



## CHAPTER TEN

# The Dilemmas of the Victors

The policing of the Versailles agreement was based on two general concepts which canceled each other out. The first failed because it was too sweeping, the second, because it was too grudging. The concept of collective security was so general as to prove inapplicable to circumstances most likely to disturb the peace; the informal Franco-English cooperation which replaced it was far too tenuous and ambivalent to resist major German challenges. And before five years had elapsed, the two powers vanquished in the war came together at Rapallo. The growing cooperation between Germany and the Soviet Union was a crucial blow to the Versailles system, something the democracies were too demoralized to grasp immediately.

At the end of the First World War, the age-old debate about the relative roles of morality and interest in international affairs seemed to have been resolved in favor of the dominance of law and ethics. Under the shock of the cataclysm, many hoped for a better world as free as possible from the kind of *Realpolitik* which, in their view, had decimated the youth of a generation. America emerged as the catalyst of this process even as it was withdrawing into isolationism. Wilson's legacy was that Europe embarked on the Wilsonian course of trying to preserve stability via collective security rather than the traditional European approach of alliances and the balance of power, despite the absence of America.

In subsequent American usage, alliances in which America participated (such as NATO) were generally described as instruments of collective security. This is not, however, how the term was originally conceived, for in their essence, the concepts of collective security and of alliances are diametrically opposed. Traditional alliances were directed against specific threats and defined precise obligations for specific groups of countries linked by shared national interests or mutual security concerns. Collective security defines no particular threat, guarantees no individual nation, and discriminates against none. It is theoretically designed to resist *any* threat to the peace, by whoever might pose it and against whomever it might be directed. Alliances always presume a specific potential adversary; collective security defends international law in the abstract, which it seeks to sustain in much the same way that a judicial system upholds a domestic criminal code. It no more assumes a particular culprit than does domestic law. In an alliance, the *casus belli* is an attack on the interests or the security of its members. The *casus belli* of collective security is the violation of the principle of "peaceful" settlement of disputes in which all peoples of the world are assumed to have a common interest. Therefore, force has to be assembled on a case-by-case basis from a shifting group of nations with a mutual interest in "peacekeeping."

The purpose of an alliance is to produce an obligation more predictable and precise than an analysis of national interest. Collective security works in the exact opposite way. It leaves the application of its principles to the interpretation of particular circumstances when they arise, unintentionally putting a large premium on the mood of the moment and, hence, on national self-will.

Collective security contributes to security only if all nations—or at least all nations relevant to collective defense—share nearly identical views about the nature of the challenge and are prepared to use force or apply sanctions on the "merits" of the case, regardless of the specific national interest they may have in the issues at hand. Only if these conditions are

fulfilled can a world organization devise sanctions or act as an arbiter of international affairs. This was how Wilson had perceived the role of collective security as the end of the war approached in September 1918:

National purposes have fallen more and more into the background and the common purpose of enlightened mankind has taken their place. The counsels of plain men have become on all hands more simple and straightforward and more unified than the counsels of sophisticated men of affairs, who still retain the impression that they are playing a game of power and playing for high stakes.<sup>1</sup>

The fundamental difference between the Wilsonian and the European interpretations of the causes of international conflict is reflected in these words. European-style diplomacy presumes that national interests have a tendency to clash, and views diplomacy as the means for reconciling them; Wilson, on the other hand, considered international discord the result of "clouded thinking," not an expression of a genuine clash of interests. In the practice of *Realpolitik*, statesmen shoulder the task of relating particular interests to general ones through a balance of incentives and penalties. In the Wilsonian view, statesmen are required to apply universal principles to specific cases. Moreover, statesmen are generally treated as the causes of conflict, because they are believed to distort man's natural bent toward harmony with abstruse and selfish calculations.

The conduct of most statesmen at Versailles belied Wilsonian expectations. Without exception, they stressed their national interests, leaving the defense of the common purposes to Wilson, whose country in fact had no national interest (in the European sense) in the territorial issues of the settlement. It is in the nature of prophets to redouble their efforts, not to abandon them, in the face of a recalcitrant reality. The obstacles Wilson encountered at Versailles raised no doubt in his mind about the feasibility of his new dispensation. On the contrary, they fortified his faith in its necessity. And he was confident that the League and the weight of world opinion would correct the many provisions of the Treaty that departed from his principles.

Indeed, the power of Wilson's ideals was demonstrated by their impact on Great Britain, the motherland of the balance-of-power policy. The official British commentary on the League Covenant declared that "the ultimate and most effective sanction must be the public opinion of the civilised world."<sup>2</sup> Or, as Lord Cecil argued before the House of Commons, "what we rely upon is public opinion . . . and if we are wrong about it, then the whole thing is wrong."<sup>3</sup>

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It seems improbable that the scions of the policy of Pitt, Canning, Palmerston, and Disraeli would have come to such conclusions on their own. At first they went along with Wilson's policy in order to ensure American support in the war. As time went on, Wilsonian principles succeeded in capturing British public opinion. By the 1920s and 1930s, Great Britain's defense of collective security was no longer tactical. Wilsonianism had made a genuine convert.

In the end, collective security fell prey to the weakness of its central premise—that all nations have the same interest in resisting a particular act of aggression and are prepared to run identical risks in opposing it. Experience has shown these assumptions to be false. No act of aggression involving a major power has ever been defeated by applying the principle of collective security. Either the world community has refused to assess the act as one which constituted aggression, or it has disagreed over the appropriate sanctions. And when sanctions were applied, they inevitably reflected the lowest common denominator, often proving so ineffectual that they did more harm than good.

At the time of the Japanese conquest of Manchuria in 1932, the League had no machinery for sanctions. It remedied this defect, but faced with Italian aggression against Abyssinia, it voted for sanctions while stopping short of imposing a cutoff of oil with the slogan "All sanctions short of war." When Austria was forcibly united with Germany and Czechoslovakia's freedom was extinguished, there was no League reaction at all. The last act of the League of Nations, which no longer contained Germany, Japan, or Italy, was to expel the Soviet Union after it attacked Finland in 1939. It had no effect on Soviet actions.

During the Cold War, the United Nations proved equally ineffective in every case involving Great Power aggression, due to either the communist veto in the Security Council or the reluctance on the part of smaller countries to run risks on behalf of issues they felt did not concern them. The United Nations was ineffective or at the sidelines during the Berlin crises and during the Soviet interventions in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan. It was irrelevant in the Cuban Missile Crisis until the two superpowers agreed to settle. America was able to invoke the authority of the United Nations against North Korean aggression in 1950 only because the Soviet representative was boycotting the Security Council and the General Assembly was still dominated by countries eager to enlist America against the threat of Soviet aggression in Europe. The United Nations did provide a convenient meeting place for diplomats and a useful forum for the exchange of ideas. It also performed important technical functions. But it failed to fulfill the underlying premise of collec-

tive security—the prevention of war and collective resistance to aggression.

This has been true of the United Nations even in the post–Cold War period. In the Gulf War of 1991, it did indeed ratify American actions, but resistance to Iraqi aggression was hardly an application of the doctrine of collective security. Not waiting for an international consensus, the United States had unilaterally dispatched a large expeditionary force. Other nations could gain influence over America's actions only by joining what was in effect an American enterprise; they could not avoid the risks of conflict by vetoing it. Additionally, domestic upheavals in the Soviet Union and China gave the permanent members of the UN Security Council an incentive to maintain America's goodwill. In the Gulf War, collective security was invoked as a justification of American leadership, not as a substitute for it.

Of course, these lessons had not yet been learned in the innocent days when the concept of collective security was first being introduced into diplomacy. The post-Versailles statesmen had half-convinced themselves that armaments were the cause of tensions, not the result of them, and half-believed that if goodwill replaced the suspiciousness of traditional diplomacy, international conflict might be eradicated. Despite having been emotionally drained by the war, the European leaders should have realized that a general doctrine of collective security could never work, even if it overcame all the other hurdles it faced, as long as it excluded three of the most powerful nations of the world: the United States, Germany, and the Soviet Union. For the United States had refused to join the League, Germany was barred from it, and the Soviet Union, which was treated as a pariah, disdained it.

The country suffering most grievously under the postwar order was “victorious” France. French leaders knew that the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles would not keep Germany permanently weak. After the last European war—the Crimean War of 1854–56—the victors, Great Britain and France, had managed to maintain the military provisions for less than twenty years. In the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, France became a full-fledged member of the European Concert after only three years. After Versailles, France's decline vis-à-vis Germany grew progressively more evident, even as it seemed to dominate Europe militarily. France's victorious Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, was right when he said about the Treaty of Versailles: “This is not peace; it is an Armistice for twenty years.”<sup>4</sup>

By 1924, the staff of the British ground forces had reached the same conclusion when it predicted that Germany would again be going to war

with Great Britain over issues that would be “simply a repetition of the conditions which brought us into the late war.”<sup>5</sup> The restraints imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, it argued, would delay German rearmament by at most nine months once Germany felt strong enough politically to throw off the shackles of Versailles—which the general staff presciently assessed as being probable within ten years. Concurring with the analysis of the French, the British general staff also predicted that France would be helpless unless, in the meantime, it made a military alliance with “first-class powers.”

Yet the only first-class power available was Great Britain, whose political leaders did not accept the views of their military advisers. Instead, their policy was based on the mistaken belief that France was already too powerful and that the last thing it needed was a British alliance. Great Britain’s leaders considered demoralized France to be the potentially dominant power and in need of being balanced, while revisionist Germany was perceived as the aggrieved party in need of conciliation. Both assumptions—that France was militarily dominant and that Germany had been harshly treated—were correct in the short term; but as premises of British policy, they were disastrous in the long term. Statesmen stand or fall on their perceptions of trends. And British postwar leaders failed to perceive the long-range dangers before them.

France desperately wanted a military alliance with Great Britain, to replace the guarantee that had lapsed when the United States Senate refused to ratify the Versailles Treaty. Never having made a military alliance with the country they considered to be the strongest in Europe, British leaders now perceived France as rekindling its historic threat to dominate the Continent. In 1924, the Central Department of the British Foreign Office described the French occupation of the Rhineland as a “jumping-off point for an incursion into Central Europe,”<sup>6</sup> a judgment totally at variance with French psychology of the period. Even more inane, the Foreign Office memorandum treated the occupation of the Rhineland as an encirclement of Belgium, creating “a direct menace to the Scheldt and Zuider Zee, and therefore an indirect menace to this country.”<sup>7</sup> Not to be outdone in generating anti-French suspicions, the Admiralty weighed in with an argument straight from the wars of the Spanish Succession or the Napoleonic Wars: that the Rhineland dominated Dutch and Belgian ports whose control would severely impair the British Royal Navy’s planning in the event of war with France.<sup>8</sup>

There was no hope whatsoever of maintaining a balance of power in Europe so long as Great Britain considered the primary threat to be a country whose nearly panicky foreign policy was geared to fending off

another German assault. Indeed, in a kind of historic reflex, many in Great Britain began to look to Germany to balance France. For example, the British Ambassador in Berlin, Viscount d'Abernon, reported that it was in England's interest to maintain Germany as a counterweight to France. "As long as Germany is a coherent whole, there is more or less a balance of power in Europe," he wrote in 1923. If Germany disintegrated, France would be "in undisputed military and political control, based upon her army and her military alliances."<sup>9</sup> This was true enough but hardly the likely scenario that British diplomacy would confront in the decades ahead.

Great Britain was right to argue, as it always had, that, after victory, the reconstruction of international order required the return of the erstwhile enemy to the community of nations. But appeasing Germany's grievances would not restore stability as long as the balance of power continued to shift inexorably in Germany's direction. France and Great Britain, whose unity was essential to maintaining the last shred of the European balance of power, were glaring at each other in frustration and incomprehension, while the real threats to the equilibrium—Germany and the Soviet Union—stood at the sidelines in sullen resentment. Great Britain vastly exaggerated France's strength; France vastly overestimated its ability to use the Treaty of Versailles to compensate for its growing inferiority vis-à-vis Germany. Great Britain's fear of possible French hegemony on the Continent was absurd; France's belief that it could conduct foreign policy on the basis of keeping Germany prostrate was delusion tinged by despair.

Perhaps the most important reason for Great Britain's rejection of a French alliance was that its leaders did not in their hearts consider the Versailles Treaty just, least of all the settlement of Eastern Europe, and feared that an alliance with France, which had pacts with the Eastern European countries, might draw them into a conflict over the wrong issues and in defense of the wrong countries. Lloyd George expressed the conventional wisdom of that time:

The British people . . . would not be ready to be involved in quarrels which might arise regarding Poland or Danzig of Upper Silesia. . . . The British people felt that the populations of that quarter of Europe were unstable and excitable; they might start fighting at any time and the rights and wrongs of the dispute might be very hard to disentangle.<sup>10</sup>

Holding attitudes such as these, British leaders used discussions about the possibility of a French alliance primarily as a tactical device to ease French pressures on Germany, not as a serious contribution to international security.

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France thus continued its hopeless quest of keeping Germany weak; Great Britain sought to devise security arrangements to calm French fears without incurring a British commitment. It was a circle never to be squared, for Great Britain could not bring itself to extend to France the one assurance that might have brought about a calmer and more conciliatory French foreign policy toward Germany—a full military alliance.

Realizing in 1922 that the British Parliament would never countenance a formal military commitment, French Prime Minister Briand reverted to the precedent of the Entente Cordiale of 1904—Anglo-French diplomatic cooperation without military provisions. But in 1904, Great Britain had felt threatened by Germany's naval program and by its constant bullying. By the 1920s, it feared Germany less than France, whose conduct it mistakenly attributed to arrogance rather than to panic. Though Great Britain grudgingly acceded to Briand's proposal, its real motive in doing so was reflected in a cynical Cabinet note which defended the French alliance as a means of strengthening Great Britain's relations with Germany:

Germany is to us the most important country in Europe not only on account of our trade with her, but also because she is the key to the situation in Russia. By helping Germany we might under existing conditions expose ourselves to the charge of deserting France; but if France was our ally no such charge could be made.<sup>11</sup>

Whether it was because French President Alexandre Millerand sensed the British evasion or simply found the arrangement too amorphous, he rejected Briand's scheme, which led to the Prime Minister's resignation.

Frustrated in its attempt to elicit a traditional British alliance, France next attempted to achieve the same result through the League of Nations by elaborating a precise definition of aggression. This would then be turned into a precise obligation within the framework of the League of Nations—thereby transforming the League into a global alliance. In September 1923, at French and British urging, the League Council devised a universal treaty of mutual assistance. In the event of conflict, the Council would be empowered to designate which country was the aggressor and which the victim. Every League member would then be obliged to assist the victim, by force if necessary, on the continent on which that signatory was situated (this clarification was added to avoid incurring a League obligation to help in colonial conflicts). Since obligations of the doctrine of collective security are meant to derive from general causes rather than from national interests, the treaty stipulated that, to be eligible for assistance, the victim must have previously signed a disarmament



agreement approved by the League, and have been reducing its armed forces according to an agreed schedule.

Since the victim is usually the weaker side, the League's Treaty of Mutual Assistance was in fact providing incentives for aggression by asking the more vulnerable side to compound its difficulties. There was something absurd about the proposition that the international order would henceforth be defended on behalf of excellent disarmers rather than of vital national interests. Moreover, since reduction schedules of a general disarmament treaty would take years to negotiate, the universal Treaty of Mutual Assistance was creating a vast vacuum. With the League obligation to resist being placed into a distant and nebulous future, France and any other threatened country would have to face their perils alone.

Despite its escape clauses, the Treaty failed to command support. The United States and the Soviet Union refused to consider it. Germany's opinion was never solicited. Once it became clear that the draft treaty would have obliged Great Britain, with colonies on every continent, to assist any victim of aggression anywhere, Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald also felt obliged to report that Great Britain could not accept the Treaty, even though it had helped to draft it.

By now, France's quest for security had turned obsessive. Far from accepting the futility of its effort, it refused to abandon its search for criteria compatible with collective security, especially since the British government under Ramsay MacDonald so strongly supported collective security and disarmament—the so-called progressive causes represented by the League. Finally, MacDonald and the new French Prime Minister, Edouard Herriot, came up with a variation of the previous proposal. The Geneva Protocol of 1924 required League arbitration for all international conflicts and established three criteria for a universal obligation to assist victims of aggression: the aggressor's refusal to permit the Council to settle the dispute by conciliation; the aggressor's failure to submit the issue to judicial settlement or arbitration; and, of course, the victim's membership in a scheme for general disarmament. Each signatory was obliged to assist the victim by all available means against the aggressor so defined.<sup>12</sup>

The Geneva Protocol, however, failed as well for the same reason as the Treaty of Mutual Assistance and all the other schemes for collective security in the 1920s had failed. It went too far for Great Britain and not nearly far enough for France. Great Britain had proposed it in order to draw France into disarmament, not to generate an additional defense obligation. France had pursued the Protocol primarily as an obligation of

mutual assistance—having only a secondary interest, if that, in disarmament. To underscore the futility of this exercise, the United States announced that it would not honor the Geneva Protocol or tolerate any interference with U.S. trade under its provisions. When the chairman of the British Imperial Defense Staff warned that the Protocol would dangerously overextend British forces, the Cabinet withdrew it in early 1925.

It was a preposterous state of affairs. Resisting aggression had been made dependent on the prior disarmament of the victim. Geopolitical considerations and the strategic importance of the region, reasons for which nations had been going to war for centuries, were being deprived of legitimacy. According to this approach, Great Britain would defend Belgium because it had disarmed, not because it was strategically vital. After months of negotiations, the democracies were advancing neither disarmament nor security. The tendency of collective security to transform aggression into an abstract, legal problem and its refusal to consider any specific threat or commitment had a demoralizing rather than a reassuring effect.

Despite the passionate lip service it paid to the concept, Great Britain clearly considered the obligations of collective security less binding than those of traditional alliances. For the Cabinet proved to be quite fertile in inventing various formulae for collective security while it adamantly rejected a formal alliance with France until the very eve of the war, a decade and a half later. Surely it would not have made such a distinction unless it viewed the obligations of collective security as less likely to have to be implemented or easier to evade than those of alliances.

The wisest course for the Allies would have been to relieve Germany voluntarily of the most onerous provisions of Versailles and to forge a firm Franco-British alliance. This is what Winston Churchill had in mind when he advocated an alliance with France “if (and only if) she entirely alters her treatment of Germany and loyally accepts a British policy of help and friendship towards Germany.”<sup>13</sup> Such a policy was never pursued with any consistency, however. French leaders were too afraid of both Germany and their own public opinion, which was deeply hostile to Germany, and British leaders were too suspicious of French designs.

The disarmament provisions of the Treaty of Versailles widened the Anglo-French split. Ironically, they eased Germany’s road toward military parity, which, given the weakness of Eastern Europe, would spell geopolitical superiority in the long run. For one thing, the Allies had compounded discrimination with incompetence by neglecting to set up any

verification machinery for the disarmament provisions. In a letter to Colonel House in 1919, André Tardieu, a principal French negotiator at Versailles, predicted that the failure to set up verification machinery would cripple the disarmament clauses of the Treaty:

... a weak instrument is being drawn up, dangerous and absurd. . . . Will the League say to Germany, 'Prove that my information is false,' or even, 'We wish to verify.' But then it is claiming a right of supervision, and Germany will reply: 'By what right?'

That is what Germany will reply and she will be justified in so replying, if she is not forced by the Treaty to recognize the right of verification.<sup>14</sup>

In the innocent days before the study of arms control had become an academic subject, no one thought it odd to be asking Germany to verify its own disarmament. To be sure, an Inter-Allied Military Control Commission had been set up. But it had no independent right of inspection; it could only ask the German government for information about German violations—not exactly a foolproof procedure. The Commission was disbanded in 1926, leaving the verification of German compliance to Allied intelligence services. No wonder the disarmament provisions were being grossly violated long before Hitler refused to carry them out.

On the political level, German leaders skillfully insisted on the general disarmament promised in the Versailles Treaty, of which their own disarmament was to have been the first stage. With the passage of time, they managed to obtain British support for this proposition, and used it as well to justify the failure to fulfill other provisions of the Treaty. To put pressure on France, Great Britain announced dramatic reductions of its own ground forces (on which it had never relied for security), though not of its navy (on which, of course, it did). France's security, on the other hand, depended totally on its standing army's being significantly larger than Germany's because the industrial potential of Germany and its population were so superior. The pressure to alter this balance—through either German rearmament or French disarmament—had the practical consequence of reversing the results of the war. By the time Hitler came to power, it was already quite apparent that the disarmament provisions of the Treaty would soon be in tatters, making Germany's geopolitical advantage apparent.

Reparations were another element of the disunity between France and Great Britain. Until the Versailles Treaty, it had been axiomatic that the vanquished paid reparations. After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, Ger-

many did not feel compelled to invoke any principle other than its victory for the indemnity it imposed on France; nor did it do so in 1918 with respect to the staggering reparations bill it presented to Russia in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

Yet, in the new world order of Versailles, the Allies had come to believe that reparations required a moral justification. They found it in Article 231, or the War Guilt Clause, described in the previous chapter. The clause was furiously attacked in Germany, and eliminated the already low incentive there to cooperate with the peace settlement.

One of the astonishing aspects of the Versailles Treaty was that its drafters included so invidious and precise a clause on war guilt without specifying the total amount to be paid in reparations. The determination of the reparations figure had been left to future expert commissions because the amount which the Allies had led their publics to expect was so exorbitant, it could never have survived Wilson's scrutiny or the analysis of serious financial experts.

In this manner, reparations, like disarmament, became a weapon of the German revisionists; experts increasingly doubted not only the morality but the feasibility of the claims. John Maynard Keynes' *Treatise on the Economic Consequences of the Peace* was a prime example.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the bargaining position of the victor always diminishes with time. Whatever is not exacted during the shock of defeat becomes increasingly difficult to attain later—a lesson America had to learn with respect to Iraq at the end of the 1991 Gulf War.

It was not until 1921—two years after the signing of the Versailles Treaty—that a figure for reparations was finally established. It was absurdly high: 132 billion Goldmarks (some \$40 billion, which amounts to approximately \$323 billion in present value), a sum which would have necessitated German payments for the rest of the century. Predictably, Germany claimed insolvency; even if the international financial system could have accommodated such a vast transfer of resources, no democratic German government could have survived agreeing to it.

In the summer of 1921, Germany paid the first installment of the reparations bill, transferring 1 billion Marks (\$250 million). But it did so by printing paper Marks and selling them for foreign currency on the open market—in other words, by inflating its currency to the point where no significant transfer of resources was taking place. At the end of 1922, Germany proposed a four-year moratorium on reparations.

The demoralization of the Versailles international order and of France, its leading European pillar, was now far advanced. No enforcement machinery existed for reparations, and no verification machinery for disar-

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advocated the policy of “no war, no peace.”<sup>19</sup> Yet the weaker side has the option of playing for time only against an adversary that considers negotiations as operating according to their own internal logic—an illusion to which the United States has been especially subject. The Germans had no such views. When Trotsky returned with instructions proclaiming a policy of neither peace nor war and announced unilaterally that the war was over, the Germans resumed military operations. Faced with total defeat, Lenin and his colleagues accepted Hoffmann’s terms and signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, accepting coexistence with imperial Germany.

The principle of coexistence would be invoked time and again over the next sixty years by the Soviets, with the reactions of the protagonists remaining constant: the democracies would each time hail the Soviet proclamation of peaceful coexistence as a sign of conversion to a permanent policy of peace. Yet, for their part, communists always justified periods of peaceful coexistence on the ground that the relation of forces was not conducive to confrontation. The obvious corollary was that, as that relationship changed, so would the Bolsheviks’ devotion to peaceful coexistence. According to Lenin, it was reality which dictated coexistence with the capitalist foe:

By concluding a separate peace, we are freeing ourselves in the largest measure possible *at the present moment* from both warring imperialist groups; by utilizing their mutual enmity we utilize the war, which makes a bargain between them against us difficult.<sup>20</sup>

The high point of that policy was, of course, the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939. Potential inconsistencies were easily rationalized. “We are convinced,” said a communist statement, “that the most consistent socialist policy can be reconciled with the sternest realism and most level-headed practicality.”<sup>21</sup>

In 1920, Soviet policy took the final step in acknowledging the need for a more traditional policy toward the West when Foreign Minister Georgi Chicherin said:

There may be differences of opinion as to the duration of the capitalist system, but at present the capitalist system exists, so that a *modus vivendi* must be found. . . .<sup>22</sup>

Despite the revolutionary rhetoric, in the end national interest emerged as a dominant Soviet goal, becoming elevated into a socialist verity just as it had stood for so long at the core of the policies of the capitalist

states. Survival was now the immediate goal and coexistence the tactic.

Yet the socialist state soon confronted another military threat when, in April 1920, it was attacked by Poland. Polish forces reached the neighborhood of Kiev before they were defeated. When the Red Army, in a counterthrust, approached Warsaw, the Western Allies intervened, demanding an end to the offensive and peace. British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon proposed a dividing line between Poland and Russia which the Soviets were prepared to accept. Poland, however, refused, so the final settlement was made along the prewar military lines, far to the east of what Curzon had proposed.

Poland thus managed to sharpen the antagonism of its two historic enemies: Germany, from which it had acquired Upper Silesia and the Polish corridor; and the Soviet Union, from which it had seized the territory east of what became known as the Curzon Line. When the smoke cleared, the Soviet Union found itself free at last of wars and revolution, yet having paid for it with the loss of most of the tsars' conquests in the Baltic, Finland, Poland, Bessarabia, and along the Turkish frontier. By 1923, Moscow had reclaimed control of Ukraine and Georgia, which had seceded from the Russian Empire during the turmoil—an event not forgotten by many contemporary Russian leaders.

To restore domestic control, the Soviet Union had to make a pragmatic compromise between revolutionary crusades and *Realpolitik*, between the proclamation of world revolution and the practice of peaceful coexistence. Though it opted to defer world revolution, the Soviet Union was far from a supporter of the existing order. It saw in peace an opportunity to pit the capitalists against each other. Its particular target was Germany, which had always played a major role in Soviet thought and in Russian sentiment. In December 1920, Lenin described the Soviet strategy:

Our existence depends, first, on the existence of a radical split in the camp of the imperialist powers and, secondly, on the fact that the victory of the Entente and the Versailles peace have thrown the vast majority of the German nation into a position where they cannot live. . . . The German bourgeois government madly hates the Bolsheviks, but the interests of the international situation are pushing it towards peace with Soviet Russia against its own will.<sup>23</sup>

Germany was coming to the same conclusion. During the Russo-Polish war, General Hans von Seeckt, the architect of the postwar German army, had written:

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The present Polish state is a creation of the Entente. It is to replace the pressure formerly exercised by Russia on the eastern frontier of Germany. The fight of Soviet Russia with Poland hits not only the latter, but above all the Entente—France and Britain. If Poland collapses the whole edifice of the Versailles Treaty totters. From this it follows clearly that Germany has no interest in rendering any help to Poland in her struggle with Russia.<sup>24</sup>

Von Seeckt's view confirmed the fears aired by Lord Balfour a few years earlier (and quoted in the last chapter)—that Poland gave Russia and Germany a common enemy and obviated their balancing one another, as they had done throughout the nineteenth century. In the Versailles system, Germany faced not a Triple Entente but a multitude of states in various stages of disagreement with each other, all of them opposed as well by a Soviet Union with territorial grievances very similar to Germany's. It was only a matter of time before the two outcasts pooled their resentments.

The occasion arose in 1922 at Rapallo, an Italian seaside town near Genoa, and the site of Lloyd George's international conference. Ironically, it was made possible by the constant haggling over reparations that had been going on since the Treaty of Versailles, and that had intensified after the presentation of the Allied reparations bill and Germany's claim that it was unable to pay.

A major obstacle to the conference's success was that Lloyd George had neither the power nor the wisdom with which Secretary of State George Marshall would later steer his own reconstruction program to fruition. At the last moment, France refused to permit the subject of reparations to be included in the agenda, fearing, quite correctly, that France would be pressed to reduce the total amount. It seemed that France prized above all its unfulfillable, albeit internationally recognized, claim to some attainable compromise. Germany was looking for a moratorium on reparations. The Soviets were suspicious that the Allies might try to end the impasse by linking tsarist debts to German reparations, whereby the Soviet Union would be asked to acknowledge the tsars' debts and to reimburse itself from German reparations. Article 116 of the Treaty of Versailles had left open precisely this possibility.

The Soviet government had no more intention of acknowledging tsarist debts than it did of recognizing British and French financial claims. Nor was it anxious to add Germany to its already extensive list of adversaries by joining the reparations merry-go-round. In order to prevent the Genoa Conference from resolving this issue to the Soviets' disadvantage, Moscow proposed in advance of the conference that the two pariahs establish

diplomatic relations and mutually renounce all claims against each other. Not wanting to be the first European country to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and thereby possibly jeopardize its chances of obtaining relief from the reparations bill, Germany evaded the proposition. The proposal remained on the table until events at Genoa forced a change of attitude.

Soviet Foreign Minister Georgi Chicherin, an aristocrat by birth who became a passionate believer in the Bolshevik cause, relished the opportunity provided by Genoa to put revolutionary convictions into the service of *Realpolitik*. He proclaimed "peaceful coexistence" in terms which placed practical cooperation above the requirements of ideology:

... the Russian delegation recognize that in the present period of history, which permits the parallel existence of the old social order and of the new order now being born, economic collaboration between the States representing these two systems of property is imperatively necessary for the general economic reconstruction.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, Chicherin coupled the appeal for cooperation with proposals well designed to compound the confusion of the democracies. He spelled out an agenda so sweeping that it could neither be implemented nor ignored by democratic governments—a tactic that would remain a constant of Soviet diplomacy. This agenda included the abolition of weapons of mass destruction, a world economic conference, and international control of all waterways. The purpose was to mobilize Western public opinion and to give Moscow a reputation for peaceful internationalism which would make it difficult for the democracies to organize the anticommunist crusade which was the Kremlin's nightmare.

Chicherin found himself an outsider at Genoa, though no more so than the members of the German delegation. The Western Allies remained oblivious to the temptations they were creating for both Germany and the Soviet Union by pretending that these two most powerful countries on the Continent could simply be ignored. Three requests by the German Chancellor and his Foreign Minister for a meeting with Lloyd George were rebuffed. Simultaneously, France proposed holding private consultations with Great Britain and the Soviet Union from which Germany would be excluded. The purpose of these meetings was to resurrect the shopworn scheme of trading tsarist debts for German reparations—a proposal which even less suspicious diplomats than the Soviets would have construed as a trap to undermine the prospect of improved German-Soviet relations.



By the end of the first week of the conference, both Germany and the Soviet Union were worried that they would be pitted against each other. When one of Chicherin's aides telephoned the German delegation at the conspiratorial hour of one-fifteen in the morning on April 16, 1922, proposing a meeting later that day at Rapallo, the Germans jumped at the invitation. They were anxious to end their isolation as much as the Soviets wanted to avoid the dubious privilege of becoming German creditors. The two foreign ministers lost little time drafting an agreement in which Germany and the Soviet Union established full diplomatic relations, renounced claims against each other, and granted each other Most Favored Nation status. Lloyd George, upon receiving belated intelligence of the meeting, frantically tried to reach the German delegation to invite them to the interview he had repeatedly rejected. The message reached Rathenau, the German negotiator, as he was about to leave for the signing of the Soviet-German agreement. He hesitated, then muttered: "*Le vin est tiré; il faut le boire*" (The wine is drawn; it must be drunk).<sup>26</sup>

Within a year, Germany and the Soviet Union were negotiating secret agreements for military and economic cooperation. Though Rapallo later came to be a symbol of the dangers of Soviet-German rapprochement, it was in fact one of those fateful accidents which seem inevitable only in retrospect: accidental in the sense that neither side planned for it to happen when it did; inevitable because the stage for it had been set by the Western Allies' ostracism of the two largest Continental countries, by their creation of a belt of weak states between them hostile to each, and by their dismemberment of both Germany and the Soviet Union. All of this created the maximum incentive for Germany and the Soviet Union to overcome their ideological hostility and to cooperate in undermining Versailles.

Rapallo by itself did not have that consequence; it symbolized, however, a common overriding interest which continued to draw together Soviet and German leaders for the remainder of the interwar period. George Kennan has ascribed this agreement in part to Soviet persistence, in part to Western disunity and complacency.<sup>27</sup> Clearly, the Western democracies were shortsighted and fatuous. But once they had made the error of drafting the Treaty of Versailles, only extremely forbidding choices were left to them. In the long run, Soviet-German cooperation could have been forestalled only by a British and French deal with one or the other of them. But the minimum price of such a deal with Germany would have been the rectification of the Polish border and, almost certainly, the abolition of the Polish Corridor. In such a Europe, France could only have avoided German domination by a firm alliance with Great

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Britain, which, of course, the British refused to consider. Similarly, the practical implication of any deal with the Soviet Union would have been the restoration of the Curzon Line, which Poland would have rejected and France would not consider. The democracies were not prepared to pay either price, or even to admit to the dilemma of how to defend the Versailles settlement without allowing either Germany or the Soviet Union a significant role.

This being the case, there was always the possibility that the two Continental giants might opt to partition Eastern Europe between themselves rather than join a coalition directed against the other. Thus it remained to Hitler and Stalin, unfettered by the past and driven by their lusts for power, to blow away the house of cards assembled by the well-meaning, peace-loving, and essentially timid statesmen of the interwar period.