered throughout every continent and tied to the rest of the world by a thousand bonds of commerce, culture, political sympathy and race, could not but be a formidable political asset not lightly to be discarded. British policies by no means won a friendly reception in the Commonwealth, new or old, but there they were likely to be given a serious hearing, possibly more so than in any equally considerable fraction of the international system. To this must be added the immense force of habit and sentiment. It was sometimes said that the British wrongly regarded the post-war Commonwealth as a reason for claiming top-nation status when the material basis of that status had long disappeared. That may be so, but the force of habit is never to be underestimated in any international institution, even when its practical utility is low, and we have argued that the practical utility of the Commonwealth in the post-1945 years was far from low. In a world changing as rapidly as it did after the Second World War the British no doubt derived a certain satisfaction from contemplating a portion of the past in the shape of the Commonwealth, the essential character of which did not seem to change though in fact it did change much faster than they imagined. But there was in addition a certain protective feeling towards the Commonwealth prevalent in Britain. Families whose forebears, perhaps for generations, had done service for years in India and Africa looked with some warmth, and no doubt not a little condescension, on the countries they had seen grow to independence and separate statehood. They felt something like the same kind of continuing responsibility for their old charges which some of the former colonies still felt Britain should feel towards themselves.

But there was also the immense change in Britain's entire world position as affected by her joining the European Communities in January 1973. How this affected the Commonwealth will be considered in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup> At first sight and for obvious reasons British membership of the European Communities may seem, or

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 11.



did seem, the final *coup de grâce* to the Commonwealth as an association of states. At the same time, it gave the other Commonwealth countries a new interest in Britain now that it had joined the EEC. A united western Europe would, almost everyone predicted, be a force in the world with which, like all other states or associations of states, the Commonwealth would have to come to terms. What better go-between could there be in this operation than Britain?

## BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

The external situation confronting Britain after 1945 was dominated by the tension between the Communist and the Western worlds which overshadowed every international problem. British Ministers generally ascribed this tension to Soviet expansion, backed by a revolutionary faith, which showed itself in the imposition of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the crushing of attempts in East Germany in June 1953 and in Hungary in October 1956 to break free. 'The plain fact is', said the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, in the House of Commons on 5 November 1957, 'that Communist doctrine, which has never been repudiated and often acted upon calls for the eventual overthrow of everything that we understand by freedom and democracy . . . I believe that never has the threat of Russia and Soviet Communism been so great or the need for countries to organise themselves against it so urgent.'<sup>1</sup>

As in all quarrels, however, there were two sides to the story. The Bolshevik Revolution which created Soviet Russia in November 1917 met with little but the frankest hostility from Western states, extending from the efforts of the Allies during the civil war which followed Lenin's seizure of power to crush the new regime to the scarcely veiled preference shown by many British and French Ministers for the Fascist governments in Germany and Italy in the 1930s. When Stalin met Churchill during the Second World War he discussed post-war collaboration with a man who had spent much of his life opposing the Soviet system and who justified the welcome he gave to Russia's entrance into the war in June 1941 by saying that he would move a vote of thanks to the devil himself if he joined in the fight against Hitler. These recollections, inevitably in a one-sided form, provided the historical introduction to the famous 'Khrushchev note' of 27 November 1958 which made the Berlin issue the central question at the opening of the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> When to this experience was added the dogmatic Marxist belief that the West was fated, regardless of its own wishes, to attempt the military destruction of Communism, the basis of Soviet hostility towards the West was laid. The precautions taken by the Soviet Union against the partly imagined, partly real, threat from the West engendered Western defensive reactions

<sup>1</sup> 577 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 35-9.

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 250.

which in their turn strengthened Soviet suspicions. The resulting vicious spiral might have been broken had it been possible for statesmen on both sides to form the continuous and informal contacts which British Prime Ministers, notably Churchill, Eden and Macmillan, persistently sought. In Stalin's time the personal seclusion of the old Communist made little progress possible, though Stalin, unlike his successors, seemed to have the power to enforce his will at home if a settlement with the West could be reached. Although with his death in March 1953 East-West relations at once improved, especially since it coincided with the arrival of the nuclear stalemate which made war all but impossible, the real forces behind Soviet policy became even harder to fathom. The exact position of Nikita Khrushchev, who assumed the Premiership from his former partner, Bulganin, in April 1958, after having defeated a coalition of his enemies, the so-called 'anti-party' group in the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, in the previous year, was never entirely clear. Considerable doubt existed, for instance, at the meeting of the Heads of Government of the four Powers in Paris in May 1960, whether Khrushchev's refusal to hold the conference was due to the influence of the military, expressed through the Minister of Defence, Marshal Malinovsky, who accompanied Khrushchev in Paris wherever he went; or to the rising influence of Communist China, whose leaders were known to disagree with Khrushchev's policy of 'peaceful co-existence' and his attack on Stalinist theory and practice at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956; or whether Khrushchev himself had abandoned hope of a settlement with the West.

Whoever directed Soviet policy and whatever the philosophy behind it, the mere extent of Russia's land mass, her interminable frontiers and many neighbours, encouraged a suspiciousness towards the world outside which the messianic Communist ideology only hardened. Russia's long history of invasion from Europe, extending back to the Vikings, gave her the kind of interest in East Europe which the United States under the Monroe Doctrine had in the whole of the Western Hemisphere, which France had in the Rhine and North Africa and Britain had in the Low Countries or the Persian Gulf. The fact that Soviet politicians did not share the Western belief that Parliamentary democracy and individual freedom ensure a peaceful foreign policy, and that in any case the states of East Europe had never made a brilliant success of Parliamentary democracy, did not lead them to welcome democratic regimes on the Western pattern in those countries at the end of the war. France in 1919 would have imposed any regime on Germany which promised to keep that country powerless. Russia's attitude towards Germany

and East Europe after 1945 was the same, except that, unlike France, she had the power to carry out her object, at least as far as the Elbe in Germany. Above all, Russia had suffered a devastating German invasion during the Second World War which no Soviet citizen, from the Prime Minister downwards, could forget. Twenty million Soviet people had died, the equivalent of five million British. Cities, notably Stalingrad, in which the struggle against Germany had been fought hand to hand and house by house, had become legends.<sup>1</sup> All this united the Soviet Government with their own people in their attitude towards Germany and the West (of which Hitler Germany, to them, had always formed a part) and created perhaps the strongest bond between the Soviets and the people of East Europe, such as the Poles and Czechs, whose experience of Germany had been almost as terrible.

### *The policy of German reunification*

Although British Ministers repeatedly asserted their understanding of these facts, they joined with their American and French colleagues in urging solutions of the German problem, the central issue of East-West relations, which no government in Moscow, Communist or other, could have regarded as a basis for serious negotiations. The most persistent of these proposals was the reunification of Germany by means of free and internationally supervised elections and with freedom afforded to Germany to join any alliance she chose. No attempt was ever made to disguise the assumption behind this proposal that a Germany so united would join the NATO alliance. Selwyn Lloyd, then Minister of State at the Foreign Office, told the Commons in July 1955 that 'these arrangements were drawn up to meet what everybody admitted to be the probable contingency. It really was not worth wasting time on the others, because it was confidently thought that this was the choice a free Germany would make'.<sup>2</sup> The plan for Germany submitted by Eden on behalf of the three Western Powers at the four-Power Foreign Ministers' conference in Berlin on 29 January 1954, envisaged five stages in German reunification: (1) free elections throughout Germany; (2) the convocation of a National Assembly resulting from those elections; (3) the drafting of a Constitution and the preparation of peace treaty negotiations; (4) the adoption of the Constitution and the formation of an all-German Government responsible for the negotiation of the

<sup>1</sup> The name of Stalingrad was changed to Volgograd in November 1961 as part of the de-Stalinisation policy.

<sup>2</sup> 557 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 248 (24 July).

peace treaty; (5) the signature and entry into force of the peace treaty.<sup>1</sup> This plan was again submitted to Russia at the four-Power Heads of Government meeting in Geneva from 18 to 21 July 1955. At the same time the question of German territory under Polish administration beyond the Oder-Neisse line was left open. At the nine-Power conference in Paris in October 1954 which brought Western Germany into the NATO pact the three Western Powers, Britain, France and the United States, had declared that the final determination of Germany's boundaries must await a freely negotiated settlement between Germany and her former enemies.<sup>2</sup>

Russia would have needed to be in a parlous condition to accept the principles of such a settlement. She already had reason to fear that the Paris agreements of October 1954, which came into effect on 6 May 1955, would lead to a remilitarised West Germany (which controlled three-quarters of the population of 1939 Germany and most of its industrial wealth) and that NATO policy, however defensive in character before Germany's admission, would be dominated by the same irredentism which had characterised German policy since 1918. Under the Western plan East Germany, with its 17 million people, would almost certainly slip from Russia's grasp and go to swell the military resources of the West, with consequences for Russia's hold on the rest of Eastern Europe which could not be foreseen. A new Germany would come into existence, armed with nuclear weapons which, it was commonly said, might have made the *difference between victory and defeat for Hitler in 1945*. Russia was told that if she accepted this proposal she would help lessen the tension between herself and the West; Eden said at the Geneva 'summit' conference in July 1955 that 'until the unity of Germany is restored there can be neither confidence nor security on this continent'.<sup>3</sup> This might have been the case, but only through turning the balance of power wholly against Russia, and even so only on the assumption that Germany when united would remain peaceful.

It is true that Russia was offered compensation for her losses under the 'Eden plan' in the form of security assurances, but these were in themselves insubstantial and were not tendered until the Geneva 'summit' conference in July 1955, that is, after the Federal German Republic had been well and truly incorporated into the Western camp. The assurances were to be embodied in a security treaty

<sup>1</sup> Miscellaneous No. 5 (1954), Berlin Conference, Cmd. 9080, Annex A, pp. 120-2. See Also Eden's report on the Conference, 524 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 401-16 (24 February 1954).

<sup>2</sup> Miscellaneous No. 32 (1954), Paris Conference, Cmd. 9304, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Miscellaneous No. 14 (1955), Geneva Conference, Cmd. 9543, p. 16.

between the four Powers and a reunited Germany and would operate in nine stages, but it was clearly laid down that none of them were to be effective until a reunited Germany decided to enter NATO and West European Union. The first two stages were merely declaratory, involving renunciation by the parties of the use of force 'in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations', and an undertaking not to assist an aggressor and to 'seek such measures as are necessary to maintain and restore international peace and security' if aggression occurred. The third stage comprised a limitation of forces and armaments in a region between united Germany and the East European states along the following lines:

'In a zone comprising areas of comparable size and depth and importance on both sides of a line of demarcation between a reunified Germany and the East European countries, levels for armed forces would be specified so as to establish a military balance which would contribute to European security and help to relieve the burden of armaments. There would be appropriate provisions for the maintenance of this balance. In parts of the zone which lie closest to the line of demarcation, there might be special measures relating to the disposition of military forces and installations.'

This arrangement was to be supervised, at the fourth stage, by 'progressive measures of mutual inspection', which would also warn against any preparation on either side for a surprise attack. Then would follow the establishment of a system of radar warning on either side of the demarcation line, the western system being operated by Russia and the Warsaw pact countries and the eastern radar system by NATO forces. The two following stages introduced the principle of consultation to implement the treaty and reasserted the right of individual and collective self-defence, on which the NATO and Warsaw pacts were based, and the right of any country to forbid the use of its territory to foreign troops. The eighth stage, however, was the most crucial, involving the most concrete of the undertakings by the Western Powers to meet the contingency of a German military revival, of which the Soviet authorities represented themselves as being most afraid. Instead, however, of a pledge to come to the assistance of a victim of aggression, it was merely proposed that: 'Each party would agree that armed attack in Europe by any party, which is also a NATO member, against any party which is not a NATO member or vice-versa, would endanger the peace and security which is the object of this treaty and that all the parties would then take appropriate action to meet that common danger.' During the ninth and final stage the whole treaty, to which the four Powers and Germany would be signatory, would come into effect 'by stages as later

agreed'. This meant that not even the first stage could come into force until the treaty as a whole was operative, that is, after Germany had entered NATO and WEU.<sup>1</sup>

Since the proposed security treaty, which the French delegation presented on behalf of the three Western Powers at the four-Power Foreign Ministers' meeting at Geneva on 28 October 1955, could not be operative unless and until Germany was an ally in NATO of the three Western Powers, the chances of the three Powers siding with Russia in any future quarrel with Germany were slight, especially as united Germany would probably inherit all the close ties with France which the Bonn Republic was contracting in the 'Little Europe' of the Six. Moreover, by the NATO alliance signatories were pledged to assist each other against 'armed attack'; it is not legally essential that they be victims of 'aggression', which is not mentioned in the treaty, to qualify for that assistance. The three Western Powers, under the treaty of assurance proposed to Russia, would thus be pledged both to assist Germany, as a NATO member, against 'armed attack' and also to 'take appropriate action' in the event of an armed attack by Germany against Russia, which in itself must provoke an armed attack on Germany by Russia. It is not hard to see which of these conflicting obligations they were likely to prefer, except perhaps in the most flagrant case of German aggression towards the east.

#### *Disengagement: British initiatives and the allies*

A second compensation tentatively held out to Russia in return for her agreement on German reunification along Western lines was the proposal for a 'demilitarised area between East and West' which Eden raised at the Geneva 'summit' conference in 1955.<sup>2</sup> This conception continued to interest the British Foreign Office throughout the 1950s and became the inspiration of many schemes for 'disengaging' the armed forces of East and West from the line in Central Europe where they confronted each other. The British view was that disengagement offered hope of relieving Russia's grip on East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, that it might provide for mutual inspection on a limited scale which could be developed more generally in a larger disarmament agreement, and that the creation of a 'no-man's land' between the opposing forces in Europe would lessen the risk of collision. The demilitarisation proposal of 1955, however, ran into the strongest opposition on the

<sup>1</sup> Miscellaneous No. 21 (1955), Geneva Conference, Cmd. 9633, Annex I, pp. 99-101.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 9543, p. 18.

Western side and seems to have dropped from view after the Geneva conference. It evoked alarm in Federal Germany, where it was feared that at worst it might develop into the neutralisation of Central Europe and the retirement of American forces from their protective role in Germany, or, at best, consolidate the division of Germany. British ideas on disengagement found little more support amongst NATO commanders. General Norstad, who became Supreme Commander, Allied Powers in Europe, in November 1956, regarded almost any form of disengagement as hampering Western defence, while leaving Russia free to deploy her massive land forces, no doubt further back than the existing western boundary of Soviet Germany, but still within easy reach of Western Europe if the signal to move were given.

British ideas on disengagement therefore had to be watered down in deference to the allies. On one occasion, Selwyn Lloyd, who became Foreign Secretary in succession to Macmillan in 1955, denied that the Eden demilitarisation plan amounted to anything more than a proposal for mutual inspection, thus implying that it had been submerged in the Western security plan already referred to, with its provision for the limitation of forces and armaments in a zone between a reunited Germany and Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, official British interest in disengagement continued. A qualified welcome was given by British Ministers to the proposal of the Polish Minister, Adam Rapacki, for the creation of a zone in central Europe from which all nuclear weapons and missiles for launching them would be removed, which the Minister explained at the United Nations General Assembly on 7 November 1957. While Rapacki assured Western newspaper correspondents that the plan was a Polish one and represented a genuine Polish initiative, it could hardly have been put forward without Soviet agreement. The Soviet Prime Minister, Bulganin, in fact supported the plan in a letter to Macmillan on 11 December 1957.<sup>2</sup> Naturally he did so because the plan had the advantage for Russia of denying nuclear arms to Germany while allowing Russia herself to retain her heavy superiority in conventional forces.

The British Government, however, were determined to see whether the Polish plan could not be moulded into a more acceptable shape. The Prime Minister replied to Bulganin on 16 January 1958 that it was under close study;<sup>3</sup> a month later the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, Ormsby-Gore, gave some of the Government's impressions in a Commons debate. He was far from rejecting it out

<sup>1</sup> 570 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 19-21 (13 May 1957).

<sup>2</sup> Soviet Union No. 2 (1958), Cmd. 381, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.



of hand.<sup>1</sup> The British objections were formulated in a note to Poland on 17 May and focused on the continuing Communist preponderance in conventional arms under the plan, its lack of clarity in the matter of control and inspection, and the absence of any reference to German reunification. Revised proposals were therefore announced by the Polish Foreign Minister on 4 November 1958 which envisaged two stages: first, there was to be no production of nuclear weapons in Czechoslovakia, Germany or Poland and armies in those countries which did not possess nuclear arms were not to have them; in the second stage the reduction of conventional arms was to be carried out 'simultaneously with the removal of nuclear weapons'. Both stages, Rapacki said, would be subject to adequate measures of control.

It was clear, however, by now that no German Government could ask their forces to prepare for an emergency in which other armies, allied and enemy, would have up-to-date weapons while they would not. In addition, the fact that British policy, as a result of the Defence White Paper of 1957, had come to rely upon nuclear arms as the first line of defence against even a conventional attack, made British enthusiasm for the Rapacki plan look like an aspect of British anti-Germanism. Hence, when Selwyn Lloyd gave the Government's considered position on the revised Rapacki plan on 4 December 1948, he said that, while there was no difficulty about forbidding the production of nuclear weapons in Germany, since this was already provided for under the Paris agreements, a freeze on atomic forces in Germany would impair the defence capabilities of NATO and 'involve discrimination against the troops of particular countries'.<sup>2</sup> Beyond this, British interest in the Polish proposal could not go.

A reflection of this interest, however, reappeared in February 1959 when Macmillan paid a twelve-day visit to the Soviet Union the object of which, as he described it, was not to negotiate but to make a 'reconnaissance' of the Soviet position and attitude.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the visit, on which the Prime Minister was accompanied by the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, a communiqué was issued in which it was stated that the British and Soviet leaders: '... agreed that further study could usefully be made of the possibilities of increasing security by some method of limitation of forces and weapons, both conventional and nuclear, in an agreed area of Europe, coupled with an appropriate system of inspection.'<sup>4</sup> The reaction in Federal Germany to this British initiative, when the

<sup>1</sup> 582 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1339 (19 February 1958).

<sup>2</sup> 596 H.C. Deb. 5s Col. 1376.

<sup>3</sup> 599 *Ibid.*, Col. 579 (5 February 1959).

<sup>4</sup> Soviet Union No. 1 (1959), *Cmd.* 689, pp. 2-3.

Rapaeki plan seemed dead and buried, was one of intense anger, the Maemillan journey to Moscow leading to perhaps the worst period of post-war Anglo-German relations. During the general election in Britain in October 1959, when the Conservative Government was returned with the increased majority of 108 seats over Labour, Dr Adenauer, the Federal German Chancellor, accused Macmillan of promising a British acceptance of the Rapaeki plan in order to win votes. This was not true but the fact that Macmillan's principal rival at the election, Hugh Gaitskell, the leader of the Labour Party, had, as far back as 1956, approved a disengagement plan based upon the withdrawal of Warsaw pact forces from East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary and of NATO forces from Germany compelled the Conservatives to keep an open mind on disengagement, on which in any case they had always looked with sympathy.<sup>1</sup>

There seemed some hope in 1956 that Russia might agree to a withdrawal of its forces to the Soviet border in exchange for reliable assurances about Germany's military revival. What with the troubles in Hungary and Poland in that year, British advocates of disengagement considered the Russians might be tempted to abandon the East European security belt they had acquired in 1945 if the price were high enough, especially as its military value was declining with Russia's advance to military parity with the United States.<sup>2</sup> How slender this hope eventually proved to be was shown by an article published in the American journal *Foreign Affairs* by Khrushchev in October 1959, coinciding with his visit to the United States. In this the Soviet leader's main theme was that peaceful co-existence between East and West must be firmly based on recognition of spheres of interest on both sides or, in the jargon of verbal warfare, there could be 'no roll back of Socialism from the People's Democracies'. The effect of this was to rule out any policy of disengagement for Germany and East Europe and to shrink almost to nothing any concession even the most hopeful British advocates of disengagement could consider on the Western side.

### *Federal Germany enters NATO*

Since Russia had threatened that dire results would follow from the absorption of Federal Germany into NATO by the Paris agreements of 1954-5, many British Opposition spokesmen feared that the

<sup>1</sup> For the Gaitskell plan see *Labour's Foreign Policy*, published by the Labour party, 1958, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> See Denis Healey, *A Neutral Belt in Europe?*, published by the Fabian Society, London, 1958.

ratification of the agreements would remove all prospect of coming to terms with Moscow and intensify the tensions. So far was this from happening that the coming into force of the agreements on 6 May 1955 seemed to coincide with a milder period of East-West relations than any that had been experienced since the war. On 10 May the Soviet delegate at the Sub-committee of the UN Disarmament Commission embarrassed Western representatives by tabling a disarmament scheme which accepted many of the features of the Anglo-French plan of 1954.<sup>1</sup> Two days later the Austrian state treaty was signed in Vienna as a result of a Soviet reversal of an obstructive stand maintained for many years. Five days later the Soviet Government accepted a Western invitation to a Heads of Government meeting intended as 'a new effort to resolve the great problems which confront us'. At the 'summit' meeting at Geneva in July the Soviet position had changed hardly at all, the only modifications in the security proposals of the previous year being a provision for the NATO and Warsaw pacts to remain in being during a first phase, in which forces stationed in the territory of other countries were to be stabilised, and acceptance of the United States as a party to the collective security treaty.<sup>2</sup> The four leaders were able to agree only on directives relating to European security, the unification of Germany by free elections and with due regard to the interests of Germany and her neighbours, and increased contacts between East and West. These constituted the agenda for a continuance of the debate at Foreign Minister level in the Swiss city in the autumn. Here again, East and West remained separated by the inevitable conflict between German reunification and European security. The West's acceptance of the principle of assurances to Russia in return for her agreement to German unity was paralleled by Soviet acquiescence in NATO, between which pact and the Warsaw alliance the Soviet Foreign Minister proposed a non-aggression pact 'until replaced by another treaty for the establishment of a system of Collective Security in Europe'.<sup>3</sup> But these movements towards a middle ground were too slight to enable the remaining distance between the two sides to be bridged.

Nevertheless, the 'Geneva spirit' mellowed the tone of East-West exchanges. In September diplomatic relations were established between Russia and the Federal German Republic and Dr Adenauer was invited to Moscow, where he was asked to consider the neutralisation of Austria in May as a model for Germany. He was not

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chapter 9, p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 9543, pp. 21-3.

<sup>3</sup> Cmd. 9633, Annexes II and III, pp. 104-7; Annex IV, pp. 107-8; Annex VI, pp. 108-9.

impressed. In April of the following year the Soviet pair, Khrushchev and Bulganin, after a tour of south-east Asia at the end of 1955 in which they had denounced British imperialism to all and sundry, were given a cordial welcome in Britain, accepting an invitation extended by Eden at Geneva in July. Amicable talks were held with British Ministers, stormy ones with Opposition leaders at a dinner given by the Labour Party, and a long list of proposed Soviet purchases in Britain (a half of which, probably by design, included goods prohibited to the Communist bloc under the strategic embargo) was handed over. The effect of the trade agreement which they desired, the Soviet leaders said, was that Russian imports from Britain would increase in the five years 1956-60 by from nine to eleven billion roubles, or £800-£1,000 million. A statement issued at the end of the visit recorded that Britain and Russia both 'attached particular importance to maintaining security in Europe' but regretted that 'an understanding on the means to achieve that end was not reached'.<sup>1</sup> After the visit Eden, the then Prime Minister, said that the danger of global war had receded and that forces were at work in Russia which could assist the relaxation of tension, among which he spoke of recent increases in living standards in that country, the new status of technicians, with their interest in construction rather than military adventures, Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinisation and new legal reforms which tended towards the independence of the courts as understood in the West. 'I believe', so Eden summarised the position, 'that there has been an essential change in the international outlook in the last two years, between the Berlin Conference (in 1954) and now. That change has been between rigidity and flexibility. All was rigid then. Much seems flexible now.'<sup>2</sup>

Although the Suez affair and the Hungarian tragedy dragged Anglo-Soviet relations back into the depths in the autumn of that year and the correspondence between Bulganin and Eden's successor, Macmillan, which began hopefully in the spring of 1957, degenerated into the bald statement of positions on either side early in 1958, it was clear that the Soviet leaders wished to come to another 'summit' meeting as soon as possible. The British Government were unwilling to write off this desire as merely one more propaganda exercise. West Germany's entrance into NATO in 1955 seemed therefore not to close the door on further negotiation with the Communist bloc, as had been feared, but rather to intensify Soviet anxiety for further talks. The conclusion which could reasonably be drawn was that 'toughness' did not necessarily provoke similar reactions from Russia, and that fear of outraging Russia and readiness to sympathise

<sup>1</sup> Soviet Union No. 1 (1956). Cmd. 9753, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> 557 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 47 (23 July).

with her viewpoint tended **only to make the Soviet Government more difficult to deal with.**

*Berlin crisis: Soviet moves and motivations*

This inference might have been correct had Russia no effective means to hand of replying to the Paris agreements. When at the end of the Paris conference on 23 October 1954 the Soviet authorities addressed a note to the Western Powers stating that 'if (the Paris) decisions are implemented, it would make it impossible for West Germany to be considered a peace-loving state, which would make the unity of Germany impossible for a long time to come',<sup>1</sup> this was regarded as an empty threat since it was thought that the accession of West Germany to NATO would improve the West's bargaining strength in the matter of German unity. But it soon became clear that, whatever her previous attitude to German unity, Russia would in no circumstances entertain it after May 1955. In Bulganin's words at the Geneva 'summit' meeting on 23 July 1955:

'The Soviet Government . . . has drawn attention even before the ratification of the Paris agreements to the fact that the coming into force of these agreements would create difficulties for talks on the German problem and makes pointless any discussion on the reunification of Germany. The Soviet Government believes that it is necessary to take the facts into consideration. War in Europe ended ten years ago. . . . Since that time two Germanies have appeared—the German Democratic Republic and the German Federal Republic—each with its own economic and social structure.'<sup>2</sup>

Nor could Russia have taken any alternative position without decisively turning the European balance of power against herself. Since therefore German unity on Western terms was impossible for Russia and unity on Communist terms impossible for the West (and for exactly the same balance of power reasons), almost the only course left to Moscow was to abandon the cause of German unity, which it had espoused only so long as there was a chance of alienating West German opinion against the NATO Powers, and to come out in favour of 'drawing a line under World War Two'. This meant abandoning the Potsdam understanding to reshape a united Germany.

This Soviet conclusion was expressed in the form of a threat to

<sup>1</sup> *Soviet News*, 26 October 1954.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 9543, p. 29.

denounce the occupation regime in Berlin, where troops of all four Powers remained despite the failure of four-Power administration of the city, and in doing so to bring the two and a quarter million inhabitants of the Western sectors under Communist control. This threat was contained in a long note circulated to the Western Powers by the Soviet Union on 27 November 1958 which began by denouncing the remilitarisation of West Germany and then proposed within six months to hand over to the East German authorities Russia's occupation rights in Berlin, if by that time an agreement had not been reached between the four Powers for making West Berlin a demilitarised 'free town', which would mean of course the departure of Western troops. The four Powers, the note went on, could undertake 'obligations to respect the status of West Berlin as a free city as was done, for instance, by the four Powers in respect of the neutral status which the Austrian Republic has assumed', and the Soviet Government would not object 'if in the observance of the status of West Berlin as a free city the United Nations Organisation also took part in some form'. Any such guarantees, however, would clearly have to recognise the fact that the East Germans, as sovereigns over the hundred miles of territory between West Berlin and the Federal Republic, would become responsible, under the Soviet proposal, for access between the city and the West.<sup>1</sup> This initial statement of Soviet policy on Berlin was revised and revised again, with varying shades of flexibility and menace, during the following three years. The most important supplement, however, was provided by Khrushchev at a Soviet-East German friendship meeting in Moscow on 19 June 1958, when he said that if within a limited period, namely eighteen months, agreement was not reached by an all-German committee representing East and West Germany on the methods of German unity, Russia would sign a peace treaty with East Germany and 'all vestiges of Western rights would disappear'.<sup>2</sup>

The implications of the note for the West were serious. There was no question that the 'free city' notion was a sham, all the more so as the same status was not proposed in the Soviet note for East Berlin. Possibly the only condition on which a 'free city' can remain independent is where it is protected by a substantial hinterland of friendly territory. This, however, was the very circumstance lacking in the case of West Berlin, an isolated Western outpost in a Communist ocean. Moreover, both Russia and the Communist regime in East Germany hardly troubled to hide their intention to interpret the epithet 'free' in their own way. The severance of the link with West

<sup>1</sup> Germany No. 1 (1959), Cmnd. 634, pp. 7-21.

<sup>2</sup> Setwyn Lloyd in the Commons, 9 July 1959; 608 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1377.

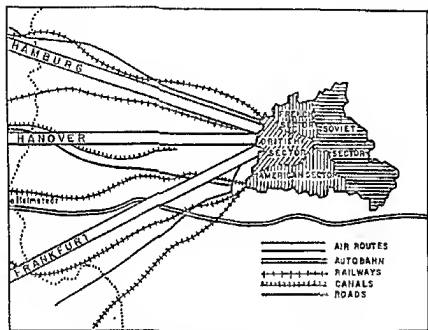
Germany, on which the prosperity of West Berlin was based, and the repeated Communist charge that West Berlin (in the words of the November note) was a centre of 'subversive activity against the German Democratic Republic, the Soviet Union and other members of the Warsaw pact' indicated that the western sectors of the city would be forced to conform to Communist ideas of 'democratic centralism' the moment that Western forces left.

On the other hand, if Western occupation forces were to remain it was difficult to see how they could avoid coming to terms with the East German authorities since, if a Soviet-East German peace treaty were signed, these authorities would take over from Soviet officials at the road, rail and canal checkpoints for access to West Berlin from Federal Germany, and at the air safety centres controlling the air corridors. This meant that some form of *de facto* recognition of those authorities would have to be granted, even though the three Western Powers were committed to regard the Federal Republic as the 'only legitimate government' for Germany and the basic assumption of West German politics was that the East German regime was a Soviet puppet with no title to respect. It is true that for some time East German officials had been responsible for checking the papers of West German travellers who crossed East German territory to reach West Berlin. But Soviet officials maintained dealings with Western occupation forces in Berlin and the Soviet Government determined policy on access to Berlin generally. At the end of November Dulles, for the United States, admitted at a Press conference that the East Germans might be accepted as 'agents' acting on behalf of Russia at the checkpoints, the ultimate responsibility remaining in Moscow. Selwyn Lloyd, for Britain, agreed, provided the agents were limited to 'minor technical functions on our lines of communication to Berlin'.<sup>1</sup> But if Russia really washed her hands of her obligations and withdrew, the power to cause incidents which might contain the makings of war or peace would lie with the puppet rather than the master. Khrushchev himself seemed well aware of this, to judge from his scarcely concealed mistrust of the Ulbricht regime in East Germany and his determination to seek an understanding with the West which would achieve his main purposes.

Despite Khrushchev's verbosity, however, it was not clear just what these purposes were. The phraseology of his declarations on Berlin, with the continuous reference to the 'Hitler generals' of West Germany, seemed designed less to reveal his thought than to curry favour with opinion in Britain and France which remained suspicious of the Germans. It was also possible that pressure in favour of a move on Berlin had been applied by the East German leaders during their

<sup>1</sup> 596 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 88 (written answers, 1 December 1958).

visit to Moscow in August 1958 and that this resulted in Khrushchev's reluctant conversion to the 'free city' proposal. Russia's first presentation of the idea to the world had an appearance of haste about it which possibly reflected the sudden recognition that if the Ulbricht regime was to be spared another uprising in East Germany like that of June 1953 it would have to be reinforced by giving it control over both parts of the former German capital. This interpretation was strengthened by the serious economic position of East Germany, the shabbiest of all Communist enterprises in East



Berlin and its communications with the West.

Europe. So long as a free West Berlin existed, with its well-advertised attractions of western life, so long as East Germans could escape from the Ulbricht regime through West Berlin, the consolidation of Communism in East Germany remained in doubt. The sheer loss of manpower through the escape hatch of West Berlin provided the mounting note of urgency behind Khrushchev's demands, especially in 1961, for a liquidation of the 'anomalous' situation in Berlin. During the ten years' life of the East German regime ending in 1961 the authorities in Bonn estimated that four million East Germans had made their way to the West via West Berlin, almost a quarter of the total population. These refugees, who, as Lenin said of the Russian army in 1917, had 'voted for freedom with their feet', were



to a large extent young and well qualified persons, including large numbers of doctors and technicians. When at length the East German Communists brutally and illegally put an end to this drain on 13 August 1961 by building a wall to cut off West Berlin from the eastern sector and created a 'dead zone' extending over the whole 860 miles between East and West Germany, they no doubt calculated that this loss of the Ulbricht regime's lifeblood had gone as far as it safely could.

The principal meaning of Berlin for Russia however (except in so far as the issue was not part of the general trial of strength between her and the United States for supremacy) seemed to be that it might force the West to accept the division of Germany and abandon the cause of Germany unity, possibly with serious effects on the unity of the West itself. This had been a theme of Soviet policy since 1955 and increasingly since 1957.<sup>1</sup> Acceptance of the 'free city' idea for West Berlin would clearly have that implication. So would Western acceptance of the East German regime, even if only on a *de facto* basis, as part of a bargain for strengthening Western rights in Berlin. Even if no agreement were reached with the West (and almost any such agreement must embody Western concessions to the Communist viewpoint) continuous conflicts between East German officials and Western forces in Berlin might one day drive the West to cut its losses and withdraw, which would again consolidate the German national division. Whichever way things worked out (provided the tension did not lead to war) the result must almost certainly strain the links between West Germany and the other NATO Powers. Any Western agreement with Russia designed to secure the freedom of West Berlin would probably involve some sacrifice of West German aspirations; on the other hand, the frictions accompanying the lack of agreement might cause more and more people in the West to hold Federal Germany responsible for the tension. If as a result of the Berlin crisis strains between West Germany and other NATO states grew, Russia itself might step in with some offer to West German opinion.

### *Western reactions*

There was no difference of view between the Western Powers that any Communist attack on West Berlin would be resisted by their occupation troops, which would inevitably draw the Western Powers themselves into the conflict; the same would apply to any attempt to sever access between West Berlin and the West. That had been

<sup>1</sup> See Bulganin's letter to the NATO Powers and Switzerland, 8 January 1958, Soviet Union No. 2 (1958), *Cmd.* 381, pp. 16-24.

the position during the Berlin crisis in 1948.<sup>1</sup> There were, however, important differences between that crisis and this. At the earlier time Russia had no nuclear weapons while in 1958 it was able to deliver hydrogen bombs of the greatest magnitude to the most distant countries, possibly with more precision than its rivals. Perhaps because of the Russians' nuclear inferiority in 1948, they had left open air access into West Berlin, thus providing the West with a pretext for not attempting to force a passage into the city. There was some doubt in the late 1950s whether Russia would do the same again if indeed she meant to isolate West Berlin, or whether the air corridors could be successfully used again if she did. On the other hand, if armed conflict did result from the crisis it might not take a form which would allow the West to appear to be acting on the defensive, as was essential in order to win over opinion at home and at the United Nations. Measures applied by the Communists against West Berlin would probably not come as a military attack, but as repeated interferences with access from East Berlin or West Germany or with the various services used by the city, none of which would be easy to represent as justifying universal nuclear destruction. After the closing of the sector boundary on 13 August 1961, Communist efforts seemed to focus on creating inconveniences for the West Berliners and the occupation forces, rather than on preparing a military *coup*. This meant that if the West decided to use force to prevent the erosion of their rights and those of the West Berliners, it might be they who would have to fire the first shot.

In any event force, with its hideous consequences, could not be contemplated unless after serious efforts to negotiate a peaceful solution. From the Western viewpoint, however, there were serious difficulties about negotiation. In the first place, it was vital not to create the impression that the Soviet Union had only to create a crisis in order to bring the West to the conference table with proposals for solving it.

Throughout 1957 and 1958 the Soviet Government pressed for a 'summit' meeting, although it was all too obvious that the basic positions of East and West had not materially altered since the Geneva meeting of 1955.<sup>2</sup> The Western reply, which was in part a compromise between Britain, who favoured such meetings, and her three allies, who suspected them, was that 'summit' conferences required careful preparation if they were to stand any chance of

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter 3, pp. 86-93.

<sup>2</sup> See Bulganin's letter to the NATO Powers, 8 January 1958 (Cmnd. 381, pp. 16-24) and Western proposals for 'summit' conference agenda: Soviet Union No. 4 (1958), Cmnd. 469, p. 21.

success and that a hastily prepared meeting which failed might make the atmosphere even worse than before.<sup>1</sup> This had not in fact happened in 1955; nevertheless there was a case for trying a new formula. In 1955 the 'ice-breaking' type of Heads of Government meeting had been attempted, the object being to create an atmosphere of trust favourable to the solution of detailed problems at a lower level later on. In 1958 the Western view was that the process should begin at the other end, with preparatory work by Ambassadors and Foreign Ministers which would, as Macmillan put it, 'choose agenda calculated to achieve concrete results on specific issues' and 'disentangle points of disagreement and reveal the most promising areas of agreement'.<sup>2</sup> This approach was normal in Western diplomacy, but took little account of the concentration of authority at the top in Russia, which Khrushchev's own dominating and restless personality only served to entrench. Soviet diplomats and Foreign Ministers were notoriously governed by rigid instruction from above; Khrushchev once said of his Foreign Secretary, Gromyko, that he would 'sit naked on a block of ice' if he were told. Moreover, the Soviet Government did not seem to consider 'summit' meetings as serving the same purpose as the West had in view, namely to sound out the position of the other side and bargain and barter until an acceptable compromise is reached. Since Soviet leaders believed that Western society must in good time collapse through its own 'internal contradictions', 'summit' meetings, while holding off a Western attack on Russia, helped to provide a footing from which differences in the Western group and between that group and the rest of the non-Communist world could be exploited.

Western diplomacy had never been equipped for this kind of struggle. Nor could the Western leaders of 1958, President Eisenhower, Macmillan, the enigmatic de Gaulle, compare (except perhaps for the first) with Khrushchev in the 'summit' art of debate-cum-mass entertainment before world audiences. They therefore raised difficulties, at length agreeing to a 'summit' only after the revolution in Iraq which removed King Faisal and Nuri As-Said in July 1958, provided it was held at the United Nations Security Council and limited to the Middle East. After a period in which Khrushchev's agreement to this seemed likely, he drew back, possibly owing to the influence of the Chinese Communists, who had no place within the United Nations, and proposed instead an extraordinary session of the General Assembly.<sup>3</sup> On this Western reluctance about East-West talks the Khrushchev note on Berlin certainly

<sup>1</sup> Macmillan to Bulganin, 8 February 1958, Cmnd. 381, pp. 26-8.

<sup>2</sup> 582 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1221 (19 February 1958).

<sup>3</sup> Soviet Union No. 5 (1958), Cmnd. 516 pp. 6-7, 7-8, 14-16.

had an impact, as was no doubt intended. Replying to the note on 31 December 1958, the British Government, along with the allies, said they were ready to negotiate on Berlin, though only 'in the wider framework of negotiations for a solution of the German problem as well as that of European security'.<sup>1</sup> More important, some of the most vital positions of the West, which had been held until the receipt of the Soviet note, at once began to relax. Dulles spoke of 'other means' of uniting Germany than by free elections. Selwyn Lloyd said in April 1959 'what we have to consider is whether some phasing is possible so that the free elections (in Germany) can take place at a time acceptable to all parties and yet not be postponed indefinitely'.<sup>1</sup> Prominent Americans, notably Senator Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Senator Mansfield, a leading member of the Committee, came out in support of disengagement in central Europe, formerly almost too delicate a subject to mention in America. Since it was evidently one of the aims of the Khrushchev note on Berlin to compel some such relaxation of the Western position, there were good grounds for thinking that readiness to negotiate did not necessarily produce a frame of mind in Russia conducive to successful negotiation.

This was the position taken up with increasing insistence by President de Gaulle, who showed much the same obstructiveness in his relations with his allies as he had done as an exiled leader of Free France during the war. Since West Germany was a close ally of France in the community of the Six, de Gaulle was almost bound to support the German argument that negotiation must not be allowed to involve sacrifices by Germany, and it was hard to think of effective negotiation unless the West Germans abandoned some of the illusions which they had cherished so long. But it was entirely in keeping with de Gaulle's conception of diplomacy that he should announce that so long as the West stood firm and paid no attention to Russia's bluster, no harm would come to them. This attitude also seemed to be held by the United States until the accession of the Kennedy administration in January 1961. Kennedy's position was a weak one from which to force a change in the American position, in that he had won the elections in the previous November with the narrowest margin in American history. Yet he realised that the passage of time without settlement with Russia being reached did nothing to improve the West's bargaining position, but merely increased the risk of war through one side or the other being forced into a position from which it could not retreat. Kennedy's phrase used in his inaugural address in Washington in January 1961, 'we shall not fear to negotiate but shall never negotiate through fear',

<sup>1</sup> 604 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 907 (27 April).

also summarised the British position, though France was not convinced.

*The deadlock remains*

Assuming, however, that negotiations were attempted, the fact remained that the West had placed itself in a position, or been placed by events, in which it had few inducements to hand to cause Russia to accept the situation in West Berlin until Germany was reunited. Ideally, what would have suited the West, assuming that German unity on the basis of a modified Eden plan of 1954 was not possible, was a new statute for Berlin which committed Russia even more unambiguously to respect the freedom of West Berlin and access to it. It was in order to agree upon such a statute that the Foreign Ministers of Russia and the three Western Powers laboured at Geneva from 11 May to 10 June 1959 and from 13 July to 5 August without success. British aims at the conference, according to the Foreign Secretary were:

'First, some progress towards the reunification of Germany on acceptable terms; secondly, reaffirmation of the right of the people of West Berlin to choose their own system of society and also acceptance of the need for satisfactory arrangements for the free access to West Berlin upon which their freedom depends; and thirdly a reduction in tension and an improvement of stability in Europe.'<sup>1</sup>

Discussion of the first of these items yielded as little result as previous exchanges, even though the West agreed to a committee of East and West Germans, whose vote could not overrule the former, to expand contact between the two parts of Germany and draft a law for free elections. The West also conceded that free elections need not be held until two and a half years after the signature of the agreement.<sup>2</sup> With the failure of discussion on the wider German question Western security proposals, based upon a zone of stabilised forces and special measures for military forces and installations on the frontiers of a reunited Germany, fell to the ground.<sup>3</sup> Agreement seemed within an ace of being reached, however, on an interim statute for Berlin, in which Western rights and freedom of access would be reaffirmed in return for measures to prevent West Berlin

<sup>1</sup> 604 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 904 (27 April 1959).

<sup>2</sup> Miscellaneous No. 11 (1959), Conference of Foreign Ministers at Geneva, Cmd. 797, pp. 5-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

from being a provocation to the Eastern bloc. But difficulties arose on the question of the position at the end of the interim period, during which efforts at German reunification would be continued, supposing that these efforts had failed.

If Russia was to consent to the kind of permanent statute which would have suited the West, after repeated Soviet allegations that occupation troops in Berlin were 'anomalous' so many years after the war, she would clearly require some solid *quid pro quo* in return. This was even more likely if her aim was not to prevent West Berlin from being a source of disturbance to the eastern parts of Germany, but to draw West Berlin into the Communist camp. Yet it was hard to see what the West could offer in any negotiation. It was committed not to accept any solution of the German problem which did not envisage free elections, and hence the linking of all Germany with NATO, at some stage. Since it was precisely this Western position which had prompted Russia to create the crisis over Berlin, the deadlock remained. The Geneva Foreign Ministers' conference in the summer of 1959 seemed to relieve the tension, though no agreement was reached, and a similar contribution was made by talks between President Eisenhower and Khrushchev at Camp David, Maryland, in September. As a result of these discussions the President at length reversed his stand that more preparation was needed before a 'summit' could be held and this enabled Macmillan to reveal to the Commons in a Debate on the Address in October that Britain had been strongly pressing for such a conference.

'We would like a summit meeting' (the Prime Minister said) 'at the earliest practicable date, in order to keep up the momentum. The general situation has improved; we do not want it to slip back again. Tension has been lowered; we do not want it to increase again. . . . So we shall continue to work for a date for the 'summit' meeting as early as practicable. I hope that we shall succeed. It will not be for want of trying.'<sup>1</sup>

This was less definite than his statement on 30 September, during the general election campaign, that 'within a few days the actual date of the "summit" talks will be fixed', but it showed the way in which British influence had been used in Washington, now bereft of the trenchant Dulles, who died in May. When the four leaders at length met in Paris in May 1960, however, these efforts came to nothing when Khrushchev refused to begin the talks for reasons not yet fully known. One explanation is that at the Camp David talks with Eisenhower he had been led to think the Western position was about to crumble, whereas it was clear by the time the gathering

<sup>1</sup> 612 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 78 (27 October).

assembled in Paris that in all basic respects that position was unchanged. The Soviet leader seems then to have used the pretext of a flight by an American espionage plane over Russia on 1 May to break up the conference and return home, there to await the coming of a new American administration. Criticism of Khrushchev's 'co-existence' policy by his Chinese allies, who had not taken kindly to Khrushchev's visit to America and Vice-President Nixon's Soviet tour in the summer of 1959, and by unrepentant Stalinists in the Soviet Communist Party may have worked in the same direction.

When President Kennedy assumed office in the following January official Soviet reactions seemed to be cordial owing perhaps to the favourable associations of a Democratic administration created by Franklin Roosevelt during the war. Nevertheless when the two leaders, Kennedy and Khrushchev, met for two days in Vienna at the beginning of June the exchanges seemed grim and fruitless. With the series of Soviet nuclear tests during September and October, culminating in the explosion of a 57-megaton weapon on 30 October, with Soviet and American tanks lined up against each other at the sector boundaries in Berlin, the situation remained tense in the extreme. It gradually became apparent, however, that a new wind was moving in Washington. The idea that East Germany must be accepted as a real, if disagreeable, fact was gaining acceptance and with it, the possibility that nuclear weapons might not, after all, be handed over to West German troops. Both eventualities were hinted at in President Kennedy's first address to the United Nations General Assembly in September. Meanwhile, talks in New York during the Assembly's meetings between Dean Rusk, Kennedy's Secretary of State, and the Soviet Foreign Minister, Gromyko, which were joined by the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Home, seemed to make progress, reflected in Khrushchev's speech at the Twenty-second Party Congress in Moscow on 18 October, in which he said he would not after all make peace with East Germany before the end of the year.

#### *The Cuban missile crisis and the birth of détente*

The Berlin wall, built in August 1961, was officially represented in the West as an outrage, a sullen symbol of man's inhumanity to man. Defectors to West Berlin who were shot by East German guards as they attempted to scale it were pictured as martyrs in the cause of freedom. Every Western statesman who visited Federal Germany felt obliged to give it a ritual inspection and to be photographed peering over it from a platform into the prison of Communist Germany. Nevertheless, the wall served to stabilise and freeze the situation in Germany, and by removing what was evidently a serious threat to

the economic stability of East Germany, it also removed an important factor in East-West tension. Though few people in the West were aware of it at the time, the wall in effect marked the end of the Berlin crisis and had the incidental advantage of removing from the diplomatic agenda, for the time being at least, the problem of German unity which East and West had failed to solve. One experienced Western commentator, though not until some years afterwards, described the man who first had the idea of building the Berlin wall as worthy of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>1</sup>

In so far as the Berlin wall underlined a truth which had been clear almost from the beginning of the Cold War, namely that no advantage could be won by either side by pressure against the *status quo* in Europe unless it wished to run the risk of nuclear conflict which was becoming totally destructive of every human value, the way was now left open for the continuance of the struggle in other theatres. Mr Khrushchev had made it clear in his famous speech at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist party in 1956 that, although the inevitability of armed conflict between Communism and capitalism must be expunged from the Marxist canon in a nuclear age, the struggle between them must continue at the level of class warfare within the capitalist states. That was one concession to members of the party who resented the Khrushchevite revision of Marxist doctrine. A second concession was Khrushchev's determination not to miss any chance of winning diplomatic victories at the expense of the West providing that this could be done at little risk to peace.

One such possibility was to exploit the tension between the United States and Cuba which had developed as a result of the increasingly Communist and anti-American measures of the Cuban leader, Fidel Castro, who had won a civil war against the Right-wing dictator Batista and established a dictatorship of his own in Havana in January 1959. The US administration of J. F. Kennedy, coming into office two years later, could hardly avoid being influenced by overtones of the Monroe Doctrine which since the early 1900s had been interpreted by American Presidents as giving them a right to intervene in Latin American states which did not adhere to democratic principles as Washington understood them; and one of those principles was respect for foreign property for which Dr Castro at least seemed to have little respect. Moreover, in American eyes Cuba in 1961 was an embodiment of that hated cause, Communism, against which the West was involved in a global struggle, and trumpeted its doctrines ninety miles away from American

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Barman, *Diplomatic Correspondent*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1968, p. 245.



shores in the heart of the domain of US influence. Castro's Cuba was a standing invitation to other Latin American states to throw off the US yoke, and struck in the process at American business interests in Cuba which it was a primary duty for Washington to protect. Small wonder then that in the late 1950s and early 1960s Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy alike first tried to turn the whole Organisation of American states (OAS) against Castro, then tried to ruin him by an economic squeeze of Cuba, and finally attempted to finish the Cuban revolution off by encouraging and aiding a group of anti-Castro Cuban exiles to launch a disastrous invasion of the island in April 1961. Small wonder, too, that Khrushchev, reckoning the situation in Europe to be unshakable after his note on Berlin of November 1958 had failed to expel the Western Powers and judging Mr Kennedy to be a weak and untried adversary after the meetings of the two men in Vienna in June 1961, should have agreed to answer Castro's appeal for aid against the United States by sending medium-range missiles to Cuba within easy reach of American shores but at all times under the close control of Soviet technicians. The almost automatic reaction of the United States to the planting of a pistol, possibly nuclear, against its heart constituted the Cuba missile crisis of October 1962 which for a week or more kept the whole world in dread of nuclear war.

The Cuba crisis, eventually liquidated by Soviet agreement to withdraw the missiles following President Kennedy's blockade of Cuba's shores and his consent, as a face-saving gesture to Moscow, to an undertaking to respect in future Cuba's sovereignty, marked a turning point, not only in East-West relations, but in the position of Britain and other European allies of the US in those relations. In the Cuba missile crisis, whatever the responsibilities for creating it on either side, America and Russia appeared to reach the brink of nuclear disaster and, having looked over into it, seemed resolved never to approach it again. Together with the partial nuclear test ban agreement signed in the first instance by Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States on 5 August 1963 and President Kennedy's remarkable speech at the American University in Washington in June 1963, in which he urged his people to reject the idea that the Communist world was a single monolithic structure with which negotiation was impossible, the Cuba crisis and its resolution marked the beginning of a *détente* between East and West which was to last until the time of writing.

The *détente*, though it had profound consequences for the allies of the two super-Powers on either side of the dividing line in Europe, was definitely a bilateral affair between Washington and Moscow. Britain was not only kept informed of Mr Kennedy's handling of

the Cuba crisis but the British Prime Minister, Mr Macmillan, was repeatedly asked his advice by the President during the dreadful week.<sup>1</sup> But there was no question that the ultimate responsibility lay in the White House, and America's other allies in Europe were not much more than informed, though it seems that that was about as far as most of them wished to go. The situation must have been the same, possibly even more so, for Russia's allies in the Warsaw Pact. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that during the fateful October days of the Cuba crisis the rest of the world apart from the two giant Powers could do nothing but sit and wait to hear whether it was to die or be reprieved. The United States and the Soviet Union were locked together in a struggle over whether the United State's predominance in the Western hemisphere was to be challenged by the Soviet Union after the Soviet Union had made it brutally clear that its own predominance in Eastern Europe could not be successfully or safely challenged by the United States. Both Powers had the capacity to wipe each other off the face of the earth. The rest of the world would be incinerated or poisoned to death by their decision to fight whatever it did. This was annihilation without representation with a vengeance.

From the beginning of the United States-Cuba conflict in 1960 British opinion was divided. There was sympathy with an ally with a painful thorn in its side and full recognition that the Communist opponent which was ranged against the US in the Caribbean came from the same ideological stable as the one which was simultaneously trying to push the Western Powers from Berlin. On the other hand, some American spokesmen seemed to be saying that if a Latin American country voted for a Communist regime of its own free will the United States would have a kind of divine right to prevent it doing so. There was also the economic effects of US pressure against Cuba which Britain, endemically cursed by balance of payments problems, could not afford to ignore; whatever Washington thought, the British authorities refused to sacrifice a Cuban demand for Leyland omnibuses on the altar of US ideological rectitude. The actual Cuba missile threat of October 1962, however, was a far graver matter and here there was no doubt that British support was for President Kennedy (though with some doubt as to whether his decision to solve the crisis by interdicting Cuba to Soviet vessels was strictly legal)<sup>2</sup> and this on the ground that peace

<sup>1</sup> See Harold Macmillan, *At the End of the Day*, 1973, Chapter VII, 'On the Brink'.

<sup>2</sup> The Prime Minister, Macmillan, dismissed the legal argument in the following words, '... in new situations—and these are unprecedented situations in a nuclear world—we cannot rely on a pedantic review of precedents', 664 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1066 (25 October 1962).

had come to depend willy-nilly on respect by the two armed camps for each other's geographical sphere of influence. If Britain, as was the case, was the most prepared of all the Western Powers to accept Soviet predominance in Eastern Europe as a fact of life which could only be disturbed at serious risk to peace, it followed that the same must apply to United States predominance in the Western hemisphere. But over and above this was the recognition that in the last resort the United States and the Soviet Union would between them determine the conditions of their relationships, with all their fateful implications for the rest of the world, and that enemies and allies alike had no option but to accept the consequences.

But this raised the dreadful question: if the United States elected to conduct its relations with its major antagonist with little or no reference to its allies, at least on vital issues, what was left to the Atlantic alliance, the sheet-anchor of British policy since 1949? Would the United States, now that she stood within immediate range of Soviet missiles, be as willing as before, or willing at all, to run the risk of war on behalf of her allies' interests? And if the United States now proposed to conduct her relations with the Soviet Union more and more on a bilateral basis, should her allies throughout the world now begin to seek accommodations of their own with the Communist world? To which was added another great question, this time arising from the bitter, intractable division between Russia and China, which was almost certainly a major factor in Moscow's decision to develop her *détente* with the West after the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. While the United States and the Soviet Union drew together as they explored the potentialities of *détente* between them, would the long-standing hostility between America and China be reinforced or would America seek to exploit the Sino-Soviet tension by breaking down the barriers between herself and Peking? In either case what should be the attitude and policy of America's European friends, including Britain?

### *Effects in Europe*

These questions were bequeathed by the Cuban crisis to a British Government now deeply involved, partly as a result of the incipient East-West *détente*, in its first attempt in August 1961 to explore the conditions for joining the European Economic Community (EEC).<sup>1</sup> The Cuban crisis certainly did nothing to weaken the Macmillan Government's (1957-63) resolve to maintain the British independent nuclear deterrent, even though the search for a vehicle

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chapter 11, p. 339.

in which to deliver it resulted in a deal with President Kennedy at Nassau in December 1962 to acquire American Polaris rockets to be fitted into British-built submarines and hence posed the question whether any future British decision to fire these missiles could ever genuinely be taken without American approval. The wisdom of the independent deterrent seemed to Macmillan and his successor as Prime Minister in 1963, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, to be confirmed when Britain sat with the United States and the Soviet Union as sponsors of the partial nuclear test ban treaty concluded in 1963, though this proved to be yet another nail in the coffin of Anglo-French relations. The deterrent, too, even though now evidently dependent on American support, served no doubt as a post-Cuba reminder that Britain was not entirely devoid of capacity to influence events even in a super-Power world. Britain remained, however, a loyal member of the Atlantic alliance while President de Gaulle seemed to draw two different conclusions from the Cuba crisis: first, that the alliance was less needed now that its original main theatre of operations, Europe, seemed guaranteed a lengthy period of peace; and, second, that while the United States needed no ally's help in the Cuba crisis, she might begin to agitate for help now that the theatre of East-West operations had broadened out from Europe to the entire world.

The France of de Gaulle showed more and more hostility to the United States, dating back *inter alia* to the American veto on the Anglo-French armed action in the Suez crisis in 1956, and to Britain as an alleged satellite of the United States. De Gaulle's antagonism to the United States manifested itself in a treble blow to these two allies: his refusal to accept Britain into the EEC in January 1963, his loud and fiercely conducted campaign against US foreign policy all around the globe and especially in South-east Asia, and his decision in March 1966 to take French forces out of the NATO system of integrated military and naval commands and to order NATO establishments, including its headquarters, out of France while, by special agreement with Bonn, keeping French forces in Federal Germany. The British Governments of Douglas-Home (1963-4) and Harold Wilson (1964-70) professed to be shocked by this French stepping out of line. When the *status quo* in Europe was challenged for the first time since the Berlin crisis of 1958-61 as the Warsaw Pact states invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968 to suppress the liberalising Communist regime there headed by Mr Dubček, the British Labour Government, more incensed by this event than any other NATO government, was inclined to attribute it to the disarray in NATO caused by the French withdrawal. For his part, President de Gaulle ascribed the Czech disaster, after his habit,

to the division of Europe imposed by the Yalta conference of February 1945, in which France did not participate.

But should America's NATO allies now go one step further and attempt to construct their own *détente* with the Communist world now that the international climate in Europe was easing and the United States was making every effort on its own side to consolidate its improved relations with the Soviet Union? Britain, as it happened, though a persistent advocate of *détente* in the 1950s, long before any of her NATO allies began to speak the same language, was not in the lead in the European *détente*-building process in the 1960s and early 1970s: that lead was taken first by President de Gaulle, later by Italy, and perhaps most dramatically by Federal Germany. For reasons which are still not entirely clear, Mr Wilson's administration which entered office after the 1964 elections in Britain, though continually pressing for the scaling down of the costs of British forces in Germany, was not active in contracting the kind of economic, technological and cultural contracts across the old 'iron curtain' in Europe which his continental allies were busily cultivating. One reason for this no doubt was that until the decision was taken in January 1968 to end the British 'East of Suez' role by 1971, Mr Wilson and his colleagues seemed to show little interest in Europe as a whole. Indeed, the word 'Europe' to most British people in those days seemed to refer only to NATO Europe or Common Market Europe west of the Elbe; Eastern Europe, true to the traditions of British foreign policy, tended to occupy a blank space in the map of international preoccupations. Besides, again in accordance with the Labour Government's world-wide conception of foreign policy, its interests for most of its career seemed to lie as much in south-east Asia and in relations between the United States and China, as in Europe, perhaps even more so. Moreover, no British government could ever be as passionately anti-American as de Gaulle, and hence no doubt British Ministers felt a certain guilt in dealing with the Communists in isolation from the United States, guilt from which America's other European allies, and certainly France, were free.

President de Gaulle's most notable experiments in self-made *détente* were his visits to France's opposite number in Eastern Europe, Rumania, which played the same odd-man-out role in the Warsaw Pact, to Poland and to the Soviet Union. To some extent, however, these journeys also had the effect of indicating the limits to a solely European *détente* intended to be external to super-Power control. In the first place, de Gaulle found no response in Eastern Europe, even in Rumania, to his call that it should free itself from bondage to the Soviet Union; after talking in this sense, for example,

in the Polish Sejm or Parliament, he was most firmly answered by Gomulka, the Polish Communist leader, who said that Eastern Europe depended upon the Soviet Union to defend itself from the main danger, which came from de Gaulle's ally, Federal Germany. In the second place, de Gaulle, who had scored something of a diplomatic *coup* by the treaty of friendship and alliance which he signed with Federal Germany in January 1963, found that he was accordingly in no position to make concessions to the Soviet bloc at Germany's expense, as for instance by committing himself to accept the permanent division of Germany. Although de Gaulle differed from all his NATO allies in frankly accepting the Oder-Neisse line as the international frontier between East Germany and Poland, which had been declared only provisional at the Potsdam conference in 1945, he could hardly hope to maintain his alliance with Bonn by playing fast and loose with the idea of German unity as he sought to make himself the architect of *détente* in Europe. And this was despite the fact that France, of all countries, seemed to have precious little to gain from endorsing the struggle for German unity.

### *The Ostpolitik*

German unity became in the 1960s a problem for the Germans themselves and they lost no time in doing what they could to move matters on towards that goal. Up to now, as we have seen earlier in this book, the Germans had been content, on the surface at least, to look to the West's diplomatic pressure to achieve, some day and somehow, the reunification of their country. Germany's allies in NATO, whatever their verbal professions, had little to gain from German unity as far as their own national interests were concerned; with the advent of the East-West *détente* as from about 1962, they became more and more reluctant to jeopardise their new and much improved relations with the Communist world by pressing for German unity, which they knew to be abhorrent to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Indeed, the new mood in the relations between the United States and the Soviet Union achieved, on the one hand, by the building of the Berlin wall in 1961 and, on the other, by the resolution of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, seemed to be based, in the minds of both the super-Powers, on a tacit mutual acceptance of the *status quo* in Europe, including the division of Germany as for all practical purposes a permanent state of affairs. The mere fact that Britain in the early 1960s had toyed so much with the idea of a disengagement of forces along the dividing line between the two Germanies was sufficient indication that any East-West under-

standing founded upon the long-term division of Germany would not be unacceptable in London.

Not surprisingly, then, the West Germans themselves, finding NATO increasingly inapposite for achieving their principal national purpose after security, wondered whether anything was possible through their own diplomatic efforts. After all, it should be remembered that when in 1955 Chancellor Konrad Adenauer chose the Atlanticist policy as the future course for Federal Germany he renounced an East European orientation which had traditionally been a national alternative for his country whenever the balance of national advantage lay in that direction. Hence, when one of his successors, Kurt Kiesinger (1964-9), adopted the so-called *Ostpolitik*, that is, the policy of mending Federal Germany's fences with Eastern Europe, it had a ring of familiarity about it in German minds. It embraced more than one objective: to make friends with all the East European states except, in the beginning at least, East Germany and thus to isolate East Germany from other Warsaw Pact states; to improve communications between East and West Europe and hence to make life easier for East and West Germans; to move, however fractionally, towards an easing together of the two Germanies and ultimately towards the great goal of German unity. In September 1969 the Foreign Minister in Dr Kiesinger's coalition government, Willy Brandt, himself became Federal Chancellor in a Social Democratic government and was able to give an even more vigorous thrust to the *Ostpolitik*. In the following two years Chancellor Brandt succeeded in transforming the position of Germany in Europe and the Atlantic alliance. That he was able to do so was as much a testimony to Federal Germany's economic strength at this time as Britain's inactivity in the European theatre was a reflection of her economic weakness.

Beginning courageously but realistically with the determination to accept the Oder-Neisse line as East Germany's and ultimately united Germany's frontier with Poland and to accept, too, the existence of the two Germanies as separate states within the one German nation, Herr Brandt at one stroke cleared away the illusions which had surrounded Federal Germany since it entered the Atlantic alliance in 1955. That he was able to do so in treaties with East Germany, Poland and the Soviet Union itself, within a year of coming into office, was at once a symbol of his own statesmanship and an indication of how far West German opinion had moved since the non-recognition of the Oder-Neisse line and of East Germany as a separate state was a principle sacred to all West German politicians. That he was able to do so without gaining much immediate benefit in return, except the satisfaction of at last facing realities

and the hope at least of freer movement between the two Germanies, is an even greater monument to Brandt's influence over German opinion and his general ability as a statesman. But, once again, the economic strength of Federal Germany, perhaps the greatest economic achievement in the whole Western alliance, played its part.

### *Europe in the age of the super-Powers*

Britain welcomed these changes in Germany's international position without having contributed much towards them itself. Britain's own ineffective initiatives in the international field were striking contrasts. Britain's influence was for all practical purposes negligible in bringing to an end the Nigerian civil war which began in 1967 and ended suddenly with the collapse of the breakaway Ibo state of Biafra in January 1970; on the contrary, the Labour Government was severely criticised by its own supporters for its opposition to self-determination for Biafra and its alleged role in the intensification of the appalling suffering of the Ibo people. Again, when the six-day war broke out between Israel and the Arab states in June 1967, resulting in an overwhelming victory for Israel and the enlargement of its territory at the expense of the Arabs to three or four times its former size, Britain found no support for her call for the internationalisation of the Strait of Tiran which President Nasser closed to Israeli shipping at the beginning of the crisis, thus precipitating a war disastrous for Egypt. Britain was then ostentatiously excluded from a summit meeting between President Johnson and Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin at Glassboro, New Jersey, in August 1967 which tried and failed to agree on a settlement to the Middle East crisis. Britain, it is true, did formally sponsor the resolution (242) at the UN Security Council in November 1967 on which subsequent efforts to resolve the crisis were based, but no one supposed that Britain commanded much influence in persuading one side or the other in the Middle East to work on the basis of that resolution.

Finally and most dramatically, although Mr Wilson's Labour Government exerted itself most energetically to act as a go-between in the tragic Vietnam war in which the United States became involved with an army on the ground of half a million men as from 1964, the outcome was total failure. When at length a ceasefire came into effect in Vietnam in January 1973 as a consequence of five years of negotiations in Paris between the United States, North and South Vietnam, and the National Liberation Front, the political arm of the Vietcong, the Communist guerrilla organisation in South Vietnam, it owed practically nothing to Britain. Indeed, so closely had Britain



been associated with the United States in the moral defence, if not the actual conduct, of the Vietnam war that it was disqualified from playing the role of a mediator which the country had earlier played in the East-West Cold War. Britain's Labour Foreign Ministers, George Brown and Michael Stewart, repeatedly insisted that Britain had a role to play in peacemaking in Vietnam in view of her having been, with Russia, co-chairman of the Geneva conference on south-east Asia which had met in July 1954 and was still theoretically in being; but Russia, a key figure in the eventual ceasefire negotiations concerning Vietnam, had no wish to see China, a participant in the 1954 conference, play any part in a peacekeeping operation in Vietnam and the Geneva conference remained unsummoned.

The Vietnam war illustrated many of the difficulties which Britain encountered in seeking to continue its pre-Cuba role of a leading participant and potential mediator in East-West relations. Both Conservative and Labour governments backed American policy in the Vietnam war despite its ferocious rejection by considerable sections of British opinion, especially in the Labour Party, by foreign opinion and particularly by President de Gaulle, and by increasing numbers of Americans themselves. British Ministers tended to identify Communist actions in Vietnam (if they could be properly so called) as having the same purposes as Communist actions in Korea in the 1950s, namely the unification of the country on Communist lines, though the methods chosen were different, largely as a result of the Communist defeat in Korea. Britain, so Ministers believed, had fought the same battle in the emergency in Malaya before its independence and against the Indonesian attack after the creation of the Malaysian Federation. In fact, apart from such countries as Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand, which actually contributed forces to the American defence of South Vietnam, Britain was perhaps the most loyal supporter of the United States in Vietnam and the United States was duly grateful for this. But there was never any question of British forces being sent to Vietnam, though Washington might from time to time suggest a token contribution, and after the destructive Tet offensive launched by Communist forces in February 1968, the British Labour Government somewhat illogically dissociated itself from the American decision to bomb the North Vietnam cities of Hanoi and Haiphong. President Johnson was no doubt pleased to see Mr Wilson using whatever influence he had with Mr Kosygin when the latter visited London in January 1967 in order that Russia might persuade Hanoi to make some answering gesture if Washington halted its bombing policy. But, by Mr Wilson's own account,

the Americans did not take this friendly intervention very seriously; or perhaps the Washington hawks 'staged a successful takeover'.<sup>1</sup> As far as the Russians were concerned, Mr Wilson's feverish efforts to put the Soviet Union and the United States into contact with each other, when they had every opportunity of doing so without his intervention, could only have served further to depreciate Britain in Soviet eyes.

It seemed for some time as though, when Edward Heath formed his government after the Conservative victory at the polls on 18 June 1970, British policy would be conducted with a more modest notion of what Britain could and could not do in the world and with an eye to more narrowly conceived British interests. Hence, in the concluding stages of the Vietnam war, when contacts between the United States and South Vietnam, on one side, and North Vietnam and the NLF, on the other, were clandestinely conducted in Paris by Dr Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's adviser on national security and later Secretary of State, British Ministers remained discreetly in the background, preparing themselves for matters which now properly concerned them more, namely the harmonising of the British outlook on world affairs with that of Britain's eight partners in the EEC and the even larger problem of revising relations within the NATO system between the United States and the European allies. During the war between India and Pakistan in 1970, which sprang from the secession of East Pakistan, later called Bangladesh, from its western sector, the Government, while satisfied that Bangladesh should be recognised as a separate state, in sharp contrast to Biafra during the Nigerian civil war, occupied itself with the organisation of relief and presumed not to intervene actively as a mediator or otherwise in the ultimate diplomatic settlement.

By the time of the formation of the Heath Government it was clear beyond doubt that the United States and the Soviet Union, with China at some distance in the rear, now interacted on a plane of status and power far beyond those of their European allies, in which Britain, after the long demise of the Anglo-American 'special relationship', was now included. The distinction between the super-Powers and all the rest was most dramatically underlined in 1972 when President Nixon, without the kind of consultation with allies which was the normal form in the Berlin crisis of 1958-61, first visited China in March, thus seeming to bring to a close the long discord between Washington and Peking, and then the Soviet Union in June. These two momentous encounters, supplemented by a visit by Mr Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet Communist party

<sup>1</sup> Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-1970*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971, pp. 356-9.

leader, to the United States in June 1973, seemed to inspire in the three participating Powers, for all the different stresses and strains between them, the feeling that for better or worse they held in their hands the future of the world. On the occasion of Mr Nixon's Soviet visit the first instalment of the strategic arms talks between America and Russia, known as SALT I, was brought to a conclusion with the signing of an agreement to limit the growth of offensive nuclear arms and defensive anti-ballistic missile systems between them. Though in the eyes of most expert observers this in itself did little to decelerate the arms race between them, the event surely meant that unless Western Europe could somehow develop a combined nuclear force of its own (and of this there was little sign) the two super-Powers were now manipulating weapon systems which left other countries far in the rear. Perhaps it would not be long before China was in the same league.

Whether the Soviet-American *détente* would continue to flourish, whether the United States could, as it were, hold the balance between Russia and China, whether the hostility between Russia and China would erupt into a gigantic war in which the role of the United States would be quite impossible to predict: these were questions which the European allies on both sides of the old 'iron curtain' could speculate about but which they could not much influence one way or the other. The European allies of the United States must wonder how far the Atlantic alliance of 1949 was relevant to the new conditions of East-West *détente* and the consolidation of the *status quo* in Europe, and to what extent the new economic relations between America and Western Europe must be reflected in some recognition of greater political equality between the transatlantic super-Power and the rest. They must wonder, too, whether the United States could continue to maintain for much longer its original interest in Europe now that a Soviet-American understanding about the European *status quo* had been reached. Soon after President Nixon's historic visits to China and the Soviet Union in 1972 the political climate in the United States became thick with rumours that Congress would before long compel the White House to cut by a third, even a half, the size of the US military contingent in Europe, said to number 300,000 men. America's rising economic problems and the increasing sense of security in Europe seemed to make that inevitable. But above and beyond this there was the possibility that the United States, so far from continuing to regard the security of her European allies as equivalent to her own, would cease to insist upon the rights of her allies in its day-to-day dealings with Moscow. The old danger which Britain had sought to avert since the onset of the Cold War, namely collision between the two

super-Powers, might thus be replaced by another, that is, collusion between the Powers which could be harmful in its own way to the interests of the European allies.

The logical answer to these adverse possibilities was something in the nature of a dialogue between the United States and the European allies for the purpose of adjusting their relations to the new international realities. Various circumstances made this a difficult if not impossible task, at least for the present. First, at a time when the American administration should have been helping to give body to the new relations of 'partnership' with Western Europe which were sharply outlined in its statements on American foreign policy in the 1970s which were issued in February 1970, 1971 and 1972, President Nixon was virtually immobilised by the Watergate scandal affecting his leading assistants, then himself, and foreign policy in its longer perspectives had to mark time. Secondly, though this time of waiting for the Watergate storm to pass might have been used by the nine European Community states to frame a common policy *vis-à-vis* the United States, in reality precious little was done. The nine EEC states remained with virtually nine foreign policies: their attempts, not so much to work out a common foreign policy, but to co-ordinate and smoothe away the conflicting edges of their separate policies, produced in 1973 little more than platitudes.

In theory Britain could not have been better placed to urge the nine separate policies to become, as far as possible, one. Britain had an immemorial record as mediator and conciliator. The essential British philosophy of foreign policy presupposed that between fixed points patient diplomacy could invariably disclose a mean position. Britain, too, was the traditional friend of the United States and, though the old days of the 'special relationship' were long past, it was still admired, perhaps most of all the European nine, in the United States. And Britain, having notably helped to create the East-West *détente*, had a distinct role to play in helping to make it acceptable for small as well as for the giant states. But the opportunity was not taken. Perhaps it could not be. Britain was still suspected in western Europe of wanting to 'give a lead' from a basis of painful economic weakness. The British people, too, in the early 1970s were still floundering in the old economic problems, falling behind other neighbour states, still wondering whether Europe was after all the right road. Prime Minister Heath took no holiday in the summer of 1973 and even so all his time was spent, apart from Northern Ireland, on economic problems while the insubstantial vision of a common European foreign policy drifted by.

## Chapter 9

# DEFENCE AND DISARMAMENT

It is now widely accepted as a platitude that defence policy (to use the almost universal euphemism of today) should be subordinate to foreign policy. A government is supposed to determine what it thinks its relations with other governments should be in the light of national interests and existing realities, and then use its armed forces, along with other instruments of foreign policy, to bring about those relations in so far as it can. As the Labour Government's statement on the defence estimates in 1966 put it, 'defence must be the servant of foreign policy, not its master'.<sup>1</sup> In practice, however, this rule was in Britain's case subject to certain qualifications in the post-1945 world. One factor was the influence of the Munich agreement of 1938, which hung over the post-war international situation like a spectre. The two inferences which democratic statesmen were supposed to draw, and most of them did draw, from Munich and its aftermath were, first, that it is better to over-estimate than to under-estimate the military strength of an adversary state as compared with one's own, and, second, that whatever the other calls on the national economy, the armed forces must at all costs occupy a prime place in the annual budget. Thus it was that in the two periods of office of the Labour Party in the period after the war, that is, in 1945-51 and 1964-70 no reproach could be levelled against Ministers that they were either 'soft' on Communism or that they neglected national defence. They might have had a hard fight against their Left wing in their efforts to avoid these reproaches, but avoid them they did.

Again, however much British Ministers after 1945 strove to bend defence requirements to foreign policy needs and the various economic limitations of the times, the vastly increased costs of modern weapons swelled defence budgets until cuts were unavoidable. In the middle and late 1960s it hardly seems that foreign policy was the master of defence policy; defence policy, or the soaring price of provision for defence, coupled with the apparently incurable tendency of the economy towards a 'stop-and-go' pattern, determined the shape of foreign policy. To quote again from the Defence Review of 1966, 'developments in weapons technology, by changing the nature of military strategy and tactics, constantly influence

<sup>1</sup> Cmnd. 2901 (Part I, The Defence Review), 1966.

those options which are open to a government in foreign policy'. But that was a serious understatement. Although the most dramatic advance in weapons technology since 1939 was the invention of nuclear devices and the British government decided as soon as the war ended to embark upon its own nuclear programme,<sup>1</sup> this never absorbed more than about 10 per cent of the defence budget (which in itself in the 1960s equalled about 7 per cent of the Gross National Product). But in every department of military and naval armaments, the technical complications and cost of ever new instruments mounted so steeply as virtually to put all other states than the two super-Powers out of the running in the world arms race. To which must be added the steadily increasing cost of maintaining and accommodating servicemen and their families, especially after National Service was finally abolished in 1957 and the Forces had to compete with industry for men in a society of rising affluence.

Finally, the swift advance of weapons technology imposed upon the Armed Services the need for a certain amount of long-range planning. A modern fighter aircraft, aircraft carrier and even a modest gun require years of development between the drawing board and the final operational stage; a warship takes about five years to design, develop and produce and can be reckoned to have a life of twenty years, an aircraft which will be in service for ten years takes about the same length of time from design to use. The likely shape of things to come had therefore to be foreshadowed in the defence field from ten to twenty years ahead. This is why, when the Labour Government introduced its massive rearmament programme in 1950, following the outbreak of the Korean war, it did so in the form of a plan for four years, envisaging the expenditure of £4,700 million on defence over the entire period. It is also why Mr Macmillan's Conservative Government in 1958 adopted a scheme for five-year planning in the defence field. But this is bound to mean that Service Departments will look to the Foreign Office as well as the Treasury for at least five-year projections and, if and when these fail to appear, will set up their own sections for looking ahead into future international developments. In 1958 Prime Minister Macmillan set up a Future Policy Committee representing the main departments of state to consider Britain's international role in the 1970s. But the committee was divided between very general recommendations for future policy.

<sup>1</sup> 'By 1960' [one commentator writes] 'the main lines of Britain's overseas defence policy had been charted and they were more

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter 6, pp. 175-79.

firmly fixed by the various emergencies east of Suez in the following four years. In 1962 a major review by the *Chiefs of Staff* became the government's strategic text, and the report of the Future Policy Committee receded further into the background' (my italics).

The report, according to the same writer, 'never became in any sense a blueprint for future policy'.<sup>1</sup>

To this uncertain relationship between foreign and defence policy had to be fitted Britain's constant preoccupation with disarmament or, to give it its more fashionable post-war name, arms control, in the years since 1945. In the years 1919 to 1939 the disarmament movement (the social implications of that word are highly significant) had been propelled by two assumptions, one that arms races are the cause of wars—this was rather weakened by the experience of the disarmed democracies at the hands of the dictators in the 1930s—and the other that multilateral disarmament was economically desirable since it would release resources for more socially acceptable ends. After 1945, though disarmament was given a much less prominent place in the UN Charter than in the Covenant of the old League of Nations, the atomic bomb seemed to give a new urgency to the search for a disarmed world and certainly the crushing burden of armaments intensified for all governments the case for arms control negotiations. In Britain there was the additional consideration that if the most heavily armed states in the post-war world could be cut down to size by successful disarmament negotiations, this might help reduce the increasing political gap between the super-Powers and the lesser states, which now included Britain.

But in the years following 1945 a distinct link was recognised between defence and disarmament policy, possibly for the first time. Before the Second World War defence and disarmament tended to be conceived as opposites; the more you had of one the less you had of the other. After 1945, however, Britain, looking more and more like a country frantically attempting to spread defence resources over too wide a canvas, was bound to regard disarmament negotiations as a means of slowing down an arms race which had become too fast for her. Ironically, the hopes of the more percipient British army officers came to be that disarmament talks, somehow, some day, might make their impossibly difficult tasks more manageable. Defence and disarmament for the first time had to be treated as organically linked together.

<sup>1</sup> Phillip Darby, *Britain's Defence Policy East of Suez, 1945-1968*, London, OUP, 1973, pp. 143-5.

*The defence outlook in the first years of peace*

The main tasks of British Armed Services when the first post-war Labour Government entered office in August 1945 were the transition from war to peace and problems of resettlement and pacification as the world as a whole readjusted to peacetime life. As to the former, British forces were at their peak strength of just over five million in 1945, with another four million men and women engaged in supplying them with services of various kinds. The Government's hope was that this massive strength would be reduced by over a half in twelve months and would be down to one million in uniform by the end of 1946, representing a demobilisation of 75 per cent from June 1945.<sup>1</sup> As it happened, this expectation was not fulfilled, the numbers in the Armed Services being still 1,427,000 in December 1946; numbers fell to below the million mark only in March 1948, the Government claiming that the continuance of National Service was still desirable. Two years later total manpower figures for the combined Services fell to 750,000, but then came the Korean war and with it the process of transition to peace was put into sharp reverse. Under a new defence programme announced by Prime Minister Attlee in the House of Commons on 29 January 1951 total Service manpower was restored to 800,000, as compared with 682,000 in the defence estimates of the previous year, and a call-up of selected reservists was introduced.<sup>2</sup> The Western Powers anticipated an immediate Communist offensive in Europe following the supposedly diversive move in Korea.

In this five-year period from 1945 until 1951 British forces were charged with widespread responsibilities stemming from the generally disturbed political state of the world, the sudden tension between the Communist and non-Communist countries and the disorders accompanying the settling down of various countries after the vast upheaval of the Second World War. The 1946 White Paper on defence identified seven major tasks confronting British forces in different parts of the world: the execution of the surrender of Germany and Japan and the occupation of the British zone in the former state; the occupation of the British zone in Austria; the maintenance of law and order in Venezia Giulia which had been taken from Italy and the future status of which was still undetermined; help to Greece in its post-war civil disorders; the maintenance of order in Palestine in the face of Zionist acts of terrorism; the liquidation of the Japanese occupation of parts of south-east Asia; the maintenance of internal order and settled conditions in

<sup>1</sup> Statement relating to Defence, Cmd. 6743 of 1946.

<sup>2</sup> 483 H.C. Deb. 5s, Cols 579-87.



the still vast British Empire and the safeguarding of communications between its widely scattered areas and the upkeep of the different British bases abroad.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, forces would have to be kept available in the event of the special security agreements envisaged in Article 43 of the UN Charter coming into force. It was hardly for a Labour Government to fail to contribute to what seemed at that time to be the first international armed force in history.

By 1950 some of these world-wide military commitments had disappeared or dwindled. Forces had been withdrawn from Greece and Palestine and troops had left the Indian sub-continent and Burma with the advent there of national independence. It is a striking fact, however, that with the independence of these great states in southern Asia, it seems that the opportunity was not taken to reconsider there and then the entire British defence position east of Suez. The British military situation in the Persian Gulf had developed directly under the aegis of the old British Government of India; the British position in Malaya and Singapore was likewise to a large extent an offshoot of the defence of India. Now, with the Indian sub-continent having suddenly become a power vacuum from the British point of view, British commitments in the Gulf and south-east Asia needed urgently to be reviewed, and as though from London and no longer from India. But this appears not to have been done. India, the great nodal point of all British military thinking for the areas east of Suez, dropped out of the British defence picture and the implications of its doing so tended to go unregarded.

But if some of the demands on British forces had diminished as a result of the beginning of decolonisation, others had developed to take their place. In Malaya, for example, an emergency had arisen owing to the initiation of a Communist campaign to subvert law and order; and forces in Hong Kong required heavy reinforcement in view of the unsettled political conditions there. Moreover, towards the end of the 1940s the new collective defence arrangements into which Britain had entered were beginning to have their effect; the notion of interdependence, or the inability of even the most considerable state in the post-1945 period to rely solely upon itself for defence, was beginning to assume that dominance in British defence thinking which it never afterwards lost. In the 1949 statement on defence the Government referred for the first time to the collective defence systems in which British planning was now being assimilated. The Brussels defence organisation was set up after the Brussels treaty was signed in March 1948 and with Lord Montgomery as its chief. There followed the creation of the North Atlantic treaty in April 1949. The Government stated its central principle, which neither

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 6743.

it nor its Conservative successor ever afterwards relinquished, namely that 'the defence of Western Europe can only be treated realistically if considered in due relationship to the wider problems of the defence of the North Atlantic area'.<sup>1</sup> The consequences of these geographically dispersed defence commitments made themselves felt in that stretching of forces to a point where their local efficiency markedly fell which characterised British defence for the next twenty years. 'These developments', the White Paper went on, 'have resulted not only in the high proportion of the Armed Forces being located overseas but also their being to an important extent dispersed in comparatively small groups over wide areas.'<sup>2</sup>

In the midst of this situation fell the crisis of the Korean war and the decision of the Labour Government to scrap all its previous plans and initiate a totally new defence programme. 'The Government believe', so the explanation ran, 'that peace cannot be ensured unless the defences of the free world are made sufficiently strong to deter aggression. It is for this purpose and for this purpose alone that the Government now think it right to take still further measures to increase the state of preparedness of the Armed Forces.'<sup>3</sup> Apart from the expansion of manpower for the Services resulting from the proposed selective call-up of qualified men, production for the forces was to be more than doubled and by 1953-4 quadrupled. Civil defence planning was to be stepped up and controls would be imposed so as to cut consumer demand and hence pressure reduced on the balance of overseas account.

This new programme rocked the Labour Party, resulting in the resignation from the Government of three Ministers, including Aneurin Bevan, at that time Minister of Labour, on the ground that the new programme was unnecessary, that its scale was more than the country could afford and that it made intolerable inroads into the social services which were the Labour Government's most notable contribution since its inauguration to British life. The critics' arguments proved to be justified in that the heavy ensuing strain on the balance of payments soon made itself felt despite economic assistance from the United States in the form of 'counterpart funds', that is, dollars made available by the US government's ordering of military equipment from Britain for use by American forces; in the year ending 30 June 1952 \$300 million came Britain's way from this source, though this represented less than one fifth of the country's total outlay on defence in 1952-3. In particular the rearmament drive was a severe blow to Britain's

<sup>1</sup> Statement on Defence, 1949, Cmd. 7631.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Cmd. 8146 of 1959.

export industries, first by creating a shortage of skilled labour, for which Service demand had much increased, and secondly by absorbing into rearmament the products of the metal-using industries; 80 per cent of defence equipment consisted of output from the metal-using industries which in themselves at that time were responsible for two fifths of Britain's exports.<sup>1</sup> In the event the great rearmament drive of the Attlee Government was slackening in its momentum in August 1951 owing to production difficulties.

### *The pressure slackens*

The critics of rearmament also seemed to be correct in that the international crisis which caused the arms drive, namely the Korean war, subsided and armistice negotiations began at Panmunjom in 1952 without world peace being affected; the feared Communist attack in Europe did not occur, whether or not on account of Western rearmament. The Soviet leader, Stalin, himself died in March 1953 and the way seemed to be open for a period of moderate 'thaw' in relations with the Communist world, at least as far as Europe was concerned. In May 1953 Winston Churchill, now Prime Minister again in a Conservative Government, was issuing—to the great consternation of Washington—his famous appeal for 'summit' talks with the new Soviet leaders in order to take swift advantage of the hiatus in Soviet government. It may, of course, have been that the Western Powers' new rearmament drive, including the momentous decision to re-arm the newly formed Federal German Republic, had itself helped create a more conciliatory mood in the mind of Stalin before his death and in that of his successors. Nevertheless, in the West the suspicion developed, and was eventually to culminate in the *détente* of the 1960s, that the presumed threat of Soviet aggression in Europe had always been exaggerated.

The Conservative Government's statement on defence issued in February 1953, that is, before Stalin's death, began with the remark that international tension had indeed slackened during the previous year, thanks largely, it was said, to the growing strength of the Western Powers. By this time the integrated command structure of the NATO alliance was being worked out, a Supreme Commander for the European theatre had been appointed and his headquarters just outside Paris created; Britain was making its contribution to the developing infra-structure of the alliance, its roads, rail communications, airfields, signalling systems and so on. Accordingly, attempts were made to reduce the defence burden on Britain as far as possible; 'when the present Government took office', the defence statement

<sup>1</sup> See statement on Defence, 1952, Cmd. 8475.

said, 'the (rearmament) plan was to be completed by March 1954 but the momentum reached in the third state of the plan would have imposed too great a burden on the balance of payments . . . the Government decided that rearmament would have to be spread over a longer period'. But this was coupled with two warnings: one was that the rise in defence expenditure from £1,513.5 million in 1952-3 to £1,636.76 million in 1953-4 was due to rising costs, and the other was that expenditure on research and development was on the increase; in 1953-4 over £100 million would be spent on research and development, representing an increase of about 40 per cent over the figure for 1951-2.<sup>1</sup> This was an early anticipation of the vast rise in the costs of defence owing to qualitative changes in weapons in the years which followed.

The relaxation of East-West tensions in 1953 still left the Soviet Union with a massive superiority in conventional forces in Europe. On these the Western Powers, after the Soviet rejection of the American Baruch proposals for the internationalisation of atomic energy, tended to concentrate in their disarmament proposals.<sup>2</sup> The struggle was fought out in the Commission for Conventional Armaments created by the UN Security Council in February 1947, which took the same road towards deadlock as the UN Atomic Energy Commission which had been the scene of the demise of the Baruch plan. The main issues were Russia's refusal to agree to international verification of the levels for conventional forces from which agreed reductions were to take effect and the problem of ensuring by inspection that the agreed reductions were carried out. At the end of 1951 the Western Powers had proposed to simplify the machinery of disarmament negotiations by substituting for the two UN Commissions, the Atomic Energy Commission and the Commission for Conventional Armaments, a single UN Disarmament Commission, consisting of all eleven members of the Security Council and Canada. By this time both East and West had made a start on filling up their deficiencies in atomic and conventional arms respectively, Russia by exploding her first atomic device in September 1949 and her first thermonuclear weapon in August 1953 while the West's position in conventional arms had improved as a consequence of the arms drive initiated as a response to the Korean war.

The new Disarmament Commission, however, languished after its creation in 1952 and met only once in 1953. Britain, still anxious to slow down the rearmament drive in view of its rising economic cost, proposed the calling of a sub-committee of the Commission

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 8768 of 1953.

<sup>2</sup> For the Baruch plan see US Department of State, *The International Control of Atomic Energy*, 1946, pp. 118-20.

to consist only of the four major Powers (excluding Communist China) and Canada, and this more intimate group met for the first time at Lancaster House, London, on 23 April 1954. It received a new Anglo-French plan for comprehensive disarmament by stages on 11 June. The essence of the plan was that, coasistent with Western fears of Soviet preponderance in conventional forces, a beginning should be made with the reduction of conventional forces to agreed levels first, the abolition of atomic weapons coming at a later stage. In effect, 50 per cent of the reductions needed to bring the armed forces of the United States, the Soviet Union and China down to one and a half million men each, with appropriate ceilings for lesser Powers, would have to be achieved and confirmed by inspection before a beginning was made with the 'cut off' in nuclear weapons production and the elimination of nuclear stockpiles. Before this second stage was reached the parties had to be satisfied that the control organ was 'positioned' and effectively operating.<sup>1</sup>

The initial Soviet reaction to the Anglo-French plan was distinctly negative, involving a reversion to Moscow's previous position when it demanded the immediate unconditional renunciation of nuclear weapons as a preliminary to their abolition, an all-round one-third cut in conventional forces of the five permanent members of the Security Council and the 'simultaneous' establishment of controls. But then a softening of Soviet attitudes resulting from the apparent 'thaw' following Stalin's death seemed to be taking effect. On 30 September 1954, at the ninth session of the UN General Assembly, Andrei Vyshinsky, the Soviet Foreign Minister, intimated that his country was willing to take the Anglo-French plan at least as a basis for discussion. When talks were resumed in the five-Power disarmament sub-committee in London in February 1955 the Soviet delegation were still vague about controls; but they indicated a significant *volte face* in being willing to accept the Anglo-French proposal for a 50 per cent reduction in conventional arms, armed forces and budget appropriations as from 1953 levels in the first stage, with the ban on the manufacture and possession of nuclear weapons to operate in the second stage, when the remaining 50 per cent of the agreed reductions in conventional forces would come into effect. Later, on 10 May, to the accompaniment of other indications of a *détente*, such as the Soviet agreement to a state treaty with Austria after ten years' delay, new Soviet proposals were tabled which amounted almost to an acceptance of the Anglo-French plan; they included force levels of one and a half million men for America, Russia and China and 650,000 each for Britain and France, nuclear weapons being

<sup>1</sup> Report on the Proceedings of the Sub-Committee, 1954, Cmd. 9204, Annex 9, pp. 31-2; Cmd. 9205, pp. 225 ff.

prohibited only when 75 per cent of the agreed conventional force reductions had taken place. The provision for supervision in the Soviet plan, though still inadequate in Western eyes, marked a distinct move forward; observers would be stationed at large ports, railway junctions, highways and airfields as safeguards against surprise attack and, in the second stage of the plan, a single control organ with expanding powers would be created to operate throughout this disarmament programme and with unimpeded access to all 'objects of control', which were not, however, clearly defined until a year later.<sup>1</sup>

### *The shadow of the bomb*

Britain grasped the Soviet change of front with both hands, Anthony Nutting, the British representative on the sub-committee, describing it as an 'important step forward . . . an encouragement to the Western policy of patient and resolute negotiations'.<sup>2</sup> Even if the Soviet Union was doing no more than trying to create a friendlier atmosphere for the coming four-Power 'summit' meeting in Geneva in July, the new development was welcome after years of sterile confrontation. But by this time strategic thinking on both sides was changing, each side moving towards the position long occupied by the other. The West had stepped up its conventional strength, now disposing, it was officially claimed, of about 100 divisions as compared with the 300 Soviet divisions, according to the British Minister of Defence.<sup>3</sup> On 14 May 1956, on the other hand, the Soviet Union, now beginning to move up towards the West in nuclear technology, announced reductions in the armed forces of 1,300,000 men by 1 May 1957, equivalent to the standing down of sixty-three divisions.

But perhaps the real motivation behind the Soviet change of front on arms control in May 1955 was the growing realisation on both sides of the East-West fence that the verification and control of a nuclear weapons agreement would have to be 100 per cent perfect if either side were to feel safe enough to abandon this most terrible weapon both of attack and defence. Denis Healey, a leading Opposition spokesman and Labour Minister of Defence in 1964-70, was able to say in the Commons on 30 July 1954 without contradiction by Ministers that: 'It is almost impossible to conceive of any effective international control organ which could be quite certain

<sup>1</sup> UN Document DC/71, Annex 15, pp. 17-25.

<sup>2</sup> 542 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 270-2 (13 June 1955).

<sup>3</sup> 552 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 199 (written answers, 17 May 1956).

that none of the parties to the agreement had salted away some of their nuclear fuel and atomic bombs before the control organ had been introduced.<sup>1</sup> Possibly it was because the Soviet Union had already reached the same conclusion that it virtually adopted the Anglo-French plan on 10 May 1955. If the West then withdrew the plan, having realised Mr Healey's point, moral opprobrium would then fall on them; if they still went forward with the plan, the Soviet Union might be able to gain a crushing nuclear advantage. The United States, however, the unquestioned atomic spokesman for the West, was not so easily deceived; hence by September the American authorities had reserved for the moment all their previous disarmament positions, including their support for the Anglo-French plan; thereafter they concentrated for the time being on President Eisenhower's 'Open Skies' plan for admitting aircraft from each side to the airspace, or agreed zones of it, of the other. This proposal, intended as a possible solution for the almost insoluble inspection problem, was laid before the Geneva Heads of Government meeting by President Eisenhower himself in July 1955.

Nevertheless, it had to be recognised in the mid-1950s that nuclear weapons had come to stay and that a state which wished to remain in the nuclear arms race, as the British at that time undoubtedly did, would have to pay increasing attention to the tireless refinement of nuclear weapons and of the means of their delivery. According to the Conservative Government's Defence White Paper of February 1954, 'if by some miscalculation in Communist policy or by deliberate design a global war were to be forced upon us, it must be assumed that atomic weapons would be used by both sides'.<sup>2</sup> This meant for practical defence policy that, in the first place, the West's nuclear shield and, as a part of it, the independent British nuclear force must be kept permanently in a state of instant readiness; hence the White Paper gave high priority to building up within the Royal Air Force a fleet of bombers capable of using the atomic weapon to the fullest effect. Secondly, on the rather odd assumption that the first nuclear exchange would not produce a decisive result for either side, the Government anticipated a period of what it called 'broken-backed' warfare and hence 'our reserve forces must be capable of rapid mobilisation behind the shield which our active' (that is, presumably, nuclear-armed) 'forces provide and be ready to perform their combat tasks at the earliest possible moment'. But this implied that the nuclear 'shield' would need to be highly effective in order to leave as favourable as possible a position for the follow-up by conventional forces. Hence the

<sup>1</sup> 531 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 883.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 9075 of 1954.

Government anticipated a shift in the defence effort from conventional to strategic nuclear arms. In the Government's own words:

'The Government have concluded that a gradual change should be brought about in the direction and balance of our defence effort. Still greater emphasis will have to be placed on the RAF because of the need to build up a strategic bomber force and because of the importance of guided missiles in air defence . . . Defence research and development will continue to have high priority and expenditure on it will increase . . . Expenditure on the Army will tend to decline . . . it will be our aim gradually to reduce the size of the Army and to reconstitute the strategic reserve at home.<sup>1</sup>

The conception of the possible development of hostilities which lay behind these decisions was not unlike that of supreme Allied commanders on the Western Front in the First World War: first would come the initial shock as the great armies met; then, after a suitable period for an opening in the enemy's line to be found, the cavalry (or, in the language of 1954, the reserve) would break through and bring about a victorious conclusion. How a conventional battle can be fought at all in territory devastated by nuclear exchanges does not appear to have been considered. But a more immediate question was whether an adequate British reserve of conventional forces could be maintained at home while forces were required for keeping law and order in the still considerable British Empire: in fact, the 1954 Defence White Paper envisaged an actual increase in British military commitments in the colonies, as exemplified by the current emergency situations in Kenya and British Guiana. Above all, the tension between the needs of the British domestic economy and the increasingly costly provision for defence continued to foreshadow the shape of things to come. 'The task of expanding our exports still further', the 1954 White Paper was frank enough to concede, 'will not be eased by the continuing need to devote to defence production a substantial part of the output of our engineering industry.'<sup>2</sup>

This tension was further increased by two developments in the foreign policy field in 1954 which served further to magnify the global commitments British defence efforts were supposed to cover. The first was the formation of the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) at a conference in Manila, the Philippines, in September 1954.<sup>3</sup> Although the obligations on member states of SEATO (Austra-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> See above, Chapter 6, p. 201.



lia, Britain, France, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, the United States) were by no means as exacting as those, for instance, of NATO, and Britain, like other member states, was obliged to make no immediate increase in its armed forces available in the area of the treaty, there was no avoiding the implication that it might one day be called upon to contribute substantially to local defence and some provision had to be made for this in defence planning. In the second place, the Government undertook in October 1954, as a consequence of the failure of the EDC treaty and Germany's subsequent entry into the WEU, to keep four army divisions and the 2nd Tactical Air Force on the continent except when 'an acute overseas emergency' dictated otherwise.<sup>1</sup> This momentous decision not only placed a strain which later became almost unbearable on the distribution of British forces, but much intensified the foreign exchange difficulties under which Britain during all these years was labouring. Moreover, in the following year, 1955, Britain adhered to the defensive alliance between Turkey and Iraq to form the Bagdad pact, which became the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) when Iraq dropped out as a result of a revolution in that country in July 1958 which destroyed its pro-Western government. Again, the immediate burden laid on Britain by the Bagdad pact was insignificant. But here there was, once more, an increase in the number of countries which Britain, however indirectly, was pledged to defend if attacked or which Britain's previous obligations to defend were strengthened. The country's three original areas of defence policy—the home islands, the colonial empire and overseas dependencies and protectorates, and allies linked to Britain by treaty obligations—seemed to be expanding at a time when all the economic indices were pointing to the need for movement in precisely the opposite direction.

But in 1954 the event which began to dominate defence thinking was in reality the hydrogen bomb and the question of defence, not so much against supersonic low-flying bombing aircraft armed with such bombs and now coming into the picture as delivery vehicles, but against missiles flying at very much higher speeds. One effect of this, as a pointer to the direction in which the principal defence efforts would lie in the future, was the British Government's decision in 1955 to abolish the Anti-Aircraft Command.<sup>2</sup> The United States had exploded a hydrogen bomb at Eniwetok Atoll in November 1952 but a far greater impact was made on world opinion by the testing of an H-bomb in the Marshall Islands in March 1954, especially as a Japanese fishing vessel, the ill-named *Fortunate Dragon*,

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter 5, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Statement on Defence, 1955, Cmd. 9391.

was dusted with nuclear fall-out, with fatal consequences for some of its crew. The effect was to cause all defence planning in the highly armed countries to be overshadowed by the dominating question of nuclear weapons. On the one hand, the sheer anticipated horrors of nuclear war were at once brought to the immediate consciousness of all governments; on the other hand, it was arguable that the very hideousness of nuclear conflict would bring home to all the great Powers their common interest in sheer survival. It is no accident that the thermonuclear explosions in the Pacific in 1954 were followed by attempts to secure four-Power agreements at the 'summit' in Geneva in the summer of 1955. As it happened, these attempts were without immediate result, the main positions on both sides on the immediate questions of Germany remaining much the same. Nevertheless, the so-called 'Geneva spirit' engendered by the 'summit' meetings of 1955 seemed to symbolise the faint beginnings of an agreement by East and West to try to live with their differences rather than to develop them to the point of nuclear self-destruction.

For Britain the advent of hydrogen weapons did not affect its government's determination to retain its putative independent nuclear capability. The Government was quite unequivocal in its statement that 'the United Kingdom has the ability to produce such weapons. After carefully considering all the implications of this step (they) have thought it their duty to proceed with their development and production'.<sup>1</sup> The position of the British independent deterrent was if anything even more entrenched than before and the same justification was urged for it officially as inspired the original decision by the Attlee Government in 1945 to provide Britain with its own atomic capability, namely that a day might come when the United States would revert to isolationism. Only in the previous year, 1953, the US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, had warned America's allies in Europe that American policy might undergo an 'agonising reappraisal' if they departed too far from American wishes. This justification of the British independent nuclear deterrent was endorsed at least by the front bench of the Labour Opposition in Parliament. Hugh Gaitskell, the leader of the Parliamentary Labour party, was to say two years later that 'our party decided to support the manufacture of the hydrogen bomb here and we decided that, quite frankly, because we did not think it right that this country should be so dependent . . . on the USA.'<sup>2</sup> Two years later still Mr Gaitskell was to be challenged and defeated by the annual conference of the Labour party on the issue of his support for the British

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 9391.

<sup>2</sup> 568 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 71 (1 April 1957).

independent deterrent, but this only caused him to repeat his determination to 'fight and fight and fight again' for the deterrent until, in the following year, the party conference reversed its vote and closed the gap on this issue between the party rank and file and the national executive.

But, independently of whether it was a wise choice for Britain to retain and develop its own nuclear deterrent in the event of any future backsliding by the United States, the question remained—though it was not often asked—whether the United States would ever permit Britain to pursue a policy of nuclear threats against another country with which America had no quarrel or intention to fight. Only twenty months after the 1955 White Paper on Defence, when Britain was joined with France in what was known euphemistically as a 'police action' against Egypt when the latter nationalised the Suez Canal company, the United States was virtually able to bring hostilities to an end simply by withdrawing support for the pound. Would the United States remain indifferent if in another great crisis of world affairs Britain threatened to use its nuclear power against another state when America had no desire to see peace disturbed? It is almost inconceivable that it would and, as we shall see, the more Britain came to depend on the United States for the delivery vehicles for conveying British nuclear weapons to an enemy, the less likely did it seem. British Ministers therefore tended to downplay the argument that the deterrent gave them wider scope for independent military action and increasingly described the deterrent as a 'contribution' to the Western, meaning the American, deterrent.

But there was also the question of how thermonuclear weapons affected the general strategic concept inspiring British defence policy. The 1955 Defence White Paper assumed that Britain's stock of nuclear weapons must be built up and that the 'most up-to-date means of delivery' must be developed. The focus of attention, the Government said, would rest on the RAF since the first priority was to be given to the deterrent, all other defence considerations being subordinated to it; in 1955 the first squadron of V-bombers would be introduced, at the very time when means of detection and defence against the bomber were rendering it obsolete. But then came a change in the Government's understanding as to how hostilities might develop in Europe. Instead of armies fighting a 'broken-backed' war after the initial exchanges had subsided, as contemplated in the previous year's White Paper, it was now assumed that the Western Powers required sufficient troops on the ground 'to hold the enemy well to the east in Europe in the vital stages of a war'. This, the defence statement went on, 'would give time for the effects

of our strategic air offensive (that is, nuclear retaliation) 'to be felt'.

How this could be squared with the assumption that Russia and its East European allies disposed of 400 divisions on the ground, and what Russia was supposed to be doing with her own nuclear forces—like the United States, Russia had exploded its first hydrogen bomb in 1952—while Britain, and presumably the United States, brought their nuclear retaliatory power into action were questions evidently not asked and certainly not answered. Moreover, the heavy pressure on Britain's conventional forces continued. By this time, that is, 1955, Britain had disengaged herself from military responsibilities in Trieste, the Korean war had ended and the Suez base had been handed back to Egypt; nevertheless, the Army's other world-wide commitments remained while the struggle to organise in Britain a mobile strategic reserve of adequate size continued. The fact that the decolonisation process was getting under way increased, at least in the beginning, and did not diminish the Army's tasks, while the obsolescence of overt force implied in the development of nuclear weapons meant increased emphasis by the Communists on subversion and other less open forms of pressure, especially in the new Afro-Asian states. 'The rapid transition through which many colonial societies are now passing in their progress towards self-government', the 1955 White Paper on defence explained, 'creates conditions which are in some cases capable of being exploited by international Communist techniques. This immediately, but as we hope only temporarily, must increase the actual and potential commitments for British forces in support of Colonial Governments and Administrations.'<sup>1</sup> With all these conflicting calls on British defence resources it is no great wonder that the 1955 White Paper on defence was the first such document since 1945 to provide a special section on disarmament. This section, despite the marked change in Soviet arms control policy in 1954 to which we have already referred in this chapter, still insisted that disagreements between East and West about inspection and control were holding up progress towards a comprehensive treaty.

One conclusion which the British Government drew from this was that international agreement on arms control might stand a better chance if for the time being it were limited to such measures of 'adequately safeguarded disarmament' as were then feasible. This indicated a shift away from the search for general and complete disarmament; as such it was recommended by Britain to the Disarmament Sub-Committee as forming a suitable programme of work for 1956 despite the pessimism concerning future East-West relations which stemmed from the lack of any real advance at the Geneva

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 9391.

'summit' meeting in July 1955. The search for limited arms control agreements did, however, achieve some success with the partial nuclear test ban agreement concluded by Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States in August 1963 after talks which began in 1958, the only substantial arms control agreement reached between East and West since 1945. In the negotiation of this Britain played a notable role, suggesting compromises and keeping the talks going when they seemed on the brink of failure.<sup>1</sup>

### *The pressures of global commitment*

The leading position occupied by Britain in the arms control negotiations in the middle and late 1950s reflected the Conservative Government's view that, despite the steadily rising costs of armed forces and hence, in early 1956, the recognition of the need to reduce the number of men in uniform as the cost of equipping them rose, Britain remained in the front rank of nations and should continue to shoulder a world-wide burden of defence. This was typically reflected in the summary of the four tasks confronting British forces as stated in the Defence White Paper submitted to Parliament in February 1956.<sup>2</sup> These four tasks were defined as: (1) making a contribution to the Allied (nuclear) deterrent 'commensurate with our standing as a world Power'; (2) playing an appropriate role in the Cold War—'by their very presence', the Government said, '(British forces) can contribute to the stability of the free world and the security of overseas territories whose peaceful development may be threatened by subversion whether overtly Communist or masquerading as nationalism'; (3) 'dealing with outbreaks of limited war should they occur'; and (4) playing an effective part in global war should it break out. It was fully recognised, however, that should global war break out, and it was more likely to break out in Europe than anywhere else, nuclear weapons were almost certain to be used on both sides and the course and indeed the whole character of a nuclear war in Europe was quite impossible to forecast. That being so, perhaps the Government's idea of how such a war would develop was as good a guess as any. But it certainly raised some awkward questions. It postulated that if the deterrent failed to deter, the forces of NATO would 'hold the line by land, sea and air until the nuclear counter-offensive has broken the back of the enemy assault'.<sup>3</sup> Merely one of the many questions which this strategic concept raised

<sup>1</sup> Harold Macmillan, *At the End of the Day*, London, Macmillan, 1973, Chapter XIV, 'Breakthrough in Moscow'.

<sup>2</sup> Statement of Defence, 1956, Cmd. 9691.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

was how it could be reconciled with the next statement in the White Paper, which, echoing Mr Dulles, claimed that the Western Powers 'must have, and be known to have, the power of instant and overwhelming retaliation if attacked'. If the retaliation was 'instant' there would hardly seem to be need for conventional forces 'to hold the line', and certainly not if it was 'overwhelming'.

However, the one fairly confident conclusion reached by the Government's review of the defence situation in 1956 was that, in view of the unpredictability of nuclear war and the widespread tasks confronting British forces in all parts of the world, considering, too, the contemplated fall in the overall size of these forces, the accent must lie on 'flexible, mobile, well-trained, well-equipped and versatile British forces', organised preferably on the basis of a highly transportable reserve retained in Britain. The result of the disastrous and fortunately short-lived campaign conducted by British forces in October and November of that year, 1956, was to demonstrate at one and the same time the importance of that conclusion and also the Government's apparent inability to put it into effect. But the Suez campaign also and more importantly demonstrated the severe political restraints surrounding almost any British use of force in almost any part of the world without the acquiescence of the United States. Was it really fitting for a 'world Power', as the Government still described Britain, to be unable to carry on military operations anywhere in the world without the say-so of a still greater Power? The British illusion of continuing world-Power status was fostered by the experience of landing British forces in Jordan in August 1958, when the United States was doing the same in Lebanon, supposedly to defend these two states against indirect aggression from President Nasser's Egypt. It played its part again in the British refusal to co-operate with the six Coal and Steel Community states in western Europe when they formed their Economic Community between the Messina conference in 1955 and the signing of the Rome treaty in 1957. But that it was an illusion there could be no possible doubt.

Reminders of this were not slow in coming. When the 1957 defence statement appeared, drawn up by Mr Duncan Sandys, whose accession to the Ministry of Defence seemed to portend a total reappraisal of British policy, complaints against the defence burden on the country's shoulders were sounded in it. Defence had consumed 10 per cent of the Gross National Product in the previous five years; it had absorbed 7 per cent of the working population, one-eighth of the output of the metal-using industries.<sup>1</sup> Sheer political considerations at home necessitated a pruning of the defence

<sup>1</sup> Defence. *Outline of Future Policy*, Cmd. 124 of 1957.

bill; hence it was proposed to put an end to National Service in 1960 and to pull down the number of regular armed forces to 375,000 by 1962. This would mean a cut in British forces in Germany from 77,000 to 64,000 in the next twelve months with further reductions later; the aircraft at the disposal of the Second Tactical Air Force in Germany were to be reduced by a half by March 1958. At the same time, while applauding the British independent nuclear deterrent, the Minister insisted that the co-operation with the United States in research on guided missiles and ballistic rockets must continue. But the United States was having its own difficulties over rocketry. Later that year, in October, the Soviet Union launched its first artificial satellite, Sputnik, thus disclosing its capability of producing intercontinental missiles of the greatest accuracy and of sufficient carrying capacity to blast the cities of the United States if armed with megaton warheads. The sequel was a virtual panic in the United States over its apparent temporary backwardness in technology as compared with Russia, an immense spurt in American missile research and manufacture and a Presidential election fought in America in the autumn of 1960 over allegations, which turned out to be false, that the Eisenhower administration had lost to Russia the race to keep ahead in the field of missile development. The rocket which carried Russia's Sputnik into space in October 1957 also had the effect of carrying the two super-Powers still further away from lesser states like Britain which aspired to remain in the nuclear league. This was a moment, if ever there was one, when Britain without any dishonour might have renounced pretensions to remain in the front-rank class of nations and come to terms with the west European states when the shape of the EEC was still in process of moulding. But that opportunity was not taken.

It was perhaps unfortunate in this respect that Britain played a leading part in the nuclear test ban negotiations of 1958 to 1963. On the face of it, when Britain, along with the United States and the Soviet Union, signed the partial nuclear treaty on 5 August 1963 in Moscow, the event seemed to vindicate the Conservative Government's claim that Britain, partly because it was a nuclear Power, was able to play a vital role in preventing a collision between the two super-Powers and improve the general climate between them, an object dear to the heart of the then Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan. Undoubtedly, British persistence kept the test ban talks going when the super-Powers were bitterly divided over the question of the verification of underground tests.<sup>1</sup> In the event the latter had to be excluded from the agreement, but this was no fault of the British side, which tied itself into knots trying to reconcile the

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 289, n.1.

American refusal to accept less than seven inspections of the other side's territory in any one year and the Soviet refusal to agree to more than two or three. In a wider sense, however, the test ban agreement, though it appeared to make a minor contribution to checking the nuclear arms race, had the effect of fostering in Britain hallucinations of world power no longer justified by realities. In the first place, it seemed to certify Britain's membership of the exclusive club of nuclear Powers which topped the world hierarchy of nations. Secondly, it entrenched the British illusion that, however much the country's physical strength had fallen, its moral influence remained pre-eminent. This myth so captured Mr Macmillan that after the signing of the test ban agreement he went to the lengths of thanking President Kennedy and Mr Khrushchev for co-operating with him to make the negotiations a success.<sup>1</sup> In fact, of course, the treaty was not unprofitable for the super-Powers; it won them a certain accolade from world opinion racked with anxiety about the health hazards of continual nuclear testing; it helped them to consolidate the growing *détente* between them; and it allowed them to do virtually as much testing as before in their underground sites while throwing the onus on such countries as France for fouling the atmosphere. But by the same token it made Britain even more dependent on the United States than before for her nuclear deterrent. In December 1962 Mr Macmillan had already travelled to Nassau, Bermuda, to agree with President Kennedy on an arrangement by which the United States would transfer to Britain missiles to which Britain would add nuclear warheads for fitting into the four nuclear submarines it was to build. This came after the British abandonment of their home-made air-to-ground missile *Blue Streak* and the American refusal to continue the production of the air-to-ground missile *Skybolt*, which Britain had looked forward to acquiring.<sup>2</sup> Now, with the signature of the partial nuclear test ban agreement, Britain also became dependent on the United States for information derived from the continued American underground testing.

At the same time, the nuclear test ban agreement, coupled with the Nassau arrangements for providing British submarines with American Polaris missiles, served further to separate Britain from France and the other countries of the EEC. France's own nuclear programme had been initiated before General de Gaulle returned to power in May 1958 but he undoubtedly gave it a formidable impetus. The sight of Britain, which after all had no stronger reasons for acquiring nuclear weapons than France or any other country, joining with America and Russia to lock the door against any further

<sup>1</sup> 'Macmillan's Way', *The Economist*, 15 February 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Macmillan, *op. cit.*, Chapter VI, 'The Nuclear Challenge'.



entrants into the nuclear club while at the same time attempting to revitalise her 'special relationship' with Washington could not but be intensely irritating to General de Gaulle, one of the most important reasons no doubt why he slammed the door in January 1963 against Britain's first attempt to join the EEC and why he was able to do so without effective protest from his Common Market partners, who were not so much as consulted when the General said 'no'. In the year of de Gaulle's troubles with student and industrial unrest in France, 1968, the three Powers, America, Britain and Russia, went a step still further in setting themselves apart from all other states by signing and opening for signature the Nuclear Non-proliferation treaty under which nuclear signatories committed themselves not to assist the further spread of nuclear weapons and non-nuclear signatories undertook not to acquire or create for themselves nuclear weapons. Theoretically, there is no reason why France and China (which exploded its first nuclear device on 16 October 1964) would not have signed the non-proliferation treaty whereas, without the highly expensive underground testing equipment which as yet only America and Russia could afford, they could not sign the test ban agreement if they wished to develop their nuclear deterrents. After all, France and China, like the other three nuclear Powers, had no interest in seeing nuclear weapons spread. But no doubt they were well enough aware that, having signed the NPT, they would have been under the strongest pressure to sign the test ban treaty, too. As it was, Britain's position as sponsor of the NPT further strengthened the divide between itself and France, and this again was reflected in de Gaulle's intransigence over Britain's membership of the European communities.

In reality, however, the major British defence preoccupation in the six or seven years following the Suez crisis in 1956 was not so much the nuclear deterrent, despite the increasing problem of providing delivery systems for nuclear weapons after the coming obsolescence of the bombing aircraft first appeared in sight, but how to stretch and spread diminishing forces over a world-wide area. In 1958 the Council of West European Union gave its consent to a reduction of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) to 55,000 men within twelve months,<sup>1</sup> but British defence commitments still remained at a worryingly high level. They were defined again in the 1962 White Paper on defence as falling under three heads: the maintenance of national security, the fulfilment of obligations to British territories abroad and to those 'to whom we owe a special duty by treaty or otherwise', and contributing to the 'defence of the free

<sup>1</sup> Report on Defence. Britain's contribution to Peace and Security, 1958, Cmnd. 363, of 1958.

world and the prevention of war'.<sup>1</sup> While the first and third of these categories were, if the need arose, capable of some compression, the second was more concrete and measurable; it was also related to the third in so far as one of the main reasons, in the Government's view, for containing local hostilities wherever they occurred was to prevent this kind of incident escalating into major war. It was admitted, as far as this third group of commitments was concerned, that 'the need for garrisons of British troops to support the civil power in internal security emergencies has demonstrably diminished already and may be expected to diminish still further'; nevertheless the drain on resources in the four major areas outside Europe—the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Africa and the Far East—remained heavy.

Security in the Mediterranean was no longer dependent to any appreciable extent on a unilateral British contribution; it had now become a collective NATO responsibility to which Britain made its contribution by maintaining bases at Gibraltar, a British colony, Malta, due to become independent in 1967, Cyprus, independent in 1960 but agreeing to two British sovereign bases at Akrotiri and Dhekelia, El Adem and Tripoli in the now independent Libya where the RAF had staging posts. Naval and air facilities, with some land forces, would be retained in Gibraltar, Malta and Cyprus, but in none of these places would large forces be stationed for operations elsewhere and in case of necessity such forces would be drawn from Britain. Cyprus would remain the chief base for the British strike force in support of NATO and for the siting of NATO early warning facilities and the wireless stations needed for a world-wide network of military communications. In the Middle East the importance of the supply of oil from the Arab states of the Persian Gulf seemed to be sufficient reason for continuing military assistance to those states, to which in any case Britain was bound by treaty. There were also the treaty obligations to the rulers of the South Arabian Federation and other states in the Aden Protectorate. This involved stationing a garrison in Aden colony and the provision of detachments for the assistance of Arab forces in the Protectorate, as for instance for the defence of the sultanate of Abu Dhabi against rebellious tribesmen and the territorial ambitions of Saudi Arabia. For such actual and possible operations in the Gulf Britain depended mainly upon Aden colony and reinforcements from Kenya. In 1963 the Government proposed to keep forces permanently stationed in Aden and the Gulf states and to reinforce them if need be in emergencies not only by air, but also by means of 'an amphibious joint services task force east of Suez capable of putting ashore in the threatened areas

<sup>1</sup> Statement on Defence, 1962, Cmnd. 1639.

land forces and their heavy equipment and of providing air and communications support'.<sup>1</sup>

In Africa the military foothold was the Kenya base, where part of the Army's Strategic Reserve was kept. During the 1960s, however, the 1962 Defence White Paper said, military requirements in Central and East Africa would have to be re-examined 'in the light of a continuing need to support the civil power' in the central and east African states now being recognised as independent. In the Far East Britain remained responsible, not so much by treaty as by unwritten Commonwealth ties, for assisting in the forward defence of Australia and New Zealand; there was also the sizeable British garrison in Hong Kong. By far the greatest military commitment in the Far East, however, arose from the British defence agreement with Malaya or, as it became in 1962, the Federation of Malaysia, an agreement concluded in 1957. In the 1962 Defence White Paper it was laid down as fixed Government policy that if the proposed Malaysia Federation was created, British responsibilities would extend to North Borneo, Sarawak and Singapore, the latter providing Britain for the time being with its traditional base facilities for conducting operations in the region as a whole. To round off these widely scattered commitments, there were added the British defence responsibilities in the South Atlantic and in regard to Britain's remaining Caribbean dependencies.

The usefulness of this scattered defence potential and the greater efficiency which now characterised British overseas forces after the Suez fiasco in 1956 were well illustrated in the early 1960s. Kuwait, for example, which, as soon as it became independent in 1961, was claimed and actually threatened by Iraq, was very effectively protected by swiftly assembled British forces which dispersed as quickly as they had arrived when once the Arab League was able to take over the defence of Kuwait. Again, in 1964 when Kenya and Uganda were threatened with army mutinies and called on Britain to help restore law and order, the value of Britain's east of Suez defence provision was shown. To crown these successful military operations and seemingly to justify the world-wide dispersion of British forces, these forces intervened with great effectiveness in the Malaysia-Indonesia confrontation between 1963 and 1966, this action being the largest British military operation since the Second World War.

These three operations in the 'east of Suez' zone were such that Britain could rightly be proud of; they tended to justify the argument the Government used in explaining its world-wide defence commitments, namely that Britain was possibly the only major state in the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

world the armed forces of which were not suspected of acquisitive designs when they answered appeals to protect or restore peace in the so-called Third World. These operations, especially that in the Persian Gulf in 1961 in defence of Kuwait, were much used by Sir Alec Douglas-Home (he succeeded Harold Macmillan as Conservative Prime Minister in 1963) when he fought and lost the general election in October 1964 against the Labour Party led by Harold Wilson.

### *Labour and Defence*

In that election Mr Wilson poked fun at the Conservatives' pride in what they called Britain's presence 'at the top table' of world diplomacy as the reward both of its ability to maintain its own nuclear deterrent and also its capability of intervening to preserve order in many parts of the world, not least the Commonwealth. Britain's participation in the 1963 partial nuclear test ban agreement was never far from the Conservatives' election campaign as arguably self-evident proof that, so long as the Conservatives remained in office, Britain would always be counted among the mighty of the earth. Mr Wilson and his colleagues were doubtful whether this post-imperial posturing made much of an impression on foreign governments; they would be more impressed, Labour claimed, by the demonstration that Britain was still the 'workshop of the world'. Wilson referred slightly to the British nuclear deterrent, saying that if returned to office he would closely re-examine its usefulness in modern conditions; he would also attempt to re-negotiate the Nassau agreement with the United States for providing Britain with Polaris missiles for its submarines.

On actually winning the election on 16 October 1964, however, Mr Wilson, like all incoming Ministers in office, did not depart as much as he seemed to have promised from his predecessor's policies. The nuclear deterrent may have been reconsidered but nevertheless remained; so did the Nassau agreements. In fact both were reaffirmed in the Labour Government's first White Paper on defence in February 1965 in which reference was made to an Atlantic Nuclear Force (ANF) which the Government were proposing as an alternative to the American scheme for a Multilateral Nuclear Force (MLF) intended to give Federal Germany some slight access to control of the NATO nuclear deterrent. Whereas the MLF was to consist of a mixed-manned fleet of twenty-five vessels collectively owned and controlled by such NATO states as wished to join the scheme, and each armed with sixteen Polaris missiles—though the ultimate power to forbid their use would lie with the American President—

the ANF would consist of Britain's V-bombers, her four Polaris submarines, an equal number of American submarines and such forces as France would agree to subscribe.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Mr Wilson certainly did not repudiate the idea of a world role for Britain; only one month after the general election in 1964 he was saying at a Guildhall banquet on 16 November that 'we are a world Power and a world influence or we are nothing'.<sup>2</sup> But Mr Wilson's conception of Britain as a world Power, with world-wide military capability, was somewhat different from that of the Conservatives. As he explained to a restless Parliamentary Labour Party in June 1966, Britain's duty in his opinion was not to strut the world stage like a down-at-heel monarch, but to contribute, as a peculiarly well-qualified state, to peacekeeping on a world-wide scale, even intervening to forestall the next great international confrontation, that between the United States and China, who already stood 'eyeball to eyeball'.<sup>3</sup> Mr Wilson tended rather to take it for granted, in his ambition to claim a peacekeeping world role for Britain, that this would be acceptable both to the new developing countries, in whose territories for the most part this role would no doubt be played out, and to the British taxpayer, especially the not too well-off taxpayer, who would be called upon to foot the bill.

The conflict between the Labour Government's desire seemingly to act as the world's principal peacemaker and peacekeeper and the financial resources likely to be available for that role was already evident in the 1965 Defence White Paper, for which Denis Healey as Labour Minister of Defence was responsible. On the one hand, the world-wide defence commitments falling to Britain were frankly, even gladly, acknowledged; '. . . if our friends turn to us for help', the document said, 'we must be ready to give it where we can'. On the other hand, Labour's Conservative predecessors were chastised for having imposed on the armed forces burdens greater than they could possibly bear; '. . . there has been no real attempt', the Defence White Paper went on, 'to match political commitments to military resources, still less to relate the resources made available for defence to the economic circumstances of the nation'.<sup>4</sup> The ultimate impossibility of the Government attempting to have its cake and eat it—that is, piling upon the armed forces tasks from which Britain was supposed to derive credit as a peacemaker, and at the same time denying to those forces the wherewithal to carry out their tasks—became brutally evident with the resignation in February 1966 of

<sup>1</sup> Statement on the Defence Estimates, 1965, Cmnd. 2592.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 17 November 1964.

<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, 17 June 1966.

<sup>4</sup> Cmnd. 2592 of 1965.

Christopher Mayhew, the Navy Minister, when his Cabinet colleagues refused to sanction the building of a new aircraft carrier, the CVA.01, while demanding an east of Suez role both from the Navy and from other branches of the Services. 'This was the beginning of the trouble,' Mr Mayhew said in his resignation speech in the House of Commons on 22 February, 'a rigid laying down in advance of two incompatible objectives, a world role and the £2000 million (defence budget).'<sup>1</sup>

In the summer following Mr Mayhew's resignation the economic blow struck in the form of the worst set of 'freeze' measures since the Second World War. A year later the balance of payments situation, largely as a result of the six-day Arab-Israeli war in June 1967, became so serious that the Government, contrary to all its previous intentions, was forced in November to devalue the pound by 14.3 per cent. This was bound in itself to make the outlook for defence spending grim; the Defence White Paper immediately following devaluation, published, that is, in July 1968, was unequivocal in stating that 'there is no military strength whether for Britain or for our alliances except on the basis of economic strength, and it is on this basis that we can best assure the security of this country'.<sup>2</sup> But this was only to underline a fundamental weakness in British defence policy which had been only too evident in all the years since the Second World War, namely the persistent tendency to ignore the fact that only if the British economy remained free from all its standard post-war troubles would the kind of world-wide defence policy be practicable which British Ministers, Conservative and Labour, seemed bent on pursuing. If the economy slipped below that level, either British forces must be under-equipped for their world-wide tasks or their commitments would have to be pruned. To add to this was the political situation at home. Whatever conclusions the Labour Government itself were to reach about the most desirable balance between defence expenditure and the general needs of the economy, the Labour rank-and-file, in Parliament and in the country, were bound to demand that cuts in defence spending must be not merely proportional to cuts in social service spending in any national economic crisis, but if anything appreciably larger. It is accordingly not surprising that Mr Wilson in issuing his now famous Government statement of 16 January 1968 should have made a dramatic cut in defence commitments in order to establish that if there had to be sacrifices somewhere they would fall equally upon all contenders for government resources: in other words, as he

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Mayhew, *Britain's Role Tomorrow*, London, Hutchinson, 1967<sup>+</sup> p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> *Supplementary Statement on Defence Policy, 1968*, Cmnd. 3701.

himself put it, there would be no 'sacred cows' spared from the axe.<sup>1</sup> The effect of this statement, by eliminating British forces from the Persian Gulf and the Far East, except for Hong Kong, by the end of 1971, was to wind up the east of Suez policy which had in reality begun to lose its point with the independence of India and Pakistan in 1948. Britain would be henceforward predominantly a European and Mediterranean Power. That was very far from being intended by the Labour Governments of 1964 to 1966 and 1966 to 1970. But in fact it was inherent in Britain's international position, economically and politically, since 1945.

The following year's Defence White Paper, issued in February 1969, began with the now familiar statement 'the essential feature of our current defence policy is a readiness to recognise that political and economic realities reinforce the defence arguments for concentrating Britain's military role on Europe'.<sup>2</sup> The 'defence arguments' were in fact two: first, that the colonial conflicts in which Britain had been engaged in the 1960s, especially the fighting against Arab nationalists in Aden and Southern Arabia and the defence of Malaysia against Indonesia, had ended—Aden became independent in 1967 and the confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia was concluded at a conference in Bangkok in August 1966; and secondly that events were occurring in Europe, notably a rise in Soviet defence spending of 6 per cent in 1969 and the Warsaw pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 which seemed to portend a switch in world political tensions back to the old theatre, Europe. A curious consequence of this was that the Labour Government which had begun its life by criticising the cost of stationing British forces in Europe and stressing by contrast Britain's world-wide peacekeeping role, had by 1968-9 come round full circle and was almost demanding to be given a greater share in European defence.

'Britain had a central role to play in supporting the solidarity, strength and strategy on which the effectiveness of the (Atlantic) alliance depends. Our decision to concentrate our defence effort in the NATO area makes us better able to fulfil this role than in the past.'<sup>3</sup>

But these defence considerations were in reality *ex post facto* justifications for a withdrawal to Europe imposed by hard economic facts. Mr Wilson himself later admitted that his judgement had been

<sup>1</sup> Cmnd. 3515 of 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Statement on Defence Estimates, 1969, Cmnd. 3927.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

at fault in clinging to the east of Suez policy when all other informed opinion was against it:

'Three years afterwards when I was asked about mistakes I had made in office, I instanced my clinging to our east of Suez policy when facts were dictating a recession. I was, I said, one of the last to be converted, and it needed a lot of hard facts to convert me. Other of my colleagues, left-wing and pro-European alike, were wiser in their perceptions.'<sup>1</sup>

It is a curious fact that when Edward Heath, a far more convinced European than Mr Wilson ever was, succeeded him as Prime Minister for the Conservatives in June 1970 he immediately tried, though without much evident success, to rehabilitate the east of Suez policy. The idea was somehow to encourage the Arab sheikdoms and petty kingdoms of the Persian Gulf to form a closer union between themselves and in the process give a British military presence in the Gulf a further lease of life, and also to create a five-Power Commonwealth naval force (Australia, Britain, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore) to be based at Singapore. At the same time Mr Heath proposed to abolish the ban on the sales of arms to South Africa which the Wilson Government had imposed in accordance with a United Nations resolution passed in 1963 and thereby to revitalise the British-South African agreement of 1955 for the joint defence of the sea routes round the Cape to the Far East. Mr Heath seemed indeed to be as much obsessed with the supposed Soviet naval threat to the south Atlantic and the Indian Ocean as Mr Wilson had been with Britain's imagined role of peacekeeper throughout the wide spaces of Asia and the Far East. But even Mr Heath's vision of a renewed east of Suez role wilted before the facts: the Arab rulers in the Gulf showed no desire to have a continuing British presence to protect them and the proposed plan for a five-Power naval force at Singapore did little more than mark time.

It is impossible to acquit successive Conservative and Labour governments since 1945 of a distinct inertia in dealing with the ever-present problem of harmonising oversea defence requirements with prevailing political and economic realities. There was perhaps an element of truth in the claim that if any Western Power were to undertake peacekeeping responsibilities in any part of the old British Empire, Britain was more acceptable to the local people than any other state. But there can be far less justification for Ministers' persistent failure to heed the warnings which they themselves mediated to the country in their own Defence White Papers year

<sup>1</sup> Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-70*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971, p. 243.



after year, namely that no state can wield influence in the world community if it is continually a net debtor in its international financial transactions and had a national rate of economic growth almost universally less than that of its peers. By consistent refusal to apply rigorously the implications of this principle they allowed defence policy to dictate to foreign policy and, what is still worse, to allow defence policy to be continually determined by unforeseen external facts rather than to be guided by a prudent appreciation of the realities on which it must be based.

## Chapter 10

### AT THE UNITED NATIONS<sup>1</sup>

Britain, like France but unlike the United States, the Soviet Union, China or any other major Power, has been a leading member of the two world organisations for the maintenance of peace, the League of Nations and the United Nations, throughout the whole life of the former and from the latter's birth in 1945 until the present. There has never been any serious question of Britain's withdrawal from the UN even during the most bitter attacks by other member-states on its policies, as during the Suez crisis in 1956 or the long-drawn-out question of Rhodesia from November 1965 until the present. Prime Minister Edward Heath was putting no more than the slightest of glosses on the British position when he ended his speech at the twenty-fifth session of the UN General Assembly by saying that the UN 'can rely on the full support of Her Majesty's Government and of the British people'.<sup>2</sup>

It is no doubt true to say that among the public at large and in the political parties British support for the League of Nations was more fervent and intense, though confined to fewer people, than the much more general support afforded to the UN since the Second World War. Moreover, whereas British interest in and popular backing for the world organisation were probably at their height during the Korean war of 1950-3 and also in the immediate aftermath of the Suez crisis in 1956, in more recent years there has been a decided fall in optimism about the UN's potentialities as a guarantor of world peace.<sup>3</sup> One reason for this no doubt is that Britain played a much more important role in the League of Nations, which was for all practical purposes a regional body, the region being Europe, than it has in the UN; in addition, Britain's importance and influence in the UN has tended to decline since 1945 in accordance with its general fall in world status. It is significant in this respect that in October 1973, when Britain pressed for an early meeting of the UN Security

<sup>1</sup> Some of the material in this chapter was incorporated in the author's contribution, 'Britain and the United Nations', to the volume *The Evolving United Nations*, edited by K. J. Twitchett and published by Europa Publications in 1971.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 24 October 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Written in January 1974.

Council to deal with the outbreak of hostilities in the Middle East, virtually nothing could be done to convene the Council until the United States agreed to take the initiative in having a meeting called.<sup>1</sup>

Another reason for the relatively passive attitude of the majority of British people towards the UN since 1945, compared with the more fervent, though less widely shared, enthusiasm for the League, is that by 1945 permanent international organisations for peace, as for innumerable other purposes besides, had become an accepted part of the international landscape. None of the three major victorious belligerents in the Second World War, Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States, doubted during their wartime negotiations that a new beginning must be made to create a world organisation to keep the peace when the war in Europe ended; even the least enthusiastic of the three, the Soviet Union, seemed to hope that its permanent membership of the executive committee of the new organisation, the Security Council, would at least help to symbolise and perhaps consolidate its front-rank status in the post-war years. That much the League seemed to have done in the cause of peace-keeping by international effort. At the same time, the mere fact that a world organisation was felt to be essential in all circles on the Allied side in the Second World War meant that the excitement of controversy had largely been taken out of the question. The fate of all political causes, once they have justified their existence, is to be enveloped in a kind of public apathy; for them only one thing is worse than failure and that is success. This has happened to British public opinion in regard to organised international co-operation for peace.

Nor is it surprising, considered only at the level of hard national interest, that Britain should have been a persistent and active member of the two world organisations for peace. As a *status quo* Power, both before and after the imperial period, Britain has stood to gain from any international machinery which exists partially to inhibit violent change within and between states. 'We are determined to work for peace and for harmony between peoples', said Mr Heath in the speech just referred to, 'because it is only in such conditions that Britain as part of the international community can prosper,' though allowance must, of course, be made in such words for the politician's normal self-flattery. It is significant that when majorities at the UN have called for radical and rapid changes, as during certain phases of the decolonisation process, British attitudes have been reserved if not positively hostile. Britain, too, though never enthusiastic about attempts by international bodies to intervene in matters within the domestic jurisdiction of states, broadly agrees with

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 8 October 1973.

the political and social ideals laid down in the UN Charter and most British people would accept as self-evident the proposition that the world would also be a more peaceful place if those ideals were held in higher regard.

Moreover, as a country with world-wide international interests, if no longer world-wide commitments or power, Britain stands to profit from the peaceful settlement of international disputes which threaten world order. The latter theme has become in fact the standard refrain of all British spokesmen at the United Nations in recent years. And, as a highly industrialised state with an exceptional degree of dependence on international trade, Britain's support must be accorded to world organisations such as the UN which include within their programmes the improvement of world economic conditions and thus the increase in the purchasing power of all members of the international community, and also the removal of hindrances to international trade.

### *British diplomatic style and the United Nations*

There is therefore a logical basis in national interests and characteristics to British membership of such bodies as the League and the UN whichever party holds the reins at Westminster, and this in itself has served to keep that membership beyond challenge at home. Moreover, if there be such a thing as a diplomatic or national style of foreign policy, in the sense of an habitual manner of conceiving foreign relations and responding to the different issues of international affairs, certain elements in Britain's diplomatic style are plainly in accordance with membership of such organisations. This is perhaps not surprising considering that on each occasion Britain has played a notable role in the fashioning of the two world organisations.

Firstly, Britain's national tradition of foreign policy, true both to the country's long participation in international affairs and at the same time to its relative geographical and mental detachment from the original and classic theatre of those affairs, Europe, is essentially conservative and hostile to fundamental changes in the structure of international politics. As the history of British attitudes to west European integration since 1945 shows, the country does not take easily to the renunciation of national sovereignty or the surrender of any part of it to multinational associations.<sup>1</sup> Hence British willingness to belong to international organisations based on the one-state one-vote principle and hostility to their encroachment on the member-state's right to determine its own home and foreign

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter 5, and below, Chapter 11.

policy. Accordingly British representatives at the San Francisco conference to finalise the UN Charter in 1945 were relieved to find almost complete agreement among the fifty-one delegations on the idea of basing the new organisation solidly upon the national sovereignty of member-states. Nor has Britain ever officially supported proposals to dilute that principle by reform of the Charter, as for instance by abolition of the unanimity rule for permanent members of the Security Council.

Another principle of the UN Charter which Britain warmly supported at the outset, which is consistent with Britain's habitual assumptions about international relations but which, to Britain's distress, has tended to weaken in the lifetime so far of the organisation, is the separation between the domestic and the international concerns of member-states and the exclusion of the former, with some exceptions, from the purview of the organisation. The principle is stated in Article 2 (7) of the Charter, corresponding with some notable differences to Article 15 (8) of the old League Covenant; this illegalises 'intervention' (a highly controversial term) by UN organs into matters that are 'essentially within the domestic jurisdiction' of member-states, except that this principle is not operative when the organisation is taking enforcement action to maintain peace and security within the meaning of Chapter VII of the Charter. It is not our intention here to consider in detail the significance of Article 2 (7) but it is important to stress that British foreign policy assumes that, whatever the effect of the progressive mingling of intra-national and international affairs in the twentieth century, the distinction must be drawn somewhere if international organisation, depending as it does on the voluntary co-operation of states, is to continue. Most people would no doubt like to see bodies like the UN used to eliminate practices or institutions within other states of which they disapprove; but equally they would resist as unjustified interference in their national affairs attempts made by other states to use the UN against themselves. In the British view the UN has frequently intervened without justification in the domestic affairs of member-states and has done so in a one-sided and partial manner; states with dependent territories, for example, have had to face UN resolutions directed at changing the status of these territories, often without regard to the wishes of the local inhabitants while any attempt to bring, let us say, Soviet internal practices before the bar of world opinion at the UN is ruled out of court almost before a resolution can be framed. Rather than risk this kind of 'double-standard' practice, the British view has been that Article 2 (7) should be interpreted in a rather restrictive sense. There is a tinge, but it is no more than a tinge, of Conservative bias to the principle formu-

lated by Sir Alec Douglas-Home on becoming Foreign Secretary in June 1970:

'One country or another may dislike discrimination in South Africa or cruelty in Communist China, or dictatorship or one-party government. But the way to reform cannot be by the threat of force or the use of force by one country against another country or by the United Nations in a majority vote . . . Once the nations of the world give way to intervention in each other's internal affairs, a United Nations would find itself broken by an intolerable strain.'<sup>1</sup>

There is, however, a further element in the British style of foreign policy which finds expression in the UN Charter and that is the idea that international differences of view, no matter how intractable, yield to continuous international debate and tireless efforts to narrow the viewpoints of opposing states by talking. Sir Winston Churchill's preference of 'jaw-jaw' to 'war-war' requires little argument in its favour in Britain. It may be true that, especially in the 1930s, British Ministers have succumbed too easily to the illusion that centuries of bitter ideological quarrelling between nations can be wafted away in hours of reasonable talk; nevertheless, in an age when the resort to force, even on a small scale, carries with it possibilities of hideous escalation, there is a commonsense quality about reasonable negotiation in preference to reaching for the gun, or, more appropriately today, the atomic bomb. Hence, British politicians have not always been as impatient as those of certain other countries at the spectacle of interminable and seemingly fruitless debates in UN organs. A day gained for talk, it is thought, is a day gained for peace; besides, as is often the case, a debate at the United Nations is not the whole action; it may in fact serve as a smokescreen behind which more confidential efforts for a peaceful settlement are proceeding. But certainly the resort to force has on few occasions since 1945 been a solution for international disputes congenial to British people, not only or solely because British force has not been available, or available in sufficient quantity, but precisely because the British have possibly had more experience of using force, and of having force used against them, than any other people. Force in the modern world is too clumsy and unpredictable an instrument to be used otherwise than as was once described as the 'last resort of kings'.

On the other hand, it would be a mistake to ignore certain features

<sup>1</sup> Speech by the Foreign Secretary at the dinner for the 25th anniversary of the United Nations, London, 29 June 1970 (London Press Service).

in the British style of foreign policy and the British outlook on international relations which have sometimes placed a strain on the country's participation in international bodies such as the UN. Sometimes these turn out to be further developments of those features we have just been discussing as favourable to British involvement in UN-type organisation. In the first place, the makers of British policy have never traditionally placed much faith in the 'forensic' brand of diplomacy (if it can be called diplomacy at all) which is normally carried on in UN organs and which was practised, though to a less extent, in the Council and Assembly of the League of Nations. British diplomats, with their long-established habits of quiet negotiation and understated language in the European tradition were shocked in the early days of the UN Security Council at the passionate stream of vilification directed at them and their allies by Soviet or Soviet-led delegates before the eyes and ears of the world; they were not accustomed to hearing themselves described as 'raging war hyenas' and 'running dogs of genocidal imperialism'. In the event, British delegates, notably Sir Gladwyn Jebb (now Lord Gladwyn) at the Security Council and, on one memorable occasion in 1960, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in an exchange with Nikita Khrushchev at the General Assembly gave as good as they received in televised wrangling matches with Communist spokesmen. But hardly anyone in Britain seriously believed that these departures from the traditional norms of diplomatic self-restraint carried matters further in dealings with the Communist world.

More recently, the determination of the thirty or forty African delegations at the United Nations to damn beyond redemption South Africa and Portugal for their practice of race discrimination, to have South African representatives hounded from the organisation as illegal spokesmen for their own people and to pass resolutions committing the UN, for instance, to take over the administration of South West Africa (or Namibia, to give it its official UN designation) without indicating the practical means of doing so, have drawn rebukes even from such British sympathisers as Lord Caradon, the principal British delegate at the UN during the Wilson administration of 1964-70. Such behaviour, in the British view, risks converting the world organisation into a verbose and ineffectual talking-shop. Linked with this, of course, is another British diplomatic trait: the pragmatic feeling that in international affairs 'Sticks and stones may break my bones But words will never hurt me'. Since 1945 British governments have by no means always respected and applied to their own foreign policy the good old rule that in framing policy commitments must always be rigorously restricted to capabilities. But they have rarely failed to reflect that rule in their judgements

on the collective verbal efforts of states, especially new states, at the United Nations.

Closely allied with these British attitudes is the sense that in the last resort it is the mutual relations between the greatest Powers of the day, rather than speech-making or the votes of a host of small and weak countries, that have in the past decided the outcome of supreme issues in world affairs and which will continue to do so. Just as British Ministers, though not intellectuals or publicists, looked askance at the creation of successor states in Eastern Europe at the close of the First World War since they might interfere with the reconciliation of Germany and Soviet Russia to the new international order created in 1919, so too after the Second World War their descendants looked primarily to understanding between the dominant Powers to keep the peace. Sir Winston Churchill on a celebrated occasion in May 1953 and Mr Harold Macmillan repeatedly throughout his premiership from 1957 to 1963 called for quiet talks between the paramount Powers, away from the oratory of UN gatherings, as part of the process of feeling for the way back to firmer ground in the Cold War. As Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home said in London on 29 June 1970:

'In these days of nationalism, it is less easy for the great Powers to assert their will. But does anybody doubt for one moment that the great Powers could—that isn't quite the right word—if the great Powers would mobilise their power behind a common will for peace, that the crises, for example in the Middle East, for example in Vietnam, for example in Europe, could be solved?'

Hence it is strange to read in Mr Harold Wilson's address to the United Nations Association in April 1967, when he was still Prime Minister, that the first of the six principles which he regarded as governing British policy towards the UN was that 'the status of the General Assembly should not be diminished as compared with that of the Security Council'.<sup>2</sup> True, the British shared the American sense of disappointment over the allegedly excessive Soviet use of the veto in the Security Council during the early years of the Cold War; the British Government accordingly continues to insist that the veto should not be used, contrary to the Soviet claim, to prevent the Council investigating international disputes. True, too, Britain was foremost in proposing the admission of newly decolonised states into the UN, so as to make the General Assembly more representative, at a time when the Soviet Union was opposed to the membership of such countries, presumably so as not to increase the non-Com-

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 306, n.1.

<sup>2</sup> Harold Wilson, *Britain and the UN*. a UNA publication, 1967



munist vote in the organisation. But, for all that, Britain's heart was not with the United States, as early as 1947 when another Labour government was in office, when America sought through the so-called 'Little Assembly' to secure the kind of resolutions in the General Assembly which it could not obtain in the Security Council owing to the Soviet veto. As a matter of history, Britain did support the USA in its efforts to engineer a partial transfer of security functions from the Council to the Assembly, but this was always done with distinct mental reservations.

This became particularly apparent in the aftermath of the American-sponsored 'Uniting for Peace' resolution adopted by the General Assembly in November 1950, which made it possible for the Assembly to organise resistance to threats to or breaches of the peace, though on a purely recommendatory basis, if the Security Council was deadlocked or otherwise unable to act. The obvious fear behind the resolution was that the Security Council might not be as favoured in any future outbreak of hostilities as it was in June 1950 when the Soviet delegate, owing to his absence from the Council's proceedings, was unable to block UN action to intervene in the Korean war. During the Suez crisis in November 1956 Britain—along with the Soviet Union, which was at the same time busily engaged in suppressing the Hungarian revolution—found itself in the dock under the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution, being condemned for a breach of the peace by a special emergency session of the General Assembly summoned in accordance with that resolution. As it happened, and thanks largely to Mr Lester Pearson's intervention, those meetings had a fortunate outcome in the shape of the UN emergency force sent to the Middle East in 1956-7 which enabled the British Government to extricate itself from an acutely embarrassing situation. Nevertheless, British people did not love the General Assembly any the more for classifying them, along with the Soviet Union, as peace-breakers when, according to their Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Ede, Britain was doing no more than defending the rule of law in the Suez canal dispute in view of the evident inability of the UN to do so. The General Assembly in that instance, said Sir Winston Churchill, had acted 'on grounds of enmity, opportunism or merely jealousy and pectulance'. Lord Glyn, speaking in the House of Lords, echoed the feelings of many when he described the General Assembly in the aftermath of Suez as a 'seething mass of corruption'.<sup>1</sup>

Equally, when Britain joined the United States in the early 1960s in demanding the application of sanctions provided for in Article 19 of the UN Charter against great Powers such as France and the

<sup>1</sup> House of Lords, *Official Report*, 25 July 1957, Col. 132.

Soviet Union which refused to pay their share of the expenses of UN peacekeeping forces sent to the Middle East and the Congo by the General Assembly, it did so in a half-hearted manner and with much soul-searching. Certainly, according to the International Court of Justice at The Hague, the defaulting states were legally in the wrong and sanctions against them would therefore be in order if a majority could be found in the UN to impose them. But it was well understood in Britain that if undue pressure were applied by the UN against a great Power, there was always the risk that it might fail or, more importantly, that the great Power might quit the organisation or be lukewarm in its future support for it; and Britain had had too much experience of great Powers quitting the League in the 1930s to wish to see it repeated. It was also realised that it was not altogether wise for the great Powers to rule out the use of force by themselves in all circumstances by making it possible for the General Assembly to step in and take a critical situation out of the great Powers' hands.

Time was to show the wisdom of this argument. When the United States decided suddenly in September 1965 no longer to press for the application of Article 19 of the Charter against the financial defaulters, it did so no doubt because by that time it had become deeply immersed in the Vietnam war and the last thing the US Government wanted was a weak UN force, manned by neutral states, vainly attempting to hold the line between North and South Vietnam and, perhaps more important, between the Saigon regime and the Vietcong. Some British apologists for the UN might be inclined to argue that they themselves favoured the application of Article 19 against the backsliders at the time because they believed in General Assembly action to maintain the peace on the ground that that body was somehow more 'democratic' than the Security Council. But it is more probable that British Ministers and their official advisers gave a sigh of relief when the United States decided to call off its attempt to invoke Article 19. No British policy-maker could agree that a United Nations denuded of some of its great-Power members and filled with small countries which pass endless resolutions while lacking the means to implement them can be an effective guardian of the peace. Britain, in short, has always tended to favour the 'Concert of the Powers' conception of the UN rather than the 'town meeting of the world' image preferred by such Americans as John Foster Dulles.

Again, British sensitivity to the facts of power in international organisation, as distinct from the 'one-state, one-vote' principle of the United Nations, has caused British governments consistently to favour the admission of Communist China into the world organisa-

tion until the United States at length came to the same conclusion and removed its veto on that admission in 1971. Few in Britain were under any illusion that Communist Chinese representation at the UN would have the effect of converting that country into the kind of 'peace-loving' state which qualifies for membership under Article IV of the Charter. Nevertheless, it is a sound British instinct to accept and try to come to terms with a foreign government once it is firmly established in power, and also to regard the 'threatfulness' of another state as a strong reason for welcoming it into, rather than ostracising it from, the family of nations. The point was made by Sir Alec Douglas-Home, then the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, when he said at the General Assembly on 24 September 1970 that:

'If the representatives of Peking were seated here their influence would be greatly felt. I cannot forecast what it would mean. They could well, by the rigidity of their political doctrine, make our tasks more difficult. But they have, more than many, to gain from expanding trade, from prosperity and from interdependence. They could add immensely, if they chose, among the rest of us, to real co-existence. Their intentions, in the opinion of the British Government, should be put to the proof here in this Assembly of nations.'

Nevertheless, until President Nixon's change of front in 1971, Britain acquiesced in the United States' refusal to seat the Peking regime in the UN, so much so as to be placed in the absurd position in 1955 of recognising that government's right of administration over the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu while protesting that any Communist attempt to recover the islands must be resisted because it would give rise 'to a situation endangering peace and security'. By making this statement in the House of Commons, Sir Anthony Eden, the then Foreign Secretary, could only have meant that the United States, even at the risk of war, would resist what on the British Government's admission was Peking's right to recover its own property.<sup>2</sup>

This British support for—or tolerance of—United States policy towards the UN, as again in the matter of the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution mentioned earlier, has often been criticised as evidence of Britain's allegedly 'satellite' status in relation to Washington. But it is in fact firmly and wisely based on the strong British belief since and even before 1945 that no world organisation for peace can

<sup>1</sup> *Speech by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the General Assembly of the United Nations, New York, September 24, 1970, The Central Office of Information, London, 1970.*

<sup>2</sup> 536 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 159-60 (26 January 1955).

be effective unless it enjoys the support of all the great Powers of the day. It is also a reflection of the nightmarish experience of the 1930s which British politicians almost unanimously wish never to see recur: the spectacle of a predominantly European organisation, the League of Nations, attempting to deter and resist aggression on a world-wide scale without the co-operation of the United States. Hence the British agreed, with some reservations later voiced more loudly, to the siting of the headquarters of the UN in New York in order to capture the loyalty of Americans for the world organisation and also supported many other American policies in the UN which have not always accorded with diplomatic practice on this side of the Atlantic. Sir Donald Maitland, Britain's chief delegate at the UN in 1973, laid the same stress on the need for effective power in the organisation when he deplored resolutions passed by a number of small states without the backing of the big Powers in a speech at the General Assembly in November 1973. Resolutions, he said, must 'take into account the views of delegations who may well be in a numerical minority but whose consent and co-operation are essential if any practical result is to follow'.<sup>1</sup>

There is finally another strand in the British style of diplomacy which sometimes militates against enthusiastic participation in such highly organised structures as the UN. One has only to glance at the UN Charter and compare it with the old League Covenant or some such purely British declaration as the Statute of Westminster of 1931 to appreciate its essentially trans-Atlantic parentage. The frequent looseness and infelicity of wording; the verbosity and repetitiveness, coupled with imprecision, which compare so unfavourably with the spare verbal austerity and clarity of the Covenant; and above all the complex rules of procedure and structures of

world government with the Security Council as the Cabinet. But then the three-Power Yalta conference met in February 1945 and torpedoed the scheme, or so it seemed, by inserting the principle of the veto into decisions of the Council.

There are, of course, advantages in the complex organisational structure of the UN with its so-called 'goldfish-bowl' diplomacy. It means considerable economies for smaller countries whose delegates can meet in New York the representatives of all the states in the world without the expense of a world-wide diplomatic network of their own. It also bestows prestige on the smaller countries as they find a place on numerous high-sounding committees and commissions. Nevertheless, the British political instinct had always tended to prefer the more informal and, as far as possible, private gathering, such as under the most favourable conditions takes place within the Commonwealth framework, in which it is argued that differences can be explored and arrangements agreed to as though in the seclusive quiet of a Pall Mall club. This takes us back to that earlier trait of British foreign policy which is at variance with much in existing UN practice, namely the essentially British ideal of 'quiet diplomacy'.

#### *Party attitudes to the UN*

We have so far considered features in the general style of British policy which suit or jar upon the mechanics and spirit of the UN as they now exist. This is proper in that the permanent machinery of British policy, that is, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and British diplomatic missions abroad, may be expected to confer on that policy more continuity and sameness than, say, the home civil service does on domestic policy. Moreover, it is widely accepted today that in foreign affairs the political parties, when in office, tend for a variety of reasons to follow roughly similar courses in which adherence to traditional patterns of national behaviour is more impressive than radical innovation. Especially perhaps has this been the situation since 1945 when the options confronting British governments in foreign policy have been exceptionally few. The Labour Government's unwillingness, for example, to share in the implementation of the UN Assembly's plan for Palestine in November 1947 except on the most unlikely condition that it was agreed to by Zionists and Arabs is matched by Sir Anthony Eden's seeming indifference to majority rule in the Assembly in the Suez crisis of 1956; and numerous other similarities may be cited. At the same time, a strong case can be made out for saying that the British Labour Party since 1945 has on the whole shown greater sensitivity to UN opinion and Charter obligations than have the Conservatives.

It is hard to think of a Labour leader describing Assembly decisions in the terms used by Sir Winston Churchill in the passage already quoted.<sup>1</sup> And it was a Conservative, not a Labour, Foreign Secretary, Lord Home (now Sir Alec Douglas-Home), who in a famous speech at Berwick-on-Tweed in December 1961 said that in the UN there was 'one rule for the Communist countries and another for the democracies, one rule for the bully, who deals in fear, and another for the democracy, because their stock in trade is reason and compromise', even though the Minister at the end of his speech 'came down decidedly on the side of hope' for the world organisation.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, it was the Labour government formed by Mr Wilson in October 1964 which sent a Minister of State at the Foreign Office, Lord Caradon, to head the permanent British delegation at the UN, whereas the succeeding Conservative government formed by Mr Heath in June 1970 discontinued this practice. It was the Labour administration of Mr Wilson, too, which adhered to the UN Security Council resolution of 1963 recommending a ban on the sale of arms to South Africa, though it was under no legal obligation to do so, and which continued to apply the ban even during the period of struggle to maintain the value of the pound after devaluation in November 1967. Again, the succeeding Conservative government at once called the Labour decision into question when returned to office in 1970 and announced its readiness, in principle at least, to reverse it.

The reasons for these differences between Conservative and Labour (with which we must include Liberal) attitudes to the UN are not far to seek. Traditionally, the Labour Party in Britain has been the party of internationalism, though this represents more a vague feeling of universal brotherhood than a definite readiness to share national sovereignty with the foreigner; of third-party settlement of international disputes; of multilateral disarmament effected through some such agency as the UN. During the League of Nations period (1920-46) the Conservatives provided no outstanding advocate of the League cause with the exception of Lord Cecil of Chelwood. When Winston Churchill called for 'arms and the (League) Covenant' in the later 1930s, he was thinking of arms first; in his mind the Covenant represented all those countries, whether members of the League or not, which were prepared to join with Britain and France in a defensive pact against the European dictators. On the Labour side, on the other hand, leaders from Ramsay MacDonald to Harold Wilson have consistently placed the world organisation pre-eminently in their policy programmes.

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 309.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Young, *Sir Alec Douglas-Home*, London, Dent, 1970, pp. 138-9.

On a more doctrinal level, too, a party of the Left which attributes human conflict, and hence international conflict, to certain removable social conditions such as poverty and ignorance, or to the accumulation of armaments on both sides, rather than to the 'old Adam' in the human *psyche*, and which believes that there is nothing inherent or inevitable in the present world-wide conflict between different national interests, might be expected to be somewhat more loyal to an institution dedicated to the resolution of such conflicts than a party of the Right.

Implicit in the thinking of the latter is the idea that international conflict, as with all human conflict, springs from a basic will to power and wealth in men against which there is no the last resort no alternative defence other than one's own strong right arm. International organisations of a universal membership can not only serve to obscure this elementary truth but at times may positively prevent that right arm from being used or even from being prepared for action. Hence in the late 1930s under Clement Attlee and in the 1950s under Hugh Gaitskell the Labour Party in its declarations seemed almost to be renouncing the right of any state to defend itself against attack unilaterally and without waiting for a coalition of other states to assist it. At the other end of the spectrum, the principle laid down by Prime Minister Heath and Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Douglas-Home, for example, at the Conservative Party annual conference in October 1970 was that on all basic issues British foreign policy would continue to be decided by a British government with strict reference to national interests above all else. Mr Heath added in his speech at the UN General Assembly on 23 October 1970 that 'I speak today for a newly elected British Government committed to vigorous policies in the interests of the security and prosperity of the British people' and then went on: 'I make no apology for defining so plainly our objectives before this assembly. For I am satisfied that the policies we propose are fully in accord with our commitments under the Charter and our record as a member of this Organisation.'<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Mr Heath left no doubt that, as far as he was concerned, he did not propose to let anyone but the British Government be the judge as to whether that final sentence was true or false.

All this, however, needs to be said about the differences of tone and temper between the two major British parties on the subject of the UN against the background of the assumption that in practice, as distinct from verbal declarations, the two parties are and have been since the war far more likeminded in their international policies than their public statements might seem to indicate. Both

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 24 October 1970.

parties after all operate in a national climate of opinion somewhat idealistic in the stress it places on the force of reason and moral principles in foreign affairs and in a tradition of foreign policy in which, at least since 1918, membership of universalist international organisations for the prevention of war has always been unchallenged. While, since the Suez crisis of 1956 and the problem of Rhodesia's illegal declaration of independence in 1965, indifference towards and perhaps a feeling of frustration with the UN have tended to grow in British public opinion, active support for the UN among the committed rank-and-file of the Labour Party has remained at about the same level, making ritualistic obeisance towards the world organisation obligatory for all Labour leaders. It is difficult to discern any similar pressure from within the party, except perhaps for the youth section, affecting Conservative leaders. Nevertheless, it would be true to say that a mood of unenthusiastic acceptance of the UN as an inevitable part of the international environment has been a common factor in the opinion of both political parties and of the British public in general.

#### *Britain's record at the United Nations*

Turning to Britain's actual record as a UN member, it may be claimed without much national bias that this compares favourably with that of any other member-state and certainly with that of any other of the five permanent members of the Security Council. Communist China, it is true, has not yet been a UN member long enough to provide any basis for comparison. But the United States in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when it was relatively easy to organise pro-Western majorities at the UN, notoriously sought to fashion the world body into a weapon in the Cold War against the Soviet Union and China while Britain looked upon these tactics with the greatest distaste. The Soviet Union has neither thought it necessary to conceal or to explain the vast discrepancy between her domestic and foreign policy and the social and political ideals laid down in Article 1 of the UN Charter, while France—to cite only the period of General de Gaulle's Presidency from 1958 until 1969—has shown distinct contempt for the organisation expressed in de Gaulle's description of it as *le machin* and its refusal, like that of the Soviet Union, to pay for UN peacekeeping expenses at a particularly critical time in its financial history. There is no parallel to this in the whole of Britain's twenty-eight-year membership of the UN to date.

Moreover, Britain has by no means been the readiest of states to resort to armed force or the threat of armed force, as proscribed by



Article 2 (4) of the Charter, when other means for the settlement of international disputes have failed. Britain has always been a signatory of the 'Optional Clause' (Article 36) of the Statute of the International Court of Justice at The Hague, as she was in regard to the pre-war Permanent Court, although less than forty other UN members are in the same position, and under this Article Britain has accepted the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court with some reservations; the most objectionable of these, the exclusion of any 'dispute which in the opinion of the Government of the UK affects the national security of the UK or any of its dependent territories' was inserted in 1957 in order to forestall any attempt to test the legality of British atomic tests in the Pacific.<sup>1</sup> It was later withdrawn when a storm of protest arose at home against it. There has never been anything in the British declaration under Article 36 of the world court's Statute which can compare with the United States' exclusion of all matters which *in the opinion of the US government* are questions of domestic jurisdiction and therefore excluded from the court's purview.

In the Norwegian Fisheries case in 1951 the British Government without hesitation abided by a judgement of the ICJ legalising decrees issued by Norway concerning its territorial waters which were highly unfavourable to Britain and most injurious to British fishing interests. The same could be said for the legal proceedings in the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute in the same year, though the Court declared its lack of jurisdiction in a case in which, again, a considerable British stake lay. Although on that occasion the Labour Government was accused by the Opposition of 'scuttling' out of Abadan, there was hardly a suggestion in Parliament or the press of force being used against Iran. Even in the notorious Suez crisis five years later, so often quoted as a 'clear' case of violation of the UN Charter, it cannot be said that Britain and other maritime states did not practically exhaust all the conventional means for the peaceful settlement of the dispute before force was resorted to; there were two international conferences in London and a mission of five was despatched to Egypt to discuss with President Nasser a formula for the internationalisation of the Suez canal. Before force was actually used, and it was almost at once called off owing to international protests, Britain and France referred the issue to the UN Security Council in which Britain exercised one of her rare vetoes. The Security Council and the General Assembly, though full of indignation against Britain and France when force was actually used, offered no answer to the question British Ministers persistently asked: what is a state to do when unilateral action against its legal rights is taken by others and

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 249 of 1957.

the UN is unable or unwilling to defend those legal rights?<sup>1</sup> Moreover, one of the most significant aspects of the Suez crisis was the protests voiced in Britain (though not in France) by large sections of public and Parliamentary opinion against the use of force without UN approval. There are few other countries in the world today in which the Government can be told by a legal Opposition, as Sir Anthony Eden was told by the Labour leader of the Opposition, Mr Hugh Gaitskell, in 1956 that the country should never use force in international affairs in the face of a substantial majority of dissenting member-states at the UN. Certainly no such protest was made in India, a country noted for its professions of high standards in international affairs, when Mr Nehru annexed Goa and other Portuguese possessions in India in 1961.

It is true that in the most dangerous disputes in the post-war world, those arising in East-West relations, Britain has not officially been in the forefront urging recourse to settlement through the UN; we have drawn attention more than once in this book to the emphasis laid by Prime Minister Macmillan in the late 1950s on the treatment of such issues at the 'summit' level between the four great Powers, though he agreed that the implementation of any agreements reached in that way might well be assured through the United Nations. Britain hesitated to join with the United States in the early years of the UN in organising General Assembly majorities against the Soviet Union and later, after 1955, when the new Afro-Asian states began to flood into the organisation, was loathe to see rivalry develop between East and West as to which of the two was more successful in winning the votes of the new states. But this attitude was based upon what seems the intelligent assumption that issues which the great Powers cannot settle between themselves, such as the Berlin dispute of 1958-61, do not necessarily strengthen the UN by being referred to it. On the whole, British governments have been reluctant to assign Cold War issues to the UN merely for the satisfaction of scoring points off the other side, which serves more to exacerbate the opponent than to conciliate him. With the great expansion of UN membership after 1955 it became clear that in any case the new states were so preoccupied with their struggle against colonialism that they could hardly be impartial adjudicators in the East-West conflict. All their animosity tended to be reserved for the Western states which still practised a residual and rapidly diminishing colonialism, while the colonial practices of the Soviet Union within her own borders and in eastern Europe tended to go unregarded.

At the same time, it must in fairness be said that long before the United States, under President Kennedy and later President

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter 4, on the Suez crisis.

Johnson, first recognised the need for peaceful existence with the Communist world, a British Prime Minister, Mr Macmillan, at the UN and elsewhere was pleading the same argument, in season and out of season, often to the chagrin of his European allies, Chancellor Adenauer of Germany and President de Gaulle of France. Macmillan's disposition to go to the negotiating table with the Communist states was castigated in western Europe as symptomatic of the 'English disease'. When eventually in his American University address in Washington in June 1963 Mr Kennedy conceded that the old American conception of the Communist world, including China, as a single monolithic bloc controlled from Moscow was a dangerous illusion which prevented profitable diplomatic deals with the various national forms of Communism, Mr Macmillan had been preaching much the same point from the moment he became Prime Minister in January 1957.

Again, in the last few years Britain has been in the forefront in calling for a review, for the purpose of improvement, of the existing machinery for the settlement of international disputes as listed, for instance, in Article 33 of the Charter. The British delegation to the UN in a letter to the Secretary-General on 20 August 1965 argued that 'the subject of peaceful settlement is of such importance that it merits a separate study directed not simply to elaborating general principles but also to examining existing and new methods and machinery for peaceful settlement'.<sup>1</sup> In December 1965 the chief British delegate to the UN, Lord Caradon, introduced a motion into the Assembly's Special Political Committee proposing that the Assembly should institute 'a penetrating survey of the means and methods leading to the adoption of recommendations and measures which would enable states to have greater recourse to the means of peaceful settlement'.<sup>2</sup>

This resolution failed to win the support of the majority of African states in the Assembly. These, under the leadership of the Ghanaian delegation, suspected that the resolution might be a Machiavellian British device for winning over UN opinion to a peaceful settlement of the problem of Rhodesia and hence diverting the UN from a forceful attempt to deal with the Smith regime. When the British delegation introduced their resolution once more at the following session of the General Assembly much the same suspicions were in evidence and debate on the resolution was at length suspended *sine die*. One after-effect, though very modest, of this British initiative was that the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly Document A/5964 of 20 August 1965.

<sup>2</sup> General Assembly, 20th Session, Official Records, Special Political Committee, 489th meeting, p. 2.

Training and Research (UNITAR) authorised its Executive Director to report to the 23rd session of the General Assembly in 1968 that the Institute hoped itself 'to examine and assess methods (including new methods) of peaceful settlement and machinery for reconciliation of differences between states'.<sup>1</sup>

It may fairly be questioned whether, as implied in the UNITAR inquiry, there is much to be discovered by research into the age-old practice of dispute settlement or whether this practice is not more a matter of human wisdom and insight rather than scientific study. But this does not affect the significance of this episode in UN history as evidence of the long-standing British concern with the peaceful settlement of disputes. Nor can it be argued that this concern establishes Britain as somehow a more idealistic or civilised UN member-state than the rest. The fact is, as already stated, that all or almost all British national interests now require a peaceful and as far as possible tension-free world. For Britain, peace is good business and to that extent British interests are identical with the principles and purposes of the UN Charter.

But this brings us to another UN activity, namely peacekeeping, in which Britain has so far played a not discreditable role. Of course, almost all UN work, including that of its Specialised Agencies is concerned with peacekeeping in the sense of promoting peace and discouraging war between the nations. But the word 'peacekeeping' has come into a special prominence in the vocabulary of the United Nations since the failure to ensure peace through the organ charged in the Charter with primary responsibility for maintaining peace and security, namely the Security Council.<sup>2</sup> Once it became clear, in the UN's first few years, that the Council, because of the political divisions between its permanent members, could not be relied upon to enforce the peace as intended, a number of alternative expedients were tried. One was the organisation of collective defence pacts, such as the Brussels pact, the forerunner of NATO, in March 1948 and the Warsaw pact in 1955, which availed themselves of Article 51 of the Charter which allows such agreements unless and until the Security Council itself is able to act. Another came with the realisation that the maintenance of peace outside the areas in which the major collective defence pacts confronted each other, especially Europe, could not always be left to the great Powers; they could not collectively enforce peace owing to their political differences, and the non-aligned states in which and between which armed conflict remained a possibility had no wish to see peace enforced or super-

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly, 23rd Session, Document A/7263, 14 October 1968.

<sup>2</sup> For a full analysis and account of UN peacekeeping since 1945 see A. M. James, *The Politics of Peacekeeping*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1970.

vised by the great Powers. In the resulting vacuum, for a time at least, a place was left for voluntary peacekeeping forces made up of small states, not for the purpose of enforcing peace, as in Korea in 1950-3, but to supervise and police a peace agreement to which the belligerents had already agreed. These forces, which the UN Secretary-General, as a supposedly impartial figure, was left to organise, were voluntary in the sense that there was no onus on member-states either to contribute men or military equipment to them or to admit such forces into their own territory. The most notable examples of these peacekeeping forces were the Emergency Force (UNEF) sent to the Middle East after the 1956 Suez crisis to observe the ceasefire on the Egyptian side of the Israeli-Egyptian border and the Congo Force (ONUC) which had the much more difficult task of establishing law and order and securing the withdrawal of foreign forces from the Congo (later Zaire) after the declaration of its independence by Belgium in July 1960.

Although some of ONUC's actions, such as the crushing of the Katanga secessionist movement in the Congo, were viewed with dismay by the Conservative Government of the day, the UN's peacekeeping activities were favourably regarded by Britain, who contributed by providing forces for the UN contingent sent to Cyprus by the Security Council in March 1964, at a time when the UN was feeling the effects of the long financial drain imposed by the Congo operation. The UN conception of peacekeeping was acceptable to Britain for a variety of reasons. It was in accordance with the long-standing British notion of international organisations to keep the peace as having a stabilising and conciliatory role rather than one of enforcement; on this Britain had differed from her closest international partners, notably France, as long ago as the 1920s, during the first years of the League of Nations. Besides this, UN peacekeeping opened up the possibility of a continuing 'world role' for Britain at not too heavy a financial cost and perhaps flattering to a country facing the prospect of diminishing world power; Mr Harold Wilson in particular during his two periods of Labour Government, set special store by the idea of Britain in the UN peacekeeping role.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, UN peacekeeping was in harmony with the British idea that the non-aligned states, especially India and other Commonwealth countries, should be given constructive work to do in building up what Mr Nehru called a 'zone of peace' beyond the interlocking spheres of interest of the great Powers.

Hence British governments during the active peacekeeping phase of the UN (from 1957 until about 1964) expressed satisfaction with the work of UNEF, ONUC and other such enterprises. In fact, Sir

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter 9, p. 297.

Anthony Eden, the British Prime Minister during the Suez crisis in 1956, later claimed responsibility for having brought UNEF into existence by creating a situation in the Middle East in which the United Nations had to intervene! Perhaps in no other country was discussion about the future possibilities of UN peacekeeping as intense as it was in Britain while Dag Hammarskjöld, who was closely associated with the peacekeeping movement, presided over the UN Secretariat. Hence British public and Parliamentary opinion regretted the French and Soviet decisions not to contribute financially to UN peacekeeping forces, though this did not extend in France's case to UNEF, an event which in effect placed the development of these forces into cold storage from 1965 until the renewal of the Arab-Israeli war in October 1973. In the years 1963 to 1965 Britain, as we have seen, went along with the United States in its efforts to set in motion the sanctions provided in Article 19 of the Charter against financial defaulters in the organisation.

But it is with respect to decolonisation and the wider problem of race relations that Britain has come under the strongest fire at UN meetings, especially those dominated, as most now tend to be, by newish member-states from Asia and Africa. It is important to see how justified some of these strictures are. First, it should be pointed out that Chapter XI of the Charter, dealing with non-self-governing territories, commits member-states which possess such territories to facilitate their progress towards *self-government*, which would be interpreted by many if not most international lawyers as implying something less than complete independence. Moreover, this commitment is wholly recommendatory in its detailed application. No metropolitan state is bound to accept any time-table laid down by a UN committee for the attainment of self-government by its colonies as Afro-Asian anti-colonialist and Communist delegates at the United Nations have persistently claimed. Nor is a metropolitan state committed by Article 73 (e) of the Charter to submit *constitutional* as well as other relevant information about the advancement of its dependent territories. Nevertheless, Britain has always been a leader among metropolitan states in accepting successive widenings of the scope of Chapter XI of the Charter, often in the teeth of stubborn resistance by other colonial states, such as Portugal.

First, Britain acceded to the anti-colonialists' demand that information submitted by metropolitan states under Article 73 (e) should go, not to the Secretary-General, as that Article quite distinctly indicates, but to a committee representing member-states and ultimately answerable to the General Assembly. Secondly, Britain acceded to the demand, again not authorised by any literal inter-

pretation of the Charter, that she should be questioned on the information submitted and later that the information presented to the committee should include facts about the constitutional as well as the technical aspects of colonial development. Later, Britain made the far-reaching concession that members of the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, as it gradually came to be called, should be empowered to visit certain of its dependent territories in order to see things for themselves and put questions to the local inhabitants about British rule. No other colonial Power went as far as this.

This situation, however, was wholly transformed in 1960 when on 14 December the General Assembly adopted its Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and subsequently created the equally awkwardly named Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration of December 1960. As a statement of the extent to which the Special Committee, now (1974) representing twenty-four states, has come to dominate all the work of the UN it has been stated that the Committee reports 'have been of increasing size, outnumbering in length those from any other previous or existing subsidiary organ'. The writer goes on: '... they have all but crowded every other item except the most urgent from the agenda of both the General Assembly and the Security Council'.<sup>1</sup> As an example of the General Assembly's attitude towards decolonisation, resulting from the recommendations of the committee of twenty-four, though deeply deplored by Britain, is its notorious resolution 1514 which declared that 'the inadequacy of political, economic, social or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence'.

The 'wind of change', Harold Macmillan's phrase, has struck the world like a tornado. In these circumstances, when Britain has nothing material further to gain from the retention of its dependent territories, it is remarkable that a vitriolic campaign arose in the UN charging it with imperialism because Britain was first in doubt whether tiny states like Fiji or Nauru, with their minute populations, could be counted as truly viable states and capable of entering the United Nations as fully fledged members on a par with the greatest Powers. Another instance of Britain earning what seems the undeserved disapproval of the new anti-colonialist states at the UN was when it dug in its toes and refused to move in the matter of Gibraltar. In Britain's favour it may be said that it seems a curiously inhuman and rigid conception of decolonisation which persuaded

<sup>1</sup> Harold S. Johnson, *Self-determination Within the Community of Nations*, Leyden, Sijthoff, 1967, p. 41.

Spain, and the Afro-Asian and Latin American countries supporting it, that Gibraltar, with its 20,000 people, should form a separate state or join with Spain despite an explicit declaration of their will to the contrary in a referendum held in September 1967. Britain has no economic and scarcely any strategic benefit to gain from clinging on to Gibraltar, or for that matter the Falkland Islands claimed by Argentina. On the other hand, it is hard to see how it can abandon people who have voted almost unanimously for staying British.

Even more important, however, have been the tempestuous clashes at the UN over Rhodesia and the question of race relations in southern Africa generally. As for Rhodesia, there is certainly nothing in the UN Charter which obliges a member-state to use force against one of its colonies—as the African states have repeatedly urged in the case of Rhodesia—even in defence of the fundamental rights and freedoms laid down by the Charter. Moreover, Britain seems correctly to have acted as a loyal UN member when it applied to the Security Council for mandatory sanctions against Rhodesia in December 1966 after repeated efforts to reach a solution by bilateral negotiations. Since that time British governments have operated sanctions as efficiently as any UN member-state and more efficiently than some. It might be argued that Britain, in refusing to use force against the Smith regime, acted in a racially discriminatory manner since the fact that the dominant community in Rhodesia was a white one was a principal factor in ruling out the use of force. But, again, there is nothing in the Charter which compels a state to use force on certain occasions without discrimination against white and black; on the contrary, the injunction *not* to use force or the threat of force in Article 2 (4) is supposed to be applied without discrimination. On any showing Britain, at no little cost to itself, has done all it could short of using force to bring the Smith regime to heel. Possibly this effort would have been more successful if only all UN member-states had done as much.

The cases of South Africa and Portuguese Angola and Mozambique, however, are on quite a different footing. While British governments after 1961 joined with the majority in the General Assembly in condemning South Africa's *apartheid* system and Portuguese colonial policy, and in addition the Labour Governments of 1964–70 voluntarily applied the non-mandatory ban on arms sales to South Africa recommended by the Security Council in 1963, they never supported motions for mandatory military and economic sanctions against either South Africa or Portugal.<sup>1</sup> According to the

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the change in British practice in 1961, see G. L. Goodwin, 'The Political Role of the UN. Some British Views', *International Organisation*, Autumn 1961, Vol. XV, No. 4.



memoirs of Lord George-Brown there was at least one crucial occasion in December 1967 when the Labour Cabinet, of which he was a member as Foreign Secretary, was by no means united in maintaining the ban on the sale of arms to South Africa.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the ban was respected. To have supported mandatory sanctions against the two regimes, the South African and the Portuguese, would have meant claiming that the situation in southern Africa was a threat to peace within the meaning of Article 39 of the Charter. Britain did argue in December 1966 that this was the case when it applied for mandatory sanctions against Rhodesia since there was a possibility that the OAU or some other body representing African opinion might take up arms against Rhodesia as a provocation to them. But it is hard to see that South Africa, at least, which is strong enough to resist almost any attack organised from within Africa and has no obvious intention to attack any other African state, could be regarded as an immediate threat to peace and hence a subject for mandatory sanctions.

But this does not mean that the decision to resume the sale of arms to South Africa, which the Conservative Government seems to have reached on its return to office in June 1970, was not with some justification bitterly criticised by the Labour and Liberal opposition in Parliament even if, by the terms of the Charter, it was evidently legal. Its probable effects, the critics said, in seeming to place Britain on the side of the ruling white minorities in southern Africa could not but weaken its comparatively good standing at the United Nations. An even graver consequence, the critics went on, might be that of driving the independent African states in their desperation into the arms of the Soviet Union or China, just as Egypt and other Arab states were thrown into Russia's arms when the United States and Britain tried to apply pressure on President Nasser in 1954-5 so as to bring him into a Western-oriented Middle East defence pact. However, although Russia naturally exploited British policy in southern Africa for its own propaganda purposes, there was no striking change in the balance of political influence in Africa resulting from that policy.

#### *The balance sheet*

All in all, then, it would seem that the United Kingdom has in reality little to be ashamed of in its United Nations record, bearing in mind, as already pointed out, that this is no doubt more due to

<sup>1</sup> George Brown, *In My Way*, London, Gollancz, 1971, pp. 171-4.

the British national interest in peace and pacification than to any obvious national virtues; and bearing in mind, too, that all states, including Britain, will and must in the last resort act in the national interest, as their constituted governments see that interest, and not as fortuitous two-thirds majorities in the General Assembly prescribe. Certainly, Britain might have done, and could still do, more. It was odd, for instance, to hear Mr Harold Wilson, when he was Prime Minister in 1967, urging other member-states to train and earmark units of their armed forces for service under a UN command; so far as is known, Britain itself has never done so, though the Wilson government did agree to make available in advance the logistic support for six battalions of UN peacekeeping forces. Also it would no doubt pay Britain in the longer run to take a far more active part in shaping the UN and its specialised agencies into effective means for reducing the gap between the rich and poor nations. It was in this respect depressing to hear Prime Minister Heath say at the 25th session of the General Assembly in 1970 that Britain 'would do its best' to reach by 1975 the 1 per cent target of national income agreed to us long ago as the second United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1968 as a contribution towards the economic advancement of the new states. This is not merely a matter of humanitarianism, certainly not charity; it is a matter of hard-headed national interest. No international order is secure which does not command the moral approval of the greater part of mankind, and hardly any state has a greater stake in international order than Britain. The present international order does not command the moral support of the world's poor who constitute the majority of its population. No doubt they are at present too weak to threaten international order. But it cannot be assumed that they will always remain so.

Britain has a peculiarly heavy stake in the kind of world which those who framed the Charter had in mind: a world free from recurrent war and massive armaments, free from racial and international tensions and violence, more prosperous than the present world and certainly for those vast numbers who now live within or below the margins of existence, above all a world which commands the moral support of most people most of the time. At the same time, Britain has its own national interests and the right, perhaps duty, to pursue them, like other states. British governments therefore have a responsibility to ensure, through UN machinery where appropriate, that their dilemmas and difficulties are well enough understood abroad that member-states of the UN do not ask Britain through their resolutions in the world organisation to act beyond its capacity or against its deepest convictions. The UN does not at once elevate states

so that they live on a higher level of morality or wisdom than they normally do. The most it can do, and British governments have on the whole since the war regarded it in this way, is to help states go about their daily business with rather less friction, conflict and violence than if it did not exist.

## Chapter 11

### THE LONG ROAD TO EUROPE

By the late 1950s one dominant idea in terms of which British politicians, taking their cue from Winston Churchill, had tended to think of foreign policy was plainly in need of revision. This was the notion of Britain as the overlapping area in three international circles, the Commonwealth, the Atlantic community (by which British politicians really meant the United States) and Europe. The idea was that the British world role, still accepted as normal by the Wilson administration of 1964-6, if not of 1966-70, would be easier to play if Britain remained a key member of all three circles. In effect this meant that none of the three circles must become so closely integrated that Britain would be faced with a choice between quitting that circle and losing its footing in one or both of the other two. There was not much risk of closer integration of the first two circles, the Commonwealth and the Atlantic community: in the later 1950s and early 1960s most of the signs pointed in the opposite direction. But Europe, meaning in reality western Europe, the Europe of the six Coal and Steel Community (CSCC) countries, went on getting more integrated after the failure of the European Defence Community (EDC) in 1954.<sup>1</sup> The result was that Britain was faced with a choice. By 1970, or even before, in reality there was nowhere else for it to go but into the Europe of the Six, so unconvincing had the other two circles become as homes of last resort. In fact, there was little choice for Britain left had politicians and the public realised it. Had the Six realised it (though France at least seemed to do so) they could have made the fee for British entry into the European communities even higher than they did.

We have dealt in a previous chapter with the centrifugal forces increasingly at work in the Commonwealth as the process of decolonisation developed.<sup>2</sup> There never had been a convincing case for any scheme of political unification in the Commonwealth; the nationalistic impulses which had created the Commonwealth even before 1939 ruled that solution out. With the growth of the newly decolonised Commonwealth after 1945 the divergences between the political attitudes of the Afro-Asian Commonwealth countries and those of the old Dominions and Britain not only excluded close political ties but produced the sharpest differences in policies on

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup> See above, Chapter 7.

current international affairs. The quarrel over Rhodesia and the Smith declaration of independence in November 1965 symbolised that divide.

Strategically, the Commonwealth lost whatever unity it had with Britain's inability after the Second World War to offer any protection against external attack to sister Commonwealth states and even, with the abandonment of Britain's east of Suez policy in January 1968, in times of internal political unrest. The same was true economically. Long ago, in the 1930s, the old white Commonwealth had banded together under the cover of the old Ottawa agreements of 1932 against the world economic depression. After 1945 Britain was too poor herself to give much assistance to the poor countries which now began to make up the bulk of Commonwealth states, although most of its foreign aid—some £200 million in the 1960s—went to those countries. Britain moreover now had to rely, not on the export of cheap shirts and coal to the Commonwealth but of expensive manufactured goods which most of the new Commonwealth was too poor to buy. As Britain's exports to Western Europe rose its exports to the Commonwealth fell—from 45 per cent of the total in 1945 to 25 per cent in 1960. The Commonwealth remained and no doubt would long remain a useful diplomatic contrivance; it certainly continued to carry powerful emotional overtones for the British people. But it never had been a convincing international home for Britain.

The Atlantic community really meant for British politicians the old Anglo-American 'special relationship' dating back to the First World War if not earlier, plus as many liberal democratic states in Western Europe as cared to join under the NATO umbrella against the perceived threat of Soviet aggression. Britain, as we have seen, played a notable role in the organisation of United States economic and military power for the recovery and defence of western Europe in the late 1940s and 1950s.<sup>1</sup> Britain also had an effective part to play in moderating headstrong American attitudes in the early and middle years of the Cold War and in pressing for tension-easing talks with the Russians, especially during the premiership of Harold Macmillan (1957-63). The value of Britain to American foreign policy in those years was evidenced by the efforts taken by official America to mend the breach between the two countries caused by the Suez crisis in 1956. Although the Eisenhower administration was reportedly shocked by the Anglo-French 'armed action' (as it was called) against Egypt in that year, it co-operated smoothly with the British only two years later in defending Lebanon and Jordan against alleged subversion by Egypt.

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapters 3 and 6

But the Anglo-American relationship was against all the logic of power and world strategic developments. As Britain plunged into one economic crisis after another in the 1960s while the American giant topped all the world's economic tables, as America raced on towards space exploration hand in hand with the Soviet Union while Britain lagged far behind, all notion of equality on which the special relationship seemed to rest was visibly eroded. Moreover, after the Cuba missile crisis of 1962 the United States and the Soviet Union began their *détente* which transformed world politics and in the process swept both super-Powers further and further away from their allies on both sides of the old Iron Curtain. The architect of that *détente*, or at least of its early stages, on the western side, President J. F. Kennedy, though an admirer of Britain and cosmopolitan enough to win more approval as a world statesman abroad than at home, did not doubt his ability to conduct, not only American, but western, policy with the Soviet Union without feeling the need for the United Kingdom as an auxiliary.

The British role as a mediator in the Cold War vanished with the passing of the Cold War itself. With the advent of Lyndon B. Johnson to the White House after Kennedy's assassination in November 1963 a further nail was driven into the coffin of the 'special relationship'. Johnson took few pains to strengthen his relations either with Britain or with his other NATO allies in Europe, never once crossing the Atlantic during his Presidency to see them. No responsible person in Britain, certainly not Labour Left-wingers who were hostile to joining the European communities, believed in the desirability or possibility of an organic association with the United States, even when relations between the two countries were on a more equal basis. Hardly anyone of importance in the United States wanted it. By the 1960s Lord Chalfont, Minister for disarmament in the Labour Government, was speaking to the point when he said that Britain had to think, not so much of relations between itself and the United States, as of relations between the United States and Europe, of which Britain was now and henceforward a part.<sup>1</sup>

### *The relaunching of Europe*

Britain had been brought a step nearer Europe politically by the government's agreement after the failure of EDC in August 1954 to station the so-called British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) in Germany and by the creation of West European Union (WEU) consisting of the six ECSC states (Benelux, Federal Germany, France and Italy) and

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 10 October 1967.

Britain.<sup>1</sup> But all this was on the level of traditional international organisation: there was nothing federal or supranational about WEU. But among the Six the federal impulse continued despite the EDC failure. In Messina, Sicily, in June 1955 the Foreign Ministers of the Six agreed to submit proposals by the three Benelux states for a common market in all commodities between themselves and for an atomic energy pool to an inter-governmental committee with Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Foreign Minister, as chairman. This committee worked in Brussels from July 1955 until April 1956 and produced a report which was discussed in Venice by the Foreign Ministers of the Six at the end of May 1956.<sup>2</sup> At the Venice meeting the Spaak report was adopted 'as a basis for negotiations to work out a treaty setting up a general common market and a treaty to create a European organisation for atomic energy'. The negotiations themselves began in Brussels on 26 June, again under Spaak's chairmanship, and ran into difficulties over French claims that social, as well as commercial and tariff, policies must be harmonised in the common market treaty and that overseas territories related in some way to signatory states must be associated with that treaty. These issues were dealt with at a further meeting of Foreign Ministers in Paris in October and in talks between Dr Adenauer and the French Prime Minister, Guy Mollet, in November. The two treaties creating the Common Market and Euratom were then signed in Rome on 25 March 1957 and came into effect on 1 January 1958.

Although the undertakings in the Rome treaty to create a uniform external tariff for the Six and progressively to abolish customs and quotas between them was what principally concerned Britain and the treaty was often referred to in Britain as the 'common market treaty', the aim of the Six, as Article I of the treaty makes clear, was 'to establish among themselves a European economic community', and this, according to the preamble, was intended as a step towards political unification. The common market was in fact merely one of two means for promoting within the territories of the Six a 'harmonious development of economic activities, a continuous and balanced expansion, an increased stability, an accelerated raising of the standard of living and closer relations between its member states'. The other means, in the words of the treaty, was the 'progressive approximation of the economic policies of members'. This was to take the form, over a transitional period of twelve to fifteen years, of the gradual abolition of obstacles to the free movement of persons, services and capital within the Community, the inauguration

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 167-70.

<sup>2</sup> A translated summary of the Spaak report is given in Planning No. 405 (Political and Economic Planning), London, December 1957.

of common policies for agriculture and transport, the adoption of procedures to co-ordinate economic policies and prevent disequilibria in the balance of payments and the control of competition so as to prevent 'distortions'. In order to facilitate the smooth working of the Community a Social Fund was to be established to finance the resettlement of workers and such retraining as might be needed as a result of changes in the economic pattern of the Community. A European Investment Bank was to be created for granting loans on a non-profit basis to finance new activities and the modernising of old ones and to assist the less developed areas within the Community. Moreover, territories outside Europe which were associated with the European Economic Community (EEC) were to be assisted from an Overseas Development Fund into which the Six were committed to pay the equivalent of \$581 million within the first five years.

The meaning of the Rome treaty for Britain was momentous though this was not officially admitted for some time; if successful it would bring together the six states of western Europe into an exclusive economic and commercial union consisting of almost 200 million of the most advanced people in the world and Britain would be shut out. However, during the Spaak talks in 1955-6 it was still too early for British Ministers to abandon their long-ingrained hostility towards supranationalism—and without doubt the Rome treaties were blueprints for two supranational agencies, the EEC itself and Euratom. Besides, the mere fact that a common tariff, if Britain were to join the EEC, would convert Commonwealth Preference into discrimination against the Commonwealth was enough in itself to damn it in British eyes. A British representative who attended the Spaak committee therefore withdrew at the end of 1955 when discussion turned from the question of the *how* of the EEC to the question of *whether*. Since, however, there was no prospect of ignoring this new development for a country like Britain which did at least one sixth (and that proportion was increasing yearly) of its trade with intending members of the EEC, Britain proposed at a Ministerial meeting of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) in July 1957 that possible forms of association between the Six and the other eleven OEEC members should be examined by a study group, and that particular regard should be paid to the possibility of a free trade area which might include the Six as a single-tariff entity. In October 1957 the Council of the OEEC agreed to establish a free trade area such as Britain wanted and appointed an inter-governmental Ministerial committee to carry on detailed negotiations about it. The chairman of the committee, the British Paymaster General, Reginald Maudling, had been appointed



special co-ordinator on free trade area questions by the British Government.

A British outline for a European free trade area had been launched as early as February 1957.<sup>1</sup> The essence of the scheme was an undertaking by member-states to eliminate in respect of each other's products all protective duties and other commercial restrictions including quantitative controls. Each member, however, would be entirely free to determine its tariff on imports from outside the area, subject to any previous international engagements by which it was bound. Meanwhile, the EEC would be evolving a single uniform external tariff on imports from outside the free trade area of which it would form a component part; the uniform tariff would ultimately represent the arithmetic average of the four customs areas making up the Community—Federal Germany, France, Italy and the three Benelux states taken together—and could not be changed except by common consent. The British free trade area would therefore have left Commonwealth Preferences unaffected. Britain also rejected for the proposed free trade area the far-reaching plans for economic integration favoured by the Six. While in the British scheme economic co-operation would develop within the area 'over a period of years', no advance commitment to move in that direction was provided for. A further difference between the British proposals and the aims of the Six was that, whereas the latter intended to include all goods and services within the scope of the Community, the free trade area was to be confined to industrial products; in fact, its title, Britain suggested, should be the European Industrial Free Trade Area. The British Government was resolved to oppose the free entry of agricultural and horticultural products so as to safeguard British farmers and Commonwealth growers.

Finally, the British proposals were firmly opposed to the supranational features of the EEC as a model for the free trade area. According to the British paper the free trade area was definitely to be established within the OEEC, in which national sovereignty had been strictly respected since its foundation in 1948. Departures from the rule of unanimity in making decisions were allowed only in certain 'carefully defined matters'. In the Rome treaty, on the other hand, supranationalism was clearly indicated at the end of the road, though the road itself was studded with concessions to national sovereignty and there were even exits by which signatories could leave the highway if they so wished. Ultimate authority still rested with a Council consisting of government delegates. Unlike the ECSC Council which mediated between the Community and governments, the EEC Council was to determine basic policy, give precision

<sup>1</sup> *Negotiations for a European Free Trade Area*, Cmnd. 641 of 1959.

to the general provisions of the Rome treaty and have authority to amend it. In general, most Council decisions had to be unanimous during the first phase, to last four years; thereafter qualified majorities became the rule, so that at the end of the transition period a member-state could in theory be overruled on matters of economic, financial or commercial policy. Everyone knew, however, that it would be many years before any such sizeable state as France or Italy could be effectively forced to comply with Council decisions which cut across deeply felt convictions about national interests.

Moreover, although the Council, that is, the Ministerial element, was the policy-making body, the power to make proposals would normally lie with a Commission of nine. The Commission was to be independent of governments although each member government had a veto on the appointment of its members. In addition, governments could compulsorily refer disputes concerning the interpretation or application of the treaty to the Court of Justice, which was to be the same as that used by the ECSC and Euratom. The legislative element was provided by a Parliamentary Assembly consisting of delegates appointed by the Parliaments of member-states according to their size and importance; this, again, was to be the same as the Assembly of the coal and steel community and Euratom. The Assembly could dismiss the Commission by a two-thirds vote but had no powers similar to those exercised in the other two communities by which it could control the Council. By Article 138 of the Rome treaty the Assembly was charged to draw up proposals for its election by direct suffrage but this was envisaged as a somewhat remote eventuality. In this structure therefore the supranational elements were carefully controlled by checks and balances, though with the passing of the transitional period the power remaining with governments would dwindle. But, whether at the beginning or the end, the implied loss of sovereignty was more than Britain, the Scandinavian states or the European neutrals were prepared for.

Discussions in the Maudling committee in 1958 inevitably brought out the basic differences between the British and the Six's philosophies of integration. The most intractable issue sprang from the fears of the Six that diversions of foreign trade from high to low tariff states within the free trade area would disturb the balanced economy they were trying to create in the EEC. The British solution for this problem was that goods should be regarded as originating externally, and hence denied the advantages of free trade within the area, if less than 50 per cent of their value was created within the area. The Six objected that this was not administratively practical and it would certainly have imposed a heavy load on the administration of the area. A formula suggested by the Italian Foreign

Trade Minister would have imposed compensatory taxes on imports from outside, when these were sold within the area, if the tariffs of the country importing them in the first place exceeded a specified margin on either side of an agreed norm. No more success was achieved with the 'sector approach' in which the different commodities in regard to which a particular country faced difficulties were to be treated separately. When all the various interests drew up their claims for exceptional treatment, it was apparent that any such agreement would have to be so weighted with reservations as to defy the best efforts of administrators. These differences, and many more, were such that by the end of 1958, when Mr Maudling drew up his report, the committee had in effect come to a standstill, despite the considerable concession Britain made in agreeing to abandon her comparatively high tariff policy when she entered the free trade area.

Apart from the clash of inter-governmental and supranational approaches to the problem of integration, Anglo-French tensions permeated the Maudling talks, reflecting British suspicion that France intended to use its friends in the Six to force Britain to its knees and French fears that Britain had concocted the free trade area scheme merely in order to wreck the EEC at its birth. Political crisis in France also played its part. When the Maudling committee first met in January 1958 the Fourth Republic in France was passing through its death throes and finally expired in the army officers' rising in Algeria in May. General de Gaulle, who left retirement to become President on 1 June, was thereafter too preoccupied in turning France into a plebiscitary autocracy and too out of touch with the details of European integration to play any part in effecting compromises with Britain, even had he wanted them, despite the anxiety of the other five Community states for a solution. Moreover, de Gaulle was in no position to oppose French industrial interests, which stood to lose if the Federal German market were open to all seventeen OEEC states instead of merely EEC members, especially before popular endorsement of his proposals for constitutional reform. The outcome was an announcement issued by the Gaullist Minister of Information, Jacques Sustrère, at the end of a fruitless two-day session of the Maudling committee on 13 and 14 November, which repudiated the OEEC Council decision to negotiate the free trade area. Two days later Maudling postponed *sine die* any further meeting of the committee and although a conciliatory statement was made after talks between Dr Adenauer and de Gaulle at Bad Kreuznach on 26 November, this reaffirmed the Six's intention to carry out the first 10 per cent reduction in the internal tariffs of the Community on 1 January 1959 despite the incomplete state of the free trade area negotiations.

During the Maudling negotiations the Scandinavian, Swiss and Austrian representatives generally sided with Britain against the Six. When the negotiations failed, the possibility of forming a free trade area limited to the 'outer' group was raised. With strong encouragement from Sweden, officials of the six states, Austria, Britain, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, met to consider further co-operation in Oslo in December 1958 and, with a free trade area of their own now definitely in view, in Stockholm on 18 March and 1 June. Ministers of these six, now joined by Portugal to make seven, then met again in Stockholm on 20 and 21 July and approved the plans for a European Free Trade Association (EFTA) which their officials had drawn up. The Stockholm convention creating the Association was signed on 4 January 1960 and came into effect on 3 May. Although EFTA was valuable to its members on its own account as a trading device, its primary aim was rather to keep the Seven together during further negotiations with the EEC Six. 'The primary purpose of founding it', said a British Minister, 'was to enable us to reach agreement with the other countries.'<sup>1</sup>

With this end in view the Stockholm convention was kept as simple as possible. The abolition of obstacles to internal trade, which was to begin in July 1960 and continue alongside the development of the EEC until free trade was achieved in 1970, was limited to tariffs and quotas, with provision for a 'complaints procedure', as in the original British plan presented to the OEEC, to ensure some slight co-ordination of economic policies. The convention was reticent, however, about freedom of movement for other factors than goods and even more so about the co-ordination of social and financial policies.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, even as a bargaining tool EFTA was weak. The member of the Six which the Association sought most to influence, France, did little trade with EFTA states with the exception of Britain. EFTA's trade with the EEC was more valuable than the trade between its members.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, EFTA could only be of limited value to Britain if it became a permanent organisation. Most of the trade done by Britain with other EFTA countries was already duty-free or subject to low duties and the Association's economic effects would therefore be small. Nor did powerful industries exist among the six other EFTA states capable of giving the competitive thrust to British manufacturing which the EEC could. The somewhat hasty formation of EFTA thus left the problem much

<sup>1</sup> Edward Heath, 640 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1669 (18 May 1961).

<sup>2</sup> Treaty Series No. 30 (1960) Cmd. 1026.

<sup>3</sup> PEP, *The European Free Trade Association. A Preliminary Appraisal*, by Miriam Camps, London, September 1959, Table I, p. 36.

as it was even if it did not harden the division of Europe into two distinct trading blocs.

### *Britain's change of course, 1961*

... of the west European participation were making themselves felt by British Ministers. The point was bluntly stated by Mr Edward Heath, the Lord Privy Seal, in May when he said that 'we now see opposite to us on the mainland of Europe a large group comparable in size only to the United States and the Soviet Union, and as its economic power increases, so will its political influence'.<sup>1</sup> There was no doubt that the EEC, so far from being a mere flash in the pan, as so many British politicians had thought of European integration schemes, was rapidly becoming a success. The reduction of internal tariffs proved less difficult than had been expected, with the result that the whole process of transition was speeded up. By the end of 1960, that is, a mere three years after the signature of the Rome treaty, tariff cuts amounted to 30 per cent, that is, the figure originally supposed to be reached after four years; cuts at the end of 1961 were now expected to total between 40 and 50 per cent, as compared with a rise of only 16 per cent in EFTA's internal trade in the same year. Even more ominously for Britain, the rate of economic growth in the EEC states was rapidly outstripping the British; between 1954 and 1960 total output in the EEC states grew faster, except in Belgium, than in Britain. Industrial output grew by over a half in the EEC states in that period but only a fifth in Britain, although agricultural production grew at much the same rate, about 13 per cent.<sup>2</sup> The strength of the EEC also began to attract funds from the United States which had previously gone to Britain. Before the EEC, over a half of American investment in Europe came to Britain, but in 1960 only 41 per cent did so while over 50 per cent was expected to go to the Six.<sup>3</sup> Part of the EEC's economic success, which was less shared by Belgium, could have been put down to extraneous forces, such as the devaluation of the French franc and the influx of refugees from East to West Germany. Nevertheless, this growing-giant of 169 million people, with its powerful appeal to American business and public opinion, threatened to by-pass Britain and throw it into the background.

By contrast, Britain's economic situation remained gloomy in the

<sup>1</sup> 640 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1388 (17 May 1961).

<sup>2</sup> HANSO, *Britain and the European Communities, Background to the Negotiations*, London, 1961, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> 640 H.C. Deb. 5s. Col. 1388 (17 May 1961). Statement by Mr Heath.

extreme, however varied the authoritative diagnoses of its causes and prescriptions for its cure. The continuing struggle to balance the country's international account with the rest of the world would certainly not be assisted by the division of Europe into two trading blocs, with Britain shut out of the richer and more-powerful of the two. Moreover, many analysts of Britain's economic malaise felt that it was subjective factors on both 'sides' of industry which were responsible for 'stop-go' economic policies and the general British tendency to fall behind in all the indices of economic progress: the lack of enterprise and fear of change in business board rooms and the restrictionist mentality and sluggishness on the shop floor. There was at least a chance that British membership of the EEC, though it might drive some of the more backward firms out of business, could administer a healthy shock to industry without which it might continue to stagnate and Britain, once the workshop of the world, would become the southern Italy of Europe.

Perhaps the economic pros and cons of joining the EEC were, at worst, evenly balanced. But there could be no doubt that the EEC bloc of states, by reason of its size and economic strength, would become a new force in world politics, fit to bear comparison with either of the super-Powers, through which the diplomatic lines of communications in future would pass, leaving Britain as an insignificant 'has been', living with its memories in its little backwater. The long service which Britain had rendered, or tried to render, as a mediator between the Communist and non-Communist worlds reached a dismal end in May 1960 at the abortive Paris 'summit' conference at which the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, had momentarily brought together Mr Khrushchev and his own reluctant allies, President Eisenhower and de Gaulle only to find the Soviet leader quit the conference at once and return home on the alleged ground of Eisenhower's refusal to apologise for sending an American spy plane over the Soviet Union which the Russians shot down. Henceforward, and especially after the Cuba missile crisis of October 1962, the United States seemed to regard itself as capable of conducting its relations with the Soviet Union without British intervention.

If the United States required European assistance at all, it seemed more likely to look for it in Federal Germany than in Britain, or for that matter France. Germany was entirely without that obsessive dislike of America which characterised de Gaulle; it co-operated cheerfully in support of the American proposal for a multinational nuclear force in the 1960s which de Gaulle bitterly detested and about which the British attitude was, to say the least, equivocal. Germany was firmer in its anti-Communism than Britain and was at

all times a more faithful and acquiescent ally than either Britain or France and was more economically successful than either. Added to which was the fact that Germany under Adenauer was a more consistent supporter of a federated Europe, with which Americans at this time were wholly in sympathy, than Britain and even more than France. No British Government in the early 1960s which wanted to keep Britain at the 'top table' in the diplomatic world could fail to see that a hostile attitude towards European integration was likely to transform the old Anglo-American 'special relationship' into a far more unpredictable and formidable American-German 'special relationship'. Finally, whereas Britain and France persisted, largely out of mistrust of America, in retaining and developing their own nuclear deterrents, which seemed to many Americans both wasteful and provocative to the Soviet Union, the Germans seemed quite content to rely on the American deterrent, modified as it might be by the MLF, first suggested by Secretary of Defence McNamara at the NATO Council on 14 December 1962. In the same year, 1962, Secretary McNamara, at a meeting in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in June, condemned the British and French deterrents in rather self-contradictory language as both dangerous and lacking in credibility. In April 1960 McNamara's point had been sharpened by the failure and consequent abandonment of the British home-made missile, *Blue Streak*, for discharging nuclear weapons from the V-bombers. In December 1962 Prime Minister Macmillan presented the somewhat ludicrous spectacle of himself going to meet President J. F. Kennedy to ask him to provide Polaris missiles for a British submarine fleet. But at least Mr Macmillan seemed to recognise that all this evidence of Britain's declining capacity to make its independence convincing pointed to the need for an early approach to the question of membership in the European communities.

But there were of course strong arguments on the other side, or rather considerations that would have to be respected if an application was to be made, as it was by the Macmillan Government in August 1961, to initiate negotiations with the Six under Article 237 of the Rome treaty to see if arrangements could be made to meet Britain's 'special interests' if and when it joined the EEC. Perhaps the least important of these was the obligation Britain had assumed by the EFTA convention of 1959. Of the seven EFTA states Denmark and Norway would probably seek full membership of the EEC with Britain; associate membership under Article 238 of the treaty was ruled out for all three countries in that it involved almost all the drawbacks of full membership without conferring any of the benefits. Austria and Portugal might, for different reasons, be eligible for associate membership despite the common assumption during the

drafting of the Rome treaty that this status was not for European countries. Switzerland and Sweden, however, as traditional neutrals would have some difficulty in joining the EEC, which could be regarded as a kind of sub-group of NATO, without some provision to exclude them from its political implications. The case of Finland, too, to whose associate membership of EFTA the Soviet Union had not objected, was a hard one. Britain particularly wished to see Finland strengthen its ties with western Europe but during November 1961 Moscow began to warn Finland and indirectly Sweden, too, against any wavering in their neutrality. The necessary assurances from Helsinki were forthcoming and, with them, hope faded that before long Finland might safely consort with the West.

Of the other three problems, agriculture hardly raised more difficulty than British obligations to EFTA. Agricultural policy was still being worked out by the Six in 1961 and there was every likelihood, despite liberalising tendencies to the contrary in the Communities, that the intention would be to keep farm prices higher than world levels. British farming was on balance at least as efficient as continental and, judged by the standard of food prices during 1959-60, British farmers would probably get higher prices for cereals and possibly also for meat if Britain joined the EEC, though the reverse might be true for eggs and milk.<sup>1</sup> It was true that the annual price review, at which the government decided its scale of support for British farming, promised somewhat greater assistance than the continental method of financing the farmer; under the latter it was the consumer who paid for artificially maintained prices. But if the general tone of the British economy was improved through membership of the EEC, agriculture might be expected to benefit from the resulting increased consumer demand for food. Horticulture, however, was a different matter since it was likely to suffer from the higher efficiency and better marketing systems of the Dutch and Italian growers.

The most delicate problem, secondly, remained that of the Commonwealth. During visits by the Commonwealth Relations Minister to Australia, Canada and New Zealand in the summer of 1961 acute local anxiety was conveyed to him about the British decision to open negotiations with the EEC. The communiqué issued after the talks in Ottawa, for instance, stated that the Canadian Government 'expressed grave concern about the implications of possible negotiations between Britain and the EEC and about the political and economic effects which British membership in the EEC would have on Canada and the Commonwealth as a whole'. The problem was twofold, assuming that Britain pursued her application

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 'The Farmer's Price', 12 July 1961.



to join the EEC whatever the consequences for the political solidarity of the Commonwealth: that of the optimum terms which Britain could obtain from the Six for the protection of its trade with the rest of the Commonwealth and that of the process by which Britain should decide whether these terms were acceptable. The second of these issues could not be disposed of by the traditional formula, 'consultation', in view of the strong concern of Commonwealth governments and the powerful interests and emotions involved. The Government therefore undertook in the Commons resolution on the EEC which it sponsored on 3 August 1961 not to enter into any agreement with the Six which had not been approved by the House 'after full consultation with other Commonwealth countries by whatever procedure they may generally agree'.<sup>1</sup> This phrase left the door open if necessary for a special Commonwealth conference on the subject, which the Opposition in fact asked for. There was no question, however, that the ultimate decision would rest with Britain and the question remained whether the more closely concerned Commonwealth countries would conclude that consultation was likely to be little more than a formality once Britain decided that the terms offered by the Six were acceptable.

The substantive issue, however, was the effect of a common European tariff, even with all the qualifications and loopholes Britain could secure through negotiation, on British trade with the rest of the Commonwealth, including still dependent territories. Excluding South Africa, the proportion of total Commonwealth exports going to Britain either duty free or with a preferential margin fell from 29.3 per cent to 23.9 per cent from 1954 to 1960 while the proportion of total Commonwealth exports sent to the EEC and continental EFTA countries rose from 13.8 per cent to 14.8 per cent. During the same period 12.8 per cent of total Commonwealth imports came from the EEC and continental EFTA states in 1960 compared with 10.7 per cent in 1954 whereas between these years the proportion of imports from Britain fell from 26 per cent to 21.5 per cent.<sup>2</sup> However, the importance of trade with Britain to the different Commonwealth states was by no means uniform. Among the dependent or newly independent countries, Mauritius sold 82 per cent of its exports to Britain, Sierra Leone 70 per cent and Nigeria 51 per cent. Of the older Commonwealth countries, New Zealand marketed 56 per cent of its exports in Britain, including almost all of its sales abroad of basic foodstuffs, mutton, lamb, butter and cheese. Australia, Ceylon and India sent almost one third of their exports to Britain.

<sup>1</sup> 645 H.C. Deb. 5s. Cols 1785-6.

<sup>2</sup> IIASO, *Britain and the European Communities*, p. 35.

Clearly the problems of such diverse intra-Commonwealth trade would have to be dealt with separately. For some dependent territories associate status within the EEC could be applied for, similar to that which France had secured for its dependent territories. For independent countries, however, such as Ceylon and India, the tea exports of which to Britain were in question, and Ghana, the staple export of which, cocoa, was involved, associate status might not be available. The Government therefore proposed either allowing free entry for such products into Britain while fixing the Common Market tariff for the rest of the Community at a level appropriate to the interests of all concerned, or setting the Common Market tariff on all such interests at zero. The second major problem, raw materials, raised less difficulty since the common tariff was already zero, but special arrangements would have to be made in regard to aluminium, wood pulp, newsprint, lead and zinc, which were of special importance to Commonwealth countries and where the common tariff was substantial. Manufactures from old Commonwealth countries, especially Australia, Canada and New Zealand, and low-cost manufactured imports from Asia and Hong Kong were also a special problem; these would have to be dealt with either by compromises struck on a commodity-by-commodity basis or, in the case of Asian imports, by some form of associate status. Perhaps the greatest difficulty, however, was that of temperate food imports into Britain from the developed Commonwealth countries, especially the dairy produce and meat of New Zealand. Much would depend here on how agricultural policy developed in the EEC, and there were in addition certain British contractual obligations with the Commonwealth, providing a stable basis for food exports, which had to be taken into account.

Finally, reference might be made to a rather more abstract doubt about British membership of the EEC which perplexed those who had to deal with the problem, namely the possible partial or total loss of sovereignty involved in joining the EEC and the other supra-national communities in western Europe. We have seen in a previous chapter how, contrary perhaps to logic, belief in the continuing feasibility of national sovereignty seemed to be strengthened in Britain by the country's survival as one of the major victorious Powers in the Second World War, whereas all six EEC states had either been occupied in the course of the war or at the end of it.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Britain was characterised by a highly centralised system of government in which there was hardly any 'sharing of sovereignty' such as might be found in Federal Germany or the United States, which strongly favoured European integration and had had

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter 5.

from its birth experience of the federal devolution of power. It is not a coincidence that France, having somewhat the same kind of unitary constitution as Britain, proved more resistant to supra-nationalism than any of its partners in the Six.

Hence both the main political parties in Britain, Conservative and Labour, feared the loss of sovereignty through the EEC and the other European communities; Right-wing Conservatives with strongly developed nationalist or imperialist convictions scorned the whole idea of the island's age-old independence being swallowed up in a continental regime while Left-wing Labour leaders feared that if British sovereignty was merged with that of the Six their ability to use Parliament for social reform at home and the betterment of life in the poor countries would be destroyed. It was easy enough to insist on the other side of the argument that the loss of sovereignty contemplated by the Rome treaty was gradual and in the first few years at least virtually imperceptible. The fact was that larger and larger areas of Britain's freedom to determine its own affairs would move into other hands. Despite the growing interest since the war in ideas of world federation, no one had satisfactorily explained how democratic self-government could be maintained in a world of administrative units of increasing size.

The British Government, in determining to open talks with the Six in 1961 with a view to membership of the communities, was supported by some of the more enterprising organs of British opinion. The *Guardian*, *Observer* and *News Chronicle* (so long as it existed) were early converts to the cause of joining the Six. They were followed by the *Daily Herald*, with qualifications and until it discontinued publication, the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*, while *The Times* tended rather to sit on the fence while a strong campaign against the EEC was conducted in the Beaverbrook Press. The British newspaper reader was thus presented with an increasingly favourable view of the Six. Industry was not hostile, though its general mood seemed to be one of waiting for a positive lead from the Government. Although high-cost firms working in lines competitive with the industries of the Six would clearly stand to lose if Britain joined the EEC, the attractions of a free market comparable in size to that of Russia and the United States were strong. Farm interests on the other hand, especially in horticulture, were suspicious. Three quarters of the farmer's net income came from deficiency payments by the Exchequer which would cease if British agriculture was financed by the same system as practised on the continent. The farmer would, of course, be compensated by higher food prices as the British subsidy arrangements were phased out, but this was prospective whereas their existing advantages were in the here and now.

Since any movement towards removing trade protection generally provokes more alarm from those expecting to suffer than support from those likely to benefit, the political parties (except for the Liberals who consistently backed British entry into Europe) and Parliament remained on the whole cold to the idea of reversing the British stand. The two main parties made little reference to Europe during the general election campaign in October 1959. The new Conservative Government resulting from that election seemed at first bent on improving British links with the Six but little was made public. A visit by the Prime Minister, Mr Macmillan, to Bonn in August 1960 was without much subsequent effect in Paris and during the following year no major debate on Europe was held in the Cabinet. During a two-day debate on foreign policy on 17 and 18 May 1961 the Lord Privy Seal, Mr Heath, indicated that the Cabinet were contemplating an approach to the Six but it was plain that both Government and Opposition parties were divided on the issue, the Conservative Right-wing forming a curious alliance in opposition to entry into the EEC with the Labour Left. The Conservative Right, maintaining the imperial traditions of the past, deplored the prospective loss of British independence and damage to the Commonwealth while their Labour allies believed that entry into the EEC would inhibit a future Labour Government in pursuing a socialist policy and would commit Britain to support the allegedly reactionary policies of the ruling Catholic groups in western Europe. Labour opposition to the EEC, like Conservative, also derived from anxiety about the effects of entry on the Commonwealth.

Leaders of both political parties seemed impressed with the likely adverse consequences of remaining outside the EEC but were conscious of the long-standing isolationism of their followers. On the whole, the Conservatives, being the party in office, had less difficulty in accepting the case for British membership of the EEC if terms satisfactory to the Commonwealth, British agriculture and other EFTA countries could be negotiated. At the annual conference of the Conservative Party in October 1961 Mr Heath, two days after making the opening statement on the British application for membership of the EEC before Ministers of the Six in Paris, emphasised that the time for making up one's mind was short; if the moment was not seized, he said, it might be many years before another opportunity came. The Minister for Commonwealth Relations, Mr Duncan Sandys, denied that it was a question of choosing between Commonwealth and Common Market; while the Commonwealth could not provide the huge internal market of the Six and a Commonwealth customs union found very little support, Britain, he said, having a far more effective economy if it joined the Six, would be

a more useful Commonwealth member. Despite strong opposition from Sir Derek Walker-Smith and Lord Hinchingbrooke, a resolution supporting the Government's decision to apply conditionally for membership was adopted with few dissentients.<sup>1</sup>

The hostility shown towards the EEC at the Labour Party annual conference a week before was a striking contrast. Although a resolution unconditionally opposing entry was rejected, the successful composite resolution on Europe was framed in the markedly negative sense of disapproving entry except on the most stringent terms, which included the retention of 'freedom to use public ownership as a means to social progress in Britain'. Most speakers showed a strong mistrust of mixing British with continental affairs, deplored any exchange of Commonwealth for European friends and feared the loss of Britain's capability to shape its own affairs. The Parliamentary Party's deputy leader, Mr George Brown, though unable to offer a clear judgement on entry since the terms were still under negotiation, was disposed to favour entry and seemed to regret the Labour Government's decision in 1950 not to support the Schuman plan, which first set Britain apart from the Six. The balance of the economic argument, he concluded, was probably in favour of going in while the political objections were possibly not as strong as had been represented.<sup>2</sup>

#### *The second attempt, 1967*

It is unnecessary here, and in any case space does not allow it, to retrace in detail the negotiations between Britain and the Six to discover the terms of British entry into the EEC which followed upon the Macmillan Government's decision to seek entry in the summer of 1961. That has been adequately done elsewhere;<sup>3</sup> in any case the negotiations proved abortive as a result of President de Gaulle's veto on their continuance, issued unilaterally and apparently without consultation with his five allies at his press conference in Paris on 14 January 1963. It is sufficient to say that during the negotiations no insuperable objection to a successful outcome seem to have been presented; indeed the British Prime Minister, Mr Macmillan, gave it as his opinion in a radio talk on 30 January that the President had interposed his veto, not because the exchanges with Britain were going badly, but because they were going so well as to hold out the hope of a successful conclusion. 'When in the last few weeks', the

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 13 October 1961.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 6 October 1961.

<sup>3</sup> See Miriam Camps, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*. London, OUP, 1964.

Prime Minister said, 'it became clear that the remaining points could be settled, then the French brought the negotiations to a close.'<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, the reasons given by the French President for his veto were far from convincing. It was true enough, as de Gaulle alleged, that Britain was still predominantly an oceanic Power, still tied to the Commonwealth and the United States, and hence might disturb the essentially European character of the three communities as they existed in 1963. Whatever the attitudes of British political leaders, the mass of the people were far from considering themselves as Europeans. Indeed they tended to take umbrage at the whole idea; and the Polaris agreement concluded by Mr Macmillan with the American President at Nassau in December 1962 immediately after visiting de Gaulle, at Rambouillet, which is often said to have touched off the President's veto, aptly reflected the comfort the British still felt in their Atlantic alliance as compared with the claustrophobia which seemed to affect them when coralled in Europe. All this is true enough and might have affected British participation in the EEC had the country been allowed to join. But these were all long-standing British characteristics; they were certainly well known when the negotiations began in Paris in October 1961. Had they constituted the real factor in the gnullist veto they should have been mentioned then.

The more probable influence in de Gaulle's mind in January 1963 was his realisation that his five allies in the European communities were beginning to accept the notion of British membership—some of them, notably Holland, Federal Germany and Italy, made no concealment of their wish to see it achieved—and that there seemed to be no permanent obstacle to its being accomplished. Hence de Gaulle had suddenly to face the fact that if the process of inducing Britain into the communities was successful, not only would the essential character of the community be changed as a result of Britain's still vigorous connections with the Commonwealth and the United States, but, what was of much greater importance to de Gaulle, before long Britain might take France's place as the effective leader of the Eight (Denmark was asking for membership of the EEC along with Britain). France at this time, as its veto on British membership of the Common Market in 1963 showed, and its breach with the other five EEC countries in 1965 showed, too, could generally get away with being the 'odd man out' among the Six. One reason for this was the persistent fact that it was virtually impossible to think of any scheme of integration in western Europe which did not include France. But if Britain joined the communities

<sup>1</sup> Macmillan, *At the End of the Day*, London, Macmillan, 1973, p. 360.

the situation would be entirely different; France would be less able to impose its will on its EEC partners than it had in the past and divisions in the Community would take the form of France, on one side, and Britain, supported by all the rest, on the other. De Gaulle went as far as admitting this in his meeting with Macmillan at Rambouillet in December 1962. 'In the Six', he said, 'France could say "no" even against the Germans; she could stop policies with which she disagreed, because of the strength of her position. Once Britain and all the rest joined the organisation, things would be different'.<sup>1</sup> This was indeed a prospect unsupportable to one so closely identified with the dignity of France as de Gaulle.

It is testimony, however, to the inescapable logic of Britain's movement towards Europe that the Labour Party, which had been anything but enthusiastic towards the European idea before and after the general election on 15 October 1964, which gave them power, was to see their leaders in government inexorably driven towards making a second attempt at entry into the EEC in May 1967. This was despite the fact that the European issue played no major part in the election, that the Labour Prime Minister, Mr Wilson, had never been a convinced European and that for most of his two governments of 1964-70 was, as we have seen earlier, dedicated to the idea of Britain's role as a world rather than strictly European Power.<sup>2</sup> By 1967, however, all the factors that had disposed Mr Macmillan to apply for entry into the EEC were still operative, perhaps in even more powerful strength. Britain had seen six more years of 'stop-go' in the economy. Although Mr Wilson won his majority of five seats in the House of Commons in October 1964 on the basis of his criticism of the oscillating pattern of the economy under the Conservatives from expansion to contraction and back again, the same pattern became evident when Labour was in office. In July 1966, for instance, ten months before Wilson's decision to apply again for membership of the EEC, Britain underwent about the worst 'squeeze' on record. Although the Labour Government had succeeded in redressing an £800 million deficit in the balance of payments which it claimed to have inherited from the Conservatives, by 1966 the same pressures on Britain's international account were becoming evident again. With the added effect of the shortage of oil resulting from the six-day war in the Middle East in June 1967, the Government was forced in November against all its inclinations to devalue the pound sterling by 14.3 per cent. As we have seen in an earlier chapter, this inexorably led in January 1968 to the Government's decision to abandon Britain's 'east of Suez' policy and thus to

<sup>1</sup> Macmillan, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

<sup>2</sup> See above, Chapter 9.

contract its role to that essentially of a European and Mediterranean Power.<sup>1</sup>

By 1967, too, there had been six more years of the Soviet-American *détente* from which Britain, like other European NATO states, was for all practical purposes excluded. The *détente* was strong enough to survive both the Vietnam war, which continued year after year without apparent hope of solution, and the six-day war in the Middle East in June 1967; and this was despite the fact that in each conflict the United States and the Soviet Union supported opposite sides without their increasingly cordial relations being seriously affected. If it was apparent under the Kennedy administration in the United States (1961-3) that Britain was falling so far behind America in economic strength and military power that the two states could hardly be mentioned together as belonging to the same category, under the Johnson administration (1963-8) the divide between Britain and America seemed to grow even wider. During Mr Wilson's premiership Britain remained the United States' most faithful ally, supporting American policy in Vietnam, except for the bombing of North Vietnam, when all the rest of the world seemed to be against it, and sharply dissenting from President de Gaulle when in March 1966 he ordered NATO to quit French soil and took French forces out of NATO. But this was far from rehabilitating the old Anglo-American 'special relationship'. In fact, Mr Wilson, in sharp contrast to his Conservative predecessor, discovered a new source of complaint against the United States which he dramatically used to reinforce his argument for EEC membership, namely the penetration of Britain by American capital. So far had this penetration gone that by 1967 one out of seventeen employed persons in Britain worked in firms predominantly owned by American interests and this proportion was growing. No one doubted that in so far as this brought into Britain some of America's business drive and managerial efficiency the effects were good; but on the other side was the fact that in such American-owned concerns in Britain American interests and preoccupations would undoubtedly prevail over British if circumstances arose in which a choice between the two had to be made. In a speech before the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe in May 1967 Mr Wilson described Europeans, including the British, as being in danger of becoming 'economic helots' of the United States, a condition they could only avoid by binding themselves more closely together.

Moreover, Mr Wilson in his election campaign in October 1964 and thereafter when in government made great play with the current 'white-hot technological revolution' which he contended was taking

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter 9.



place and for which Britain should be energetically preparing itself. But it soon became evident to the most parochial of British politicians that the 'science-based' industries to which Wilson often referred as the spear-head of the technological revolution required the kind of massive market which even the largest of nation-states, with the exception of the super-Powers, could no longer provide. Hence it was the curious experience of the two Labour Governments of 1964-70 that the more they demanded that Britain should exploit and utilise to the full the latest technical advances in industry, mining and manufactures, the more they discovered that entry into the EEC was virtually inescapable.

The Commonwealth difficulties about a British entry into the EEC, of course, remained much as they always had, but this time they seemed to count less with the Government than they had done in 1961. One reason for this was that the centrifugal forces in the Commonwealth, political and economic, which were rapidly eroding its unity in 1961 had gone even further by 1967. Together with that development went a decided cooling of feeling in Commonwealth countries towards Britain and *vice-versa*. In this respect the Rhodesia crisis arising from the unilateral declaration of independence by the Smith regime in November 1965 was a dramatic example.<sup>1</sup> Labour MPs and their supporters who had previously looked to the Commonwealth as an association in which their ideal of equality could apparently be realised were shocked at the extent of the bitterness shown by African leaders against Britain at the United Nations and especially at the Commonwealth conference held in London in September 1966. As for British people less committed than Labour sympathisers to the Commonwealth ideal, the feeling was growing that that association was more of a handicap to Britain than an advantage, a veritable millstone round its neck. Another reason for the diminishing importance of the Commonwealth as an obstacle to British membership of the EEC was that in negotiations with the Six in 1961-2 the Commonwealth problem had by no means proved insuperable. It had certainly played a distinctly minor role in President de Gaulle's veto on British membership in January 1963 and during the 1961-2 talks with the Six the Commonwealth states had begun to adjust themselves to the idea of a changed Commonwealth should Britain at length join the EEC. Some Commonwealth countries had in fact already begun to make adjustments in their policies on the assumption that before long Britain would be joining the Six.

The case for British membership of the European communities was therefore even stronger in 1967 than it had been in 1961, as

<sup>1</sup> Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-70*, p. 284.

was shown by its being supported by Mr Wilson, in no sense a long-term convinced European, and by a favourable vote of 588 in the House of Commons when Mr Wilson asked for approval of his decision to seek membership in May 1967. Whereas the Parliamentary Labour Party had abstained on the vote of 3 August 1961 to support Macmillan's proposal to open negotiations on the terms of membership, in 1967 the Conservative Opposition voted almost unanimously for the Labour Government's motion. The stronger case for British membership was also underlined, though rather paradoxically, when President de Gaulle for the second time vetoed the British application at his press conference on 27 November 1967. On this occasion there was far less reference in his explanation of his action to the maritime and oceanic interests and outlook of Britain, the Anglo-American connection, the Commonwealth and other world-wide British interests. It could hardly be denied that by 1967 Britain had definitely started to qualify as a European state. Now de Gaulle shifted his ground to the arguably more convincing question of the strength of the British economy. Since Britain's endemic economic weakness, culminating in the devaluation decision of 18 November 1967, had been a powerful reason for the Labour Cabinet's new-found enthusiasm for Europe, it was also a ready stick for the French President to beat Britain with and to that end he used it mercilessly at his press conference. Britain, he said, was too weak to join Europe, although that complaint could always be exploited to make out the contrary argument, namely that if Britain was economically weak membership of the European communities was essential to make it strong, and the Six, especially perhaps Germany, had a fundamental interest in seeing that it was restored to a position of economic strength.

But by the time of the second de Gaulle veto in November 1967 quite a different consideration was beginning to affect British people about the European issue, and thereby the politicians, too. So far, British agricultural interests and those of the other EFTA countries and the Commonwealth had loomed largest on the negative side of the argument about British entry into the communities. Now, in 1967, when the Six, after the most strenuous negotiations, had adopted their common agricultural policy (CAP) and that policy had survived the great crisis of the EEC in the last quarter of 1965, the likely impact of membership of the Community on the cost of living in Britain began to predominate. In reality, the three concerns of 1961 which had to be safeguarded—British agriculture, EFTA and the Commonwealth—were, especially the last two, abstract and remote for most British people to be moved by, and even agriculture affected only a small proportion of the working population. In 1961

it is even possible that these interests served more as a cover for deeper psychological aversions to 'going into Europe' than as substantive objections in their own right. In 1967, however, and the period between 1967 and the end of the Labour administration in 1970, fears about the effects of Britain joining the EEC on the cost of living began to occupy major attention, and these fears were far more lively and intimate than worry about EFTA and the Commonwealth, especially as, with the approach of the 1970s, inflation in Britain began to dominate public and political opinion.

This helps to explain why, after de Gaulle's second veto, the mood again in Britain tended to be one almost of relief that all the discomforts of joining Europe had once more been avoided. Moreover, for the first time this relief began to have a class basis. It was the wage-earner, it now seemed, who would stand to lose most and soonest when Britain joined the communities. Industrial interests might gain almost immediately from having a wider market in which to sell their goods. The better off might have to pay fewer taxes as farm subsidies were cut or abolished. But the ordinary housewife would at once feel the pinch as British food prices rose to the same level as those prevailing on the continent in the EEC. As it happened, these working-class fears of higher food prices coincided with the falling value of money in Britain at the end of the Labour Government in 1970, which underwent another precipitous drop after Edward Heath formed his government in June 1970.

In the period between the second de Gaulle veto in 1967 and the fall of the Wilson government in 1970 the feeling that the issue of British membership of the European communities had merely been postponed until de Gaulle and his immediate followers finally quitted the scene grew, despite all the difficulties. Yet at the same time the popularity of a European role for Britain shrank at home as the costs of that role, especially in food prices, were reckoned up, or perhaps it would be more true to say guessed at. One such guess, with a decidedly pessimistic bias, was provided by a Government White Paper on the economic implications of British membership of the European communities issued by the Wilson Cabinet in February 1970, four months before its fall from office.<sup>1</sup> This estimated that the cost of British entry into the EEC might vary between £100 and £1,100 million, the effect being felt on a balance of payments which was none too healthy at the best of times and which had fluctuated between the deplorable and the critical throughout most of the post-war years. With much greater specificity, more perhaps than could be justified, the White Paper forecast an increase in the price of retail food of between 18 and 26 per cent over a transition period of from

<sup>1</sup> Cmnd. 4289, 10 February 1970.

five to seven years while Britain was adjusting herself to Common Market membership and a rise in the cost of living of between four and five per cent. It was not explained how increases of this kind resulting from EEC membership could be disentangled from the rise in the cost of living which was taking place anyway and also from the effects of world-wide rises in prices which the Heath Government blamed for inflationary trends in Britain after the country actually joined the EEC in January 1973.

The 1970 White Paper also omitted to point out that while the cost of entry would be heavy on any showing, one reason for this was the fact that Britain would have to adjust to Common Market regulations which were shaped by the Six when Britain, of its own free will, remained outside the EEC. Moreover, the longer it remained outside the more adverse the conditions of entry were likely to become. The White Paper admittedly pointed out that, while the cost of food for the ordinary person would rise during the transition period, his real income would also be rising if—and there was no reason for thinking otherwise—the rate of growth in the British economy, then one of the lowest in Europe, matched that which had been enjoyed by almost all the Six. But this fact did not receive the emphasis accorded to the projected rise in the cost of living in the White Paper, and it was the latter which tended to stick in the mind of the average newspaper reader. Perhaps this was the Government's intention.

### *The end of the road*

It is therefore not surprising that support for the country's entry into the EEC seriously began to fall off just at the moment when the five member-states of the EEC were waiting for the fall from power of General de Gaulle in France, which in fact occurred in June 1969, thus making a resumption of the negotiations with Britain possible again. Thereafter, and even when Britain formally entered the European communities in 1973, British opinion towards the European issue continued to cool. In the six months between January and July 1973, for instance, the percentage of people who wanted to leave the communities increased from 15 to 29 even though by this time no noticeable effects of entering them had become apparent; by July 1973 only 42 per cent of the British people approved the Common Market as compared with 48 per cent who disapproved.<sup>1</sup>

The effect of this movement of opinion was to intensify the strains between the pro- and anti-European wings of the two main political parties, the Liberals remaining practically untouched by the con-

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 6 July 1973.

trovery in their unwavering support of the European policy. This intra-party conflict was stronger on the Labour side despite its traditional support for breaking down nationalistic barriers between peoples. In the final resort the Labour Party was not opposed to membership of the European communities in principle, but this was never quite decidedly so; at its annual conference in October 1973, for example, the party defeated a motion opposing membership of the communities on any terms only by a margin of half a million votes. Officially the position of the party as defined by that conference was that in the event of its winning the next election it would renegotiate the terms for entry into the communities negotiated by Mr Geoffrey Rippon on behalf of the Conservative Government in 1971 and signed by Mr Heath in Brussels on 22 January 1972; and that before accepting the renegotiated terms a future Labour Government would present them to the British people for acceptance or rejection at an election. This position was endorsed by an overwhelming majority at the 1973 conference.<sup>1</sup> Never before had a foreign policy issue been placed before the electorate in isolation from other questions, and it is indeed hard to see how it could be, but Labour Party leaders argued that Britain had never been given a chance to decide about the Heath terms of entry, which had been accepted by Parliament when public opinion was clearly moving in the opposite direction. Labour leaders also pointed out that the Danish, Irish and Norwegian people had been asked their opinion by referendum when their governments decided to apply for membership of the communities and the Norwegians had in fact voted against their government's advice.

Mr Heath, however, who had practically won the June 1970 election single-handedly, seemed quite unmoved by public opinion as reflected in the polls published in the newspapers. A consistent European from the time of his maiden speech in Parliament in May 1950, he had conducted the negotiations with the Six for Britain in 1961-2 and had never concealed his pro-European sentiments. Though the June 1970 election cannot be said to have given him an explicit mandate to apply to join the Six, it was clear to every intelligent voter that this is what he intended to do if he won the election; in any case, as he himself put it, in applying for membership he was merely 'taking up the negotiating hand' which Mr Wilson had temporarily dropped when President de Gaulle intervened with his second veto.

At the Conservative Party's annual conference in October 1973 following Britain's entry into the communities on 1 January the Government's unpopularity with the electorate owing to its failure

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 October 1973.

to control inflation 'at one stroke', as Mr Heath had promised during the election campaign, somewhat dampened the enthusiasm for Europe despite the Government's argument that rising prices at home were due to world conditions rather than Britain's venture into Europe. But this did not shake Mr Heath's conviction that there was no future for Britain in any attempt to restore its political influence in the world from an economic basis which had been shown time and again to be too small. Moreover, in Heath's political outlook the three-circle concept of British foreign policy was for all practical purposes eclipsed. He differed from almost every British Prime Minister since 1945 in having no very great admiration for the United States or wish to shore up his own position by frequent visits to Washington. At the same time, he was never a strong Commonwealth man. The Commonwealth conference at Singapore in January 1971 which Mr Heath attended for Britain was marked by strong tensions between himself and other Prime Ministers. At the Ottawa Commonwealth conference in June 1973 there was even some doubt for a time whether he would return early to Britain in order to take part in a yacht race. Under Heath, and there was in fact no reason for thinking that the situation would be radically different under another Prime Minister, there could be no other circle for Britain but Europe.

The terms finally agreed with the Six by the Rippon negotiations were indeed hard but could easily have been much harder.<sup>1</sup> Briefly stated, they were, first that over a transitional period of four-and-a-half years the EEC's common external tariff would apply to British industrial imports from third countries, with, of course, free trade in such goods within the enlarged Common Market. As to agricultural products, the EEC's common agricultural policy (CAP) would be accepted by Britain, which meant that over a transitional period of six years British retail food prices would rise by something like an estimated 2.5 per cent a year, representing an annual rise in the cost of living of perhaps 0.5 per cent. Again, there was a large element of guesswork in such figures in the light of current inflation due to quite other causes. As to the much debated question of the British contribution to the Community budget, this was calculated according to a complicated formula the upshot of which was that, as from 1978, Britain would be paying something like £300 million a year to the Community's expenses.

New Zealand, perhaps the Commonwealth country hardest hit by the change in Britain's international position, would have its

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 4715 of July 1971. For a detailed account of the negotiations see Uwe Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1973.

sales of butter to Britain reduced by 4 per cent a year until 1978, when 80 per cent of its former entitlement would be reached; its milk exports to Britain would be reduced to 71 per cent of the former entitlement by 1978. As for other Commonwealth interests affected by the Brussels agreements, the Commonwealth sugar agreement which facilitated cane sugar imports from Commonwealth producers into Britain would expire in 1975, to be replaced by a new agreement to be negotiated between the enlarged EEC and the Commonwealth producers. Various forms of association with the European Community were provided for Commonwealth countries in Africa and the Pacific. The EEC was to negotiate later with India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Malaysia and Singapore for replacements for the favourable arrangements they previously had with Britain. Australia and Canada were to have special agreements made with them to soften the impact of the EEC's common external tariff.

Contrary to what many expected, the immediate effect of Britain's long-delayed entry into the European communities in January 1973 was barely noticeable: the promised benefits of membership would plainly take some years to materialise, if ever they did, and the anticipated drawbacks, if felt at all, might be swallowed up in the general difficulties the Western states became involved in, especially in regard to fuel and energy, following the renewed Arab-Israeli war in October 1973. It is also true that the impact of entry was somewhat obscured by the strong inflationary tendencies in Britain which accompanied entry. These could hardly be directly attributed to the fact of entry; at the same time they threw a question mark over all the carefully calculated costs of entry. If the truth be told, the prospective gains and losses were largely a matter of guesswork, as shown by the equal numbers of professional economists writing to *The Times* either supporting or deploring entry. The political effects of entry were still more difficult to forecast although on balance they had probably been more influential than the economic prospects in the decision of the three to apply for entry.

Nevertheless, that the decision was natural and perhaps inescapable was implicit in the fact that, despite a mainly negative attitude on the part of the British people, despite discouragement in the shape of the two French vetoes, the trend towards Europe continued under both Conservative and Labour governments alike. Economically, it was hard to see why Britain should not benefit, as the Six had manifestly done, from membership of the Community; politically, Britain was clearly counting for less and less as a solitary voice in a world increasingly dominated by the big battalions. In any case, what were the alternatives to Europe? Writing in his diary in February 1963, after the first French veto, Harold Macmillan

replied to that question by saying that 'if we are honest, we must say that there is none',<sup>1</sup> Europe would without doubt mean a new course for Britain, however slight the short-term effects of entry. At the same time, there was also no denying the fact that a new course for Britain, after all the disappointments since 1945, was now indispensable.

<sup>1</sup> Harold Macmillan, *At the End of the Day*, p. 374.



## WHEN ALL IS SAID

Looking back on the almost thirty years of foreign policy covered by this book, the most striking fact is, of course, the decline of British power continuously over that period. At the beginning of the story, in 1945, a British Prime Minister sat at Yalta with Roosevelt and Stalin, and all three were, in the words of the Soviet leader, members of a club the price of admission to which was five million men under arms, to which Churchill is said to have responded by amending that figure to three million. At the end of the story, when Britain entered the European communities in January 1973, it was as a European state with strictly European interests, no greater in power than France or Federal Germany and considerably weaker in economic strength than the latter and even perhaps than the former as well.

A similar decline took place during the twenty years of British foreign policy between the two world wars.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of that period Britain's political leader was determining the fate of the whole world, with an American President soon to be swept from power along with his dreams of American co-operation with the Europeans in the maintenance of world security, and with the Prime Minister of a France which was to be humiliatingly conquered only two decades later. And at the end of that story Britain was bankrupt, isolated and having only its national will to survive and its hopes of a turn in the balance of world affairs to save it from extinction. Miraculously, as it happened, these circumstances combined in the Second World War to elevate Britain to a pinnacle of prestige greater than any occupied in the imperial glories of the past. But the substantive value of that was little in the world scales of power. It won for Britain seats at Yalta and Potsdam, but that was only a few months before the country was applying for national assistance in Washington.

For parallels to this history we have to look at the slow fall of Spain after the Golden Century of Ferdinand and Isabella, or Austria between, say, 1815 and the final collapse of the Habsburg monarchy in 1918. Britain's decline in the last fifty years is perhaps even more remarkable; in 1919 hardly any major international question in any part of the world could be settled without British

<sup>1</sup> See the author's *The Troubled Giant: Britain among the Great Powers, 1916-1939*, London, Bell and the London School of Economics, 1966.

acquiescence, while in December 1973 a conference opened in Geneva, without an invitation to London to join in the proceedings, which was to try to find a lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the whole history of which Britain in its prime had helped to shape more than any other country. Britain may be described then as the Austria or Spain of the late twentieth century, but with the difference that Britain is now in a position to link itself with a powerful group of west European countries which, statistically at least, bears comparison with the two contemporary Leviathan states, America and Russia.

It is important to see this British decline first in what may be called its world geopolitical context, that is, in terms of the ever-changing balance of world forces as a whole. It was emphasised in the author's previous study of British foreign policy between the two wars that the causes of the Second World War are to be found in the inability of Britain and France, the last remnants in the 1930s of the great Allied coalition of 1914-18, to contain Germany and Japan at the same time.<sup>1</sup> It took a Soviet Union reconstructed after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and the civil war and the United States to complete the destruction of Germany and the defeat of Japan in 1945. Once that had happened, the axis of world power began to run between Washington and Moscow except for a short period in the 1950s when the United States, strong as it was, still required a foothold in Europe among the west European states, as a kind of temporary extension of its own territory and as a strategic perimeter for its own defence. Along with this reduction of western Europe, including Britain, to a kind of no-man's land between the two opposing super-Powers went the divesting of the west European states of their empires in Africa and Asia, and hence the elimination of imperial control as the *raison d'être* for their military forces in Africa and Asia. The new states formed from these old European empires have a vital part to play in shaping decisions at the United Nations and increasingly in using their raw materials—as, for instance, the Arab states their oil—as carrots and sticks in influencing the policies of the consumer countries, especially Europe and Japan. But the real political influence of the Afro-Asian states will probably appear in the future, when they have progressed further with their economic development, and that future is quite unpredictable today. The forecast which can perhaps be made, however, is that, unless there are some rapid strides towards political unity in western Europe, its influence in the non-European world is likely to diminish as the political impact of that world on international affairs grows.

Because of the strength and ubiquity of these geopolitical forces

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter XXIII, 'The Fault in Ourselves'.

hardly any action by a British government in the period covered by this book could have done anything to arrest or reverse the British decline. Serious mistakes have undoubtedly been made in foreign policy during the last thirty years. Perhaps we made a fatal mistake in not joining the European coal and steel community when we were invited to do so in 1950 and when there was no de Gaulle to prevent us accepting the invitation. Almost certainly we were wrong to try to hustle the Arab states into a pro-Western regional defence arrangement in the mid-1950s. Suez, too, we might as well admit, was a disaster, though, to be fair, blame for that misjudgement should be shared with the United States. The clinging to the 'east of Suez' policy long after its feasibility had gone was another blunder. But there are good things in the record, too: the untiring resistance to the American variety of 'brinkmanship' in the 1950s, the equally untiring call for *détente* with the Communist world long before it became fashionable, the championship, in the face of the strongest American opposition, of Communist China's claim for an entry permit into the family of nations. But on the whole the decline in British power has been too geopolitically based to have been much affected either way by wrong decisions or by helpful and effective British initiatives in the past.

But this is not to say that those larger sources of decline have not had their effects aggravated by the psychology of the British people in the years since 1945. Every pundit, of every school of thought, has tried his hand at diagnosing, prescribing cures for and working out the prognosis of the British *malaise* since the war. There is no intention to review, evaluate or add to these investigations here. It is sufficient to say that for many reasons since 1945 the British, while evidently wanting progressively higher living standards, do not appear to cultivate, and even positively renounce, the kind of industrial and commercial enterprise which makes those higher living standards possible. The British people are rather like a formerly wealthy but now penniless family of aristocrats who disdain the 'rat race' (as they call it) of, say, American society but demand the motor cars and television sets which go as rewards to the rats. Life has been hard for the majority of the British people in the past fifty years but not so hard that they are yet prepared, so to speak, to roll up their shirtsleeves to avoid having to face hardships again. From this mood stem many of the economic troubles which have increasingly placed the British in difficulties since 1945 and which have effectively undermined their foreign policy.

At the same time, there are characteristics of Britain's habit of looking at its place in the world which have intensified the geopolitical factors in decline. First, it is clearly difficult for men and women who

have known the prime of Britain to become accustomed to the idea of living from hand to mouth. Those who have governed Britain in the days of decline entered politics or were in their youth when Britain governed a quarter of the globe and lorded it over international conferences: certainly their education in English history has been a study of the country as a great, perhaps the greatest, Power in the world. We may see before long a new generation of politicians dominating affairs at Westminster who have known only the decline of England. At first sight it may seem that only Right-wing Conservatives have suffered from the retrospective thinking due to having been born and grown up in an age of greatness and having to rule in an age of downward adjustment—the 'Suez group' of the mid-1950s and such-like. But it has in fact affected the attitudes of the Left in an equally disastrous way. The period covered by this book is the first period of assured Labour government in Britain, symbolised by the Attlee regime in 1945-51 and the Wilson regime of 1964-70. In both these periods a kind of Palmerstonian reformism characterised the Labour view of foreign affairs, though the basic pragmatism of Attlee and Bevin mitigated it in the earlier period: the idea, that is, that Britain has a divinely ordained mission to put the world to rights, with the automatic assumption that the means are always there to put this laudable object into effect. If the symbol of Right-wing traditionalism is the Union Jack flying over the Persian Gulf, the symbol of Left-wing traditionalism is the British soldier, wrapped in the United Nations flag and peacekeeping in the Sinai desert. The fact that assured periods of Labour government since 1945 have also meant better living standards and social services for the mass of the people has caused foreign policy to seem rather like a magic wand dispensing British justice throughout the world with hardly any burden on the humble taxpayer.

But this brings us to perhaps the most persistent assumption in British thinking on foreign policy and that is the idea that the rest of the world is rather like an unruly child which has a divine obligation to defer to its elders and betters, such as the British, which is bound in the long run to realise the inherent wisdom in the British argument but which from time to time may be prevented from doing so either by sheer stupidity, or suppression by some upstart dictator or propaganda by a small group of politically motivated trouble-makers and rabble-rousers.

This kind of national arrogance has been, of course, not unknown in the post-1945 world in places outside the British Isles. General de Gaulle, to name only one foreign statesman, could surely have taught the British something about national pretentiousness. But there was something in the world situation after 1945 which made

the British brand of national pride not only understandable but even perhaps intelligent in the eyes of a detached witness. In the first place, the sagacity and statesmanship with which the two super-Powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, conducted their mutual relations at least until the Cuba missile crisis in 1962 left the British with little to be ashamed of in their attitudes to world affairs. On the one side, the Soviet Union seemed inspired by a highly simplified and dogmatically held ideology which, at least until 1956, preached inevitable, bloody conflict between Russia and the West. On the other side, the United States and its government seemed to regard their foreign policy as nothing less than the permanent elimination of the Soviet Union and all its works from the face of the earth. Britain during this time acted from the rational belief that in a world of conflicting ideologies and weapons of mass destruction no state is so powerful that it can commit itself to forcing its own internal arrangements on other states. Whatever may be said of the Suez enterprise in 1956, it is hard to think of examples of the British use of force to affect the internal arrangements of other states to compare with the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolution in the same year as Suez, the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the American intervention in Vietnam. The British habit is to use force only when events are occurring which threaten to disturb the balance of power and the independence of all states. Rarely if ever have British Ministers taken the view that the presence of a radically different ideology or regime in another state is sufficient in itself to justify the resort to arms.

In the second place there is undoubtedly a certain wholesomeness about the British view that as between contending world ideologies like Communism and Western democracy there is always some middle ground to be reached if communication between the two sides goes on long enough. That middle ground may take an agonisingly long time for the adversaries to reach, but in an age when the human race is threatened by extinction by its own hand it is surely those who search single-mindedly for the middle ground who can save the situation. Hence, despite diminishing power, it was a valuable service the British have done in the world since the war to argue the case for the unfanatical view, the belief that the most implacable enemies can and will find a way to co-exist and that the refusal to compromise is far too dangerous for any state to indulge in while the whole world situation remains as dangerous as it is. It is not an accident that during the seventies the two super-Powers seemed to arrive at much the same conclusion.

But it is time for a word to be said about the way ahead. Where do we go from here? First of all, it is vitally important that the

British people, using all their still considerable political judgement, should finally resolve in their own minds whether or not they belong in the European Community. Many reasons have been given in this book why the author thinks that Britain in effect has no choice in the matter; however difficult life may have been in Britain's first year in the Community, it probably would have been more difficult outside it. Three British governments in the period since 1945, Conservative and Labour, would not have agreed on this, in the face of strong discouragements from Parliament and public opinion, had that not been a simple irrefutable fact. Nevertheless, it is still possible for the British people to take a different view, though it is at present hard to see what that view could be or how it could provide the basis for a convincing foreign policy for the future.

The British people, after years of being constantly on the alert during the Cold War, found that there was little they could do in international affairs from the basis of their own strength. If Britain wishes to influence world affairs for the purpose, not of dominating events, but of ensuring that it is not dominated by them, that can only be done from a basis of economic power which, potentially at least, only Europe can now provide. But, once having joined the European Community, it is implicit that a member-state must act from national interest plus something else and that is concern for the Community as a whole. In the Common Market tensions prevailing at the end of Britain's first year in the Community, tensions taking the shape of alignments of Britain and France on one side and Federal Germany on the other side, it seemed as though Britain wished to remain a member of the Community but at the same time to act and speak as though it had no obligations to its European partners and desired above all to take more out of the Community than it put into it. The British people seem as though they have never really considered what it means to be a European state, what they have to contribute, what they can fairly expect to receive. Their foreign policy, as this book has tried to show, has reached a conclusion and exhausted its previous possibilities. The time has arrived for a new start.

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