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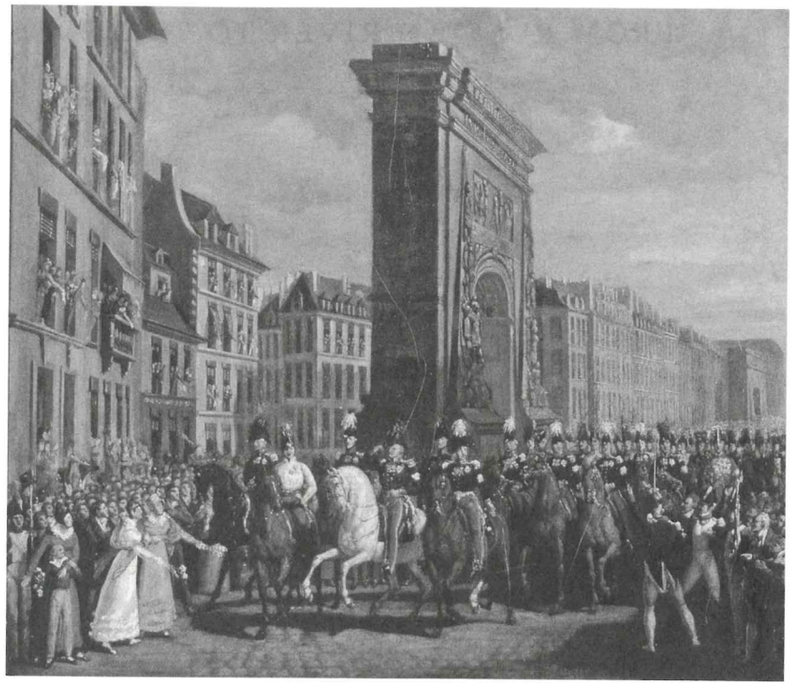
Barrass

the Great Cold War

THE HALL OF MIRRORS

Gordon S. Barrass

Why Did It Start?



Tsar Alexander I leads his troops though Paris, accompanied by King Frederick William of Prussia, March 31, 1814. (By Jean Zipper. Musée Carnavalet, Paris)

1 Soaring Eagles

Worlds Apart

Because the rivalry between Russia and America became clear long before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, it is useful to look back a little further into each country's history in order to see the origins of the tension.

Russia had been built up by autocratic tsars, who ruled through a highly centralized regime backed by the Orthodox Church. Since the collapse of Byzantium in 1453, Moscow believed it had become the "Third Rome," with a God-given destiny to gather the peoples of the world to the Orthodox faith.

The national symbol was the double-headed eagle of Byzantium, with one head supposedly looking back to ancient Rome and the other looking forward from the new one. At the end of the 15th century, Italian engineers were to strengthen the fortifications of the Kremlin and to build the Faceted Hall, which was modeled on one of the most admired Italian palaces of the day—the Palazzo Diamante in Ferrara.

At the end of the 17th century, Peter the Great set about modernizing Russia with extraordinary determination. He created St. Petersburg, his splendid new capital on the shores of the Baltic, to symbolize Russia's growing involvement in Europe. By 1758, there had been the first clash of arms in centuries between the Russians and the Germans, with Russian troops advancing close to Berlin; twelve years later, Catherine the Great ordered the most dramatic military move Russia had yet made—sending its navy into the Mediterranean to destroy the Turkish fleet.

At the turn of the century, the Russians moved much farther westwards, battling against the armies of revolutionary France in Italy and Switzerland. The biggest battle began in 1812, when Napoleon invaded Russia, and within a year he had lost most of his massive army of half a million men. In 1814, Tsar Alexander I led his victorious troops through Paris, along with those of his Prussian and

Austrian allies. While Alexander went on to London, where he was treated as the hero who had liberated Europe, his troops made their way home.

After Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo in 1815, Tsar Alexander had a major voice at the Congress of Vienna, which shaped the political geography of Europe for the next hundred years. After the trauma of the Napoleonic wars, Alexander hoped it would be possible to create a new Russian identity that would enable the country to have a greater say in European affairs through the establishment of a European confederation, without undermining the stability of Russia itself. Alexander failed to achieve that goal, but he did gain control over much more of Poland, which he believed would provide a forward line of defense in central Europe.

As the 19th century progressed, Russia's former allies began to fear its imperial ambitions. To the south, the Russians were pushing the Ottoman Turks back through the Balkans in the hope of gaining control of the Turkish Straits, which linked the Black Sea with the Mediterranean. At the same time, their advances into Central Asia alarmed the British, who believed that the Russians were intent on gaining a warm-water port on the Indian Ocean. They jostled with the British for influence in Afghanistan, whose king was given a truly imperial welcome to St. Petersburg in 1905.

All the while America, too, was developing its own distinctive identity. The Puritans who arrived in Massachusetts Bay in the early 17th century brought with them a revolutionary mix of ardent beliefs, not simply about religion, but about politics, economics and society as well. They believed their task was to create a New Jerusalem and then take their "shining example" to the rest of the world.

By the end of the next century, through the War of Independence with Britain and much heated debate over the drafting of the Constitution, the Americans had accomplished the first great political revolution of the modern age. They had paved the way for the establishment of a new political system based on the aspirations of freedom and liberty.

The new republic expanded westwards with remarkable speed and under its emblem of the bald eagle, whose great strength was seen as symbolizing the American ideal of freedom. Unfortunately, the Founding Fathers and many other members of the political elite owned cotton and sugar plantations, which were the major source of their wealth. Although slavery was legally abolished in 1865, after a bloody Civil War, problems over racial equality would continue to blight America's reputation for well over another century.

Getting Closer

A century after Russia's intrepid explorers reached the Pacific in 1647, they laid claim to Alaska. Then, in the 18th century, the Russians began establishing a few trading posts along the Pacific coast. The post furthest to the south was opened in 1812, at the mouth of a river, still known as the Russian River, in what is now northern California.[1]

Even though the United States only stretched as far west as the Mississippi, there was already a growing sentiment that the nation's "manifest destiny" was to extend its territory to the Pacific. With it grew the belief that the Americans were entitled to have all of North and South America within their sphere of influence. In 1823, President Monroe proclaimed that the Americas were "henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers . . . ," and this new policy immediately became known as the Monroe Doctrine.

The first country to be formally warned-off was Russia, which two years earlier had banned foreigners from Alaska, where it was preparing to commercially exploit the land it claimed. Despite this problem, Russia and the United States remained fairly friendly, reflecting their shared wish to keep Britain and France in check. The high point of this period came in 1867, when Russia decided that it was too difficult to sustain the development of Alaska and amicably sold it to the United States.

As the United States consolidated its hold across the continent, immigrants poured in, and its population grew larger than that of any European state other than Russia, in addition to which it had developed a strong and stable republican government. It had also just become the world's largest industrial nation. Trade and investment were booming in Latin America, and the annexation of Hawaii in 1898 had provided a stepping-stone across the Pacific that would make it easier to promote American business interests in Asia.

The United States embarked on its first overseas war in 1898, putting an end to Spain's savage efforts to retain control over Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam—Spain's remaining colonial possessions in the Caribbean and the Pacific. The success of this venture reaffirmed the widely held American belief that the United States had the moral authority to be the advanced-guard of a new civilization. The following year, Rudyard Kipling wrote his memorable poem "The White Man's Burden," explaining to Americans that building empires was a long and costly process.

As the 19th century came to a close, American and Russian commercial

Europe in 1914

interests were coming into conflict in China, where the government was weakening year by year. The Americans wanted free trade, whereas the Russians were more interested in gaining control over the northeastern province of Manchuria, with its rich resources and warm-water ports on the edge of the Pacific. As the United States hoped, Russia's expansion into China was checked by Japan, a rapidly rising power in Asia. In 1904–5, the Japanese trounced Russia's army in Manchuria and sank most of its main battle fleet at the Tsushima Strait, which separates Korea from Japan (see map on p. 28).

Relations between Washington and St. Petersburg had also soured as a growing number of Americans became aware of the brutality of the Russian government. Indeed, some American bankers were so angered by Russia's treatment of its Jews that they provided much of the finance that had enabled Japan to defeat Russia in 1905. By 1911, the United States government bowed to pressure from American Jewish groups and abrogated the 70-year-old Russian-American commercial treaty. This was the first time that Americans had felt that they could interfere in Russia on human rights; it would not be the last.

The setbacks Russia suffered in Asia led to modest political reforms at home, but they resulted in the emergence of weak political parties and their involvement in a parliament that had little power. An even bigger change was already underway as Russia's economy began to take off, growing faster than that of any other major state as grain exports boomed.

As a result of the growth of trade, more Western Europeans were living in Russia and ever greater numbers of Russians were visiting Western Europe. While Russia's extraordinary cultural creativity—in music, ballet, literature and art—was all widely admired in Europe, open-minded Russians were collecting some of the finest modern French art. During the *belle époque* that preceded the First World War, the Russians had a greater presence in Europe than the Americans.

The Americans, meanwhile, wanted the world to know that they were a rising military power. Having restructured the army so that it could act as an expeditionary force overseas, the American government set out to show the flag by sending its new "Great White Fleet" to circle the globe in 1908. It was the largest naval force ever to have made that voyage. And during the two decades before the First World War, the Marines were sent into Latin American and Caribbean countries some twenty times, usually in response to demands from Wall Street to ensure that governments would not default on American loans or to protect American investments.

Fear of Revolution

Long before the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia in 1917, there was a pervasive fear of revolution not just among Europeans, but also among Americans.

The harshness and misery that accompanied industrialization built up pressures for radical change. According to Karl Marx, revolution would be the locomotive of history that would lead the exploited into a more just and prosperous world. In 1848, he issued his *Communist Manifesto* in which he backed this idea with his famous rallying call—"Workers of the World Unite!" The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 sparked a revolution in a part of Paris—the so-called Paris Commune—which brought into the open the intense anger that lurked within the proletariat.

As the authorities across Europe tightened their control, some people turned in desperation to anarchism. In the twenty years before the First World War, five European heads of state and dozens of other prominent figures were assassinated by anarchists and many other leaders narrowly escaped. In 1901, President McKinley became the most prominent of their victims in America.

Anarchism was much more widespread in autocratic Russia. Between 1881, when anarchists assassinated Tsar Alexander II, and the outbreak of the First World War, some two and half thousand people died as a result of anarchist attacks and roughly the same number were executed by the tsarist government for having being involved in them.

In Western Europe, over the course of the three decades leading up to the First World War, most Marxists became social democrats, a process helped by timely social legislation and by the fact that workers had gained a political voice through the formation of trade unions. Nonetheless, fear of revolution persisted in America, where businesses continued to oppose unions, social security and injury compensation, and where social democracy was generally considered little more than communism in disguise.

In Russia, revolution did not progress according to Marx's predictions. After three exhausting years of war against Germany, widespread unrest among the relatively small working class and fear the army would mutiny, Tsar Nicholas II abdicated in February 1917. That November, Vladimir Lenin led the Bolsheviks, Russia's small hard-line communist party, to power—not by a popular revolution, but through a *coup d'etat* that enabled them to seize control of the politically weak provisional government and win popular support by proclaiming utopian aspirations and promising land to the peasantry.

In a world plagued by poverty and injustice, the new creed of Marxism-Leninism, which promised prosperity and justice for all, had enormous attraction. But in Russia it swiftly adopted the authoritarian character of tsarism, along with faith in the ability of violence to secure political ends. Lenin assured the Russian people that their revolution would be defended with "merciless measures," and it was.[2]

Arthur Koestler, the former communist who had written *Darkness at Noon*, published in 1940, described how he and so many others who did not wish to engage in violence coped with the horrors of a revolution whose ideals they supported. He wrote, "I learned to classify automatically everything that shocked me as 'the heritage of the past' and everything I liked as 'seeds of the future.'"[3]

Whereas "Holy Russia" believed that God had given it a divine mission, Soviet Russia believed that "history" had tasked it with promoting proletarian revolution across the world—a far more messianic venture that would bring it into conflict with the capitalist powers of the world. But even if Russia had not become a communist nation, there would almost certainly have been growing friction between Russia and America. They were, after all, two rapidly expanding and fundamentally different powers.

The Clash of Ideologies

Had they ever met, perhaps the only thing that Ronald Reagan and Vladimir Lenin would have agreed upon was that the struggle between socialism and capitalism would end only when one of them gave up. In many respects, the start of the Cold War can be traced back to 1917, when Lenin called for a world revolution that would eliminate capitalism because, as he saw it, "we cannot live in peace; in the end, one or the other will triumph."[4]

The Bolsheviks were not the only ones promoting a major new ideology on the world stage in 1917. That same year, the entry of the United States into the First World War gave the Americans their first chance to do just that. But the Americans did not champion their cause with either the ardor or the constancy of the Bolsheviks.

In bringing the American people into the war against Imperial Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, President Woodrow Wilson appealed to their idealism. Americans disliked the thought of being part of a "balance of power," but they responded positively to Wilson's call to fight "the war to end all wars." The public accepted his claim that the right to national "self-determi-

nation" and prosperity through free trade would help make the world safe for democracy.

Following the defeat of Germany, the Bolsheviks lost control of three territories that Russia had long regarded as important to its security—the so-called Congress Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Finland and the Baltic provinces that soon became Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. They hoped to regain the advantage through world revolution. Communists made violent attempts to seize power in Germany, Hungary, Slovakia and Finland.

In Russia, beginning in 1918, the Allies began trying to unseat the "Red" Bolsheviks by backing the "Whites," the group of tsarist supporters and others who opposed the communist coup. In 1919, efforts to break a strike by longshoremen in Seattle who refused to load arms to support the "Whites" led to a five-day general strike that paralyzed the city. Many Americans reacted hysterically to what was being portrayed, with the help of the Department of Justice, as the creeping menace of communism.

The "Whites" might well have won had they received more help from the Allies, but the Allies soon tired of their involvement in the civil war. In 1921, they pulled out their forces, hoping they would eventually be able to tame the Bolsheviks in other ways. A year earlier, Lloyd George, the British prime minister, reflected this hope when he argued: "We have failed to restore Russia to sanity by force. I believe we can do it and save her by trade . . . The simple sums of addition and subtraction which it inculcates soon disposes of wild theories."[5]

This was not the way the Bolsheviks viewed the world. For them the Soviet Union was not just a great power pursuing expansion in search of security, but the capital of an international revolutionary movement. Its leaders adhered to a closed system of thought that distorted their vision of the outside world and ruled out much of the normal give-and-take of international dealings.

Although the Bolsheviks saw themselves engaged in a long and ultimately victorious struggle with the forces of capitalism, they recognized that at times they would need to reduce the intensity of the struggle, by advocating the creation of united fronts against a common enemy or the pursuit of such policies as peaceful coexistence and détente. These, however, were temporary devices, pauses on the way to the predestined goal.

By 1919, having fought and won the "war to end all wars," the American people partied, abandoning Wilson's internationalism and quickly returning to the isolationism that many had long favored. In 1920, the Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles that had established the League of Nations, with

the result that there was now little hope of maintaining peace through "collective security." In the years to come, the disconcerting vacuum of power that this created became increasingly dangerous.

Soviet-American Relations Begin

To build up Soviet strength, Lenin needed credits and technology from the very capitalists he soon hoped to overthrow. In 1922, he began calling for "peaceful co-existence" and "correct" relations with other countries. Many foreign leaders and businessmen accepted that this really was what he wanted—even though Moscow was, at the same time, helping to develop revolutionary communist parties in countries and colonies all over the world.

Despite the absence of diplomatic relations between Washington and Moscow, the United States was providing a quarter of all Soviet imports. In late 1933, Washington finally established diplomatic relations with Moscow, making the United States the last major power to do so. This was the beginning of the complicated relationship between Josef Stalin and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Stalin was a revolutionary whose successful bank robberies provided the money that kept Lenin going while he plotted revolution in Russia from the safety of Western Europe. Stalin was a pseudonym that meant "man of steel," and it resonated well with the name "Lenin" (also a pseudonym, but one whose meaning is still debated). In 1922, Lenin made Stalin general-secretary of the party.

By the time of his death, two years later, Lenin had become deeply troubled by certain defects in Stalin's personality. He was right to be so, as Stalin was skillfully and murderously manipulating Lenin's aready ruthless system, perhaps with a little additional guidance from Machiavelli's *The Prince,* which was specially translated for him. But unlike several of the other leading Bolsheviks, Stalin had little firsthand knowledge of the outside world, having made only two brief trips into Western Europe, both before the First World War.

As far as Stalin was concerned, there was no hope of a communist world revolution in the foreseeable future. He believed that first the Soviet Union needed to develop "socialism in one country" so that it would be strong enough to deter any would-be attacker. In the meantime, he would exploit whatever opportunities might arise to spread communism in other countries. For Stalin, the goal of "socialism in one country" could be achieved only through the elimination of all domestic opposition and by industrializing the Soviet Union at breakneck speed.

The human cost of these twin policies was appalling. By the time war broke out in 1941, perhaps as many as 20 million people had been executed, died in slave-labor camps or perished in the famines that followed the forced collectivization of agriculture.[6] On the night of December 12, 1938, alone, Stalin personally signed death warrants bearing the names of 5,000 people, after which he went to his private movie theater to enjoy two films, one of them a comedy called *Merry Fellows*.[7]

Few Americans know what an important part their country played in building up Soviet industry. In the twenties and thirties, Americans designed over 600 major factories, oversaw the construction of the biggest hydroelectric dam and established the truck and automobile industry. At the peak there were probably some fifteen thousand Americans working in the Soviet Union.

While Stalin was trying to build socialism in one country, Roosevelt was hoping to revive capitalism in another—and through far more humane means. A landslide victory brought him to the White House in 1933, as the first Democratic president in twelve years. During the campaign he had promised the American people a "New Deal" to banish the horrors of the Great Depression, which had halved America's national income and dragged millions of Americans into poverty and despair.

As Roosevelt began his presidency, the hopes of continued peace were beginning to fade. Japan was expanding into China, Hitler had taken control of Germany and both powers had withdrawn from the League of Nations. Roosevelt understood that the United States would not be able to stand on the sidelines much longer. Within nine months of entering the White House, he proposed that the United States and the Soviet Union should establish diplomatic relations.

When the first American ambassador to the Soviet Union arrived in December 1933, he received not only unprecedented courtesy, but also a big wet kiss on his cheek from Stalin. But the fundamental differences between the two countries soon made such an amicable relationship unsustainable.

Forced Cooperation

Even as war became increasingly likely, uncertainties over Hitler's intentions fueled the suspicions of all concerned. Whereas the British and the French hated communism more than Nazism, Stalin's aim was to see Germany wear itself out in a war with Britain and France.

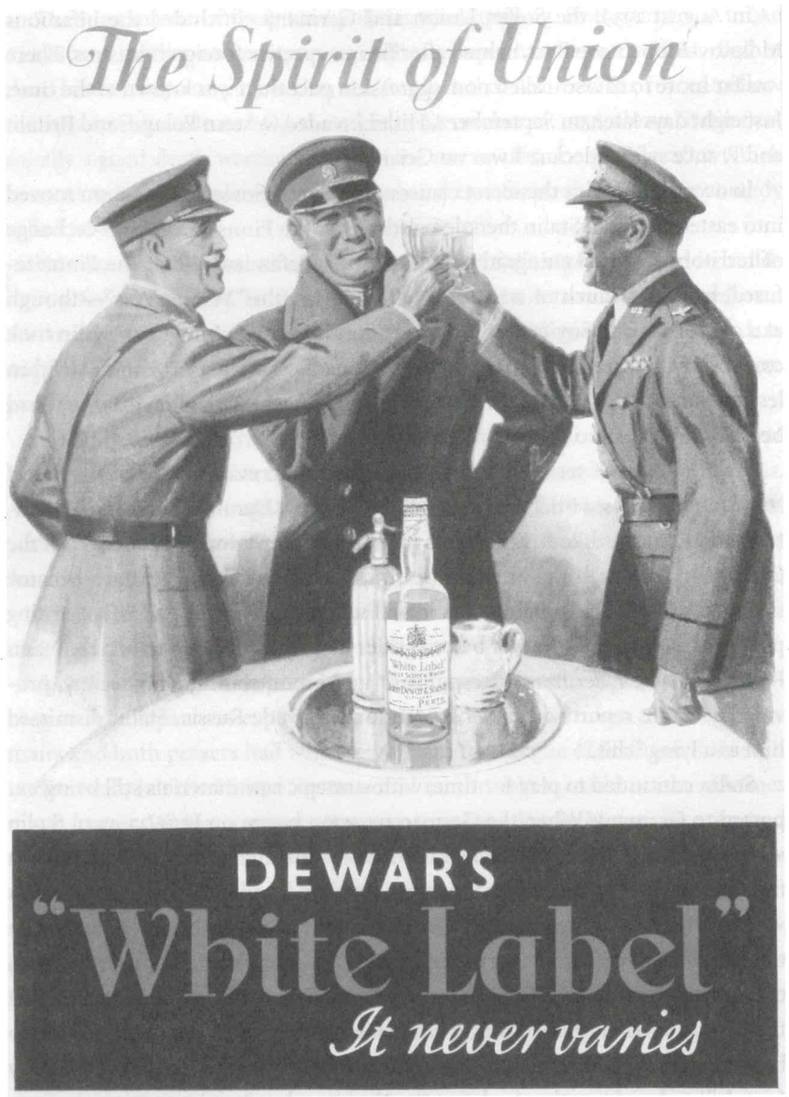
In August 1939, the Soviet Union and Germany concluded the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, named after their respective foreign ministers. There was far more to this so-called non-aggression pact than was known at the time. Just eight days later, on September 1, Hitler invaded western Poland, and Britain and France swiftly declared war on Germany.

In accordance with the secret clauses of the pact, Soviet troops soon moved into eastern Poland. Stalin then demanded that the Finns agree to an exchange of territory so that Leningrad could be better defended. When the Finns refused, he seized much of what he wanted during the "Winter War"—though at a cost of 125,000 Soviet troops. Three months later, in June 1940, Stalin took control of the three Baltic Republics—Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Within less than a year, he had recovered much of the Tsarist Russian territory that had been lost as a result of the First World War.

Stalin's hopes of seeing Germany weakened soon evaporated. In a series of stunning victories, Hitler had conquered Norway, Denmark, the Low Countries and France, while British forces had been ignominiously evicted from the Continent. Although the intelligence of an imminent German attack became stronger with each passing day, Stalin still suspected this was part of a cunning plot to draw him into the war before Hitler had really decided to attack. When Richard Sorge, a German correspondent and an outstanding Soviet spy, provided accurate reports on Hitler's intention to invade Russia, Stalin dismissed him as a lying "shit."[8]

Stalin continued to play for time, with strategic raw materials still being exported to Germany. When the German invasion began on June 22, 1941, Stalin was so shaken that he left Viacheslav Molotov, his foreign minister, to inform the Soviet people what was happening. Further humiliated by the rapid advance of Hitler's armies towards Moscow, Stalin retreated briefly to his dacha outside of Moscow. Whatever his colleagues thought about his misjudgments, they were agreed that Stalin was the only person who had any chance of rallying the people to defeat Hitler. But it was not until July 3 that Stalin made a radio broadcast from the Kremlin, calling on the public ("brothers and sisters . . . my friends") to band together to defeat the Nazi invaders.[9]

Only when Stalin and Winston Churchill, Britain's wartime leader, faced the prospect of defeat could they finally join in a common cause. Churchill had a deep hatred of both communism and Nazism, but the threat of Nazism was far more immediate. He justified his willingness to join with Stalin by saying, "If Hitler invaded Hell, I would make at least a favorable reference to the Devil



"The Spirit of Union" caught the public mood, but the big question was whether one could be confident that, like Dewar's, "It never varies." (Courtesy of John Dewar & Sons)

in the House of Commons."[10] Stalin would no doubt have concurred with the sentiment.

"Mother Russia" Goes to War

Faced with the prospect of defeat, Stalin rightly judged that the cheapest and quickest way to inspire his troops was to make their military commanders more closely resemble the victors of Russia's past. Through his newfound British ally, Stalin obtained large amounts of gold braid that soon began to appear on the uniforms of Soviet officers.

In December 1941, the Japanese attacked the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor and expanded their war of conquest from China into southeast Asia. Hitler's simultaneous declaration of war on the United States brought the Americans into alliance with both Britain and the Soviet Union. After almost a quarter of a century, America was once again going to be a major player in European affairs.

Japan, however, remained neutral in the Nazi-Soviet war, a decision that was crucial for Stalin's regime. Reliable intelligence about Japanese intentions enabled Stalin to transfer troops from Siberia in time to defend Moscow.[11] Similarly, the Japanese did not interfere with the rapidly growing volume of American military aid that was being sent across the Pacific in American ships flying the Soviet flag.

At home, Stalin played on Russian nationalism. Many conscripts and volunteers fought with fervor, feeling that after the years of Stalin's terror they were again "free to be Russian" and to defend "Mother Russia." Before long, the portraits of Marx and Engels hanging in the Kremlin were replaced by those of the Russian heroes of the Napoleonic Wars and after the Red Army's great victory at Stalingrad, in February 1943, Stalin took to wearing a marshal's uniform.

We now know that intelligence from Britain—based on the deciphering of Germany military communications (code-named *Ultra*)—contributed to the victories of the Red Army. Its importance increased greatly after Stalin obtained unsanitized versions of the decriptions from his own agents in Britain and so took them more seriously.[12]

So, too, did military aid from Britain, and above all from America, which provided roughly $150 billion worth of supplies and equipment at 2007 prices. In the summer of 1944, Marshal Rokossovsky, one of the most talented Soviet commanders of the Second World War, destroyed the same number of German

divisions on the Eastern Front that were confronting the Allied forces in France on D-Day.

As the Germans were pushed on to the defensive, a new prospect was emerging. Either Soviet troops would come face-to-face with the Americans and British in a defeated Germany or one side might cut a deal with the Germans at the other's expense. Given what had happened in 1941, Stalin was taking no chances. There was a dramatic upsurge in Soviet espionage against these two countries.

Soviet Intelligence had the benefit of some promising sources in Britain (who came to be known as the "magnificent five"), one of whom had already reported on British plans to develop an atomic bomb. The primary intelligence effort, however, took place in America, with high priority being given to America's war aims, military technology and the atom bomb. Moscow's efforts were greatly aided by the presence of many intelligence officers among the some 5,000 Soviet officials in New York and Washington, who were arranging for American supplies to be shipped to the Soviet Union.

2 Face-to-Face

Towards an Accord

When Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin (the Big Three) met together for the first time in Tehran at the end of November 1943, they had real incentives to try to come to terms. They were, after all, close to exhaustion, in midst of the second world war in one generation and with no wish to face a third. They feared that unless they found a way to cooperate with each other, Germany and Japan would be strong enough to threaten them again within twenty years.

Both Churchill and Roosevelt felt that they detected a distinctly tsarist streak in Stalin's foreign policy. Roosevelt, more so than Churchill, was prone to think that he could get through to "Uncle Joe" as one politician to another, even recording that at the Tehran Conference "we talked like men and brothers."[1]

For Stalin, however, it was not a question of choosing between great power interests and the pursuit of revolution, it was a matter of how best to achieve both. Although Stalin retained an ideological conviction that the Soviet Union would eventually find itself at war with the United States and Britain, his recent dealings with them seemed to have made him think that such a war could be delayed for many years. During this period he would seek to strengthen Soviet power and gradually spread communism abroad.

One of the reasons Stalin and Roosevelt got along was that neither liked to take up firm stances until they knew whose army occupied the territory. When Churchill asked Stalin about his post-war territorial ambitions, over dinner during the Tehran conference, Stalin replied "when the time comes we will speak."[2]

The discussion soon moved on to how the peace would be kept once the war was over. The president took the lead and proposed that, after the war, the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union and China should act as the world's "four policemen," cooperating through a new international body called the United Nations. By getting all four to sign up to this during the war, not afterwards,