

## AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN FOREIGN RELATIONS

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### Summary

This essay traces the security relationship between the United States and Europe from the end of World War II to the present. The onset of the Cold War impelled the West Europeans to enter into defensive pacts, first among themselves (Brussels Pact), and then with the United States and Canada (North Atlantic Treaty). An attempt to create an all-European Army on the communitarian model (the European Defense Community patterned after the European Coal and Steel Community) ended in failure in 1954; but in its wake, a modified Brussels Pact organization (the Western European Union) admitted West Germany and Italy, paving the way for the former also to enter NATO, thus bringing German troops into the balance vis-à-vis the Soviet Bloc. Throughout the Cold War, Western Europe sought to assure itself of the U.S. nuclear umbrella while seeking to mitigate American strategic dominance. The end of the Cold War paradoxically saw the West involved collectively in a series of conflicts – in the Gulf, in Bosnia, and in Kosovo – during which the use of NATO’s military assets proved indispensable. This, coupled with the European Union’s initial reluctance to enlarge its domain to the east, caused NATO enlargement to take place, with the admission of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary in 1999. The demonstration of European technological inferiority, as evidenced particularly in the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the

1990s, provided the impulsion for the Europeans, led by Britain and France, to develop an autonomous military force. This is to be done through the European Union itself, which would absorb the Western European Union. In this manner, Western Europe would be in a position of greater equilibrium vis-à-vis the United States. At the same time the European Union finally committed itself at the end of the decade to enlarge its membership to the east, though still not settling on a firm timetable.

## 1. Europe in 1945

In 1945, Europe was weary of the destruction it had caused itself in the two world wars of the first half of the twentieth century. Essentially, two movements were at work aimed at creating a new order so as to prevent a repetition of this destruction. The first was that of International Communism, given tremendous élan by the victory of the Red Army over Nazi Germany, but fatally flawed from within by the fact that the inspiration of Karl Marx had been taken over by what Charles de Gaulle referred to in 1961 as “the greatest imperialism that the world has ever known – the imperialism of the Soviet Union.”

The second movement was that of liberal internationalism, based on a perceived sense of an Atlantic Community outlined by Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill in their historic meeting at sea off the coast of Newfoundland in August 1941. It was Roosevelt’s aim in particular to make the forthcoming United Nations a more effective instrument of Wilsonian internationalism than its predecessor, the League of Nations was. Though he adhered to Wilson’s vision, Roosevelt wanted to improve on Wilson’s methods, and in particular his lack of a political touch.

The Atlantic Charter, promulgated by Roosevelt and Churchill in August 1941, was centered on Western Europe and North America. To harmonize this vast Community, and more particularly to end what had been at the heart of Continental European discord for the previous 75 years, the French-German rivalry, was the focus of statesmanship in the postwar period, led most notably by Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, Jean Monnet, Ernest Bevin, Robert Schuman, Paul-Henri Spaak, and Alcide de Gasperi.

On the other side of the Atlantic, enlightened figures such as George Kennan could appreciate that the idea of military pacts had a hollow ring for the peoples of Western Europe, who were still far from recovered from the effects of the Second World War. Little by little, by way of filling a spiritual void, and at the same time providing a strategic and moral *raison d’être* for a new engagement of the United States in Europe, a number of American and European intellectuals, led by Walter Lippmann, sketched out a picture of cultural and historical affinities on both sides of the Atlantic -- what Lippmann described as an “Atlantic civilization.” In his demarche, Lippmann was also aiming at an end to American isolationism, a position he had advocated as early as 1937.

Authors Jacques Godechot and Robert Palmer describe Lippmann in the following terms:

Lippmann was clearly the first to use the expression “Atlantic Community.” For him the

Atlantic Community was a political and economic grouping, established little by little by all the great powers bordering the ocean, strengthened by the "Atlantic Charter," and destined to develop in the future, thanks to the good neighbor principle and to the organization of increasingly active economic exchanges.

This sense of a Western community was to take on two inchoate forms at the end of the decade of the 1940s: an Atlantic form, in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which linked together Western Europe and North America in a defensive pact against an International Communism spearheaded by the Soviet Union; and a European form through the Council of Europe but later, and more importantly, through the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), launched as an idea by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman on May 9, 1950. Behind this initiative, which was that of Jean Monnet, was the notion that if France's and Germany's main war-making resources could be pooled, it would be impossible for them to go to war again. At the outset, the two forms, Atlantic and European, were not antithetical but mutually supportive.

At the same time, the idea of a North Atlantic, or even a Western European, community did not find unanimity on the continent of Europe. The small group of Western European statesmen, such as those mentioned above, did not have the full weight of public opinion behind them. In France in 1946, a third of the electorate voted Communist. The same was true of Italy by 1948. In the western zones of Germany, as political parties began to emerge in the late 1940s, there were strong anti-American movements on the Right as well as on the Left. Democracy in the United States was perceived by the Left in Continental Europe in antithetical terms. This is captured in François Furet's description of American civilization as:

In its reality both too mixed in with the Christian faith and too confident about the idea of free enterprise to attract all those who cannot think of the future of democracy except as separated from Christianity and from capitalism: the innumerable children of the French Revolution.

What is more, the prestige of the Soviet Union as the principal conqueror of Nazi Germany was at its height in Western Europe at the war's end, and in France, for example, virtually the entire intellectual class, with the exception of Raymond Aron, Albert Camus and a few others, looked upon the USSR with a sympathetic eye. Much of Continental European public opinion was still under the influence of the reigning anti-Fascism of the era, an anti-Fascism that, as François Furet observed, had a potent appeal. It was a "negation which unified East and West"; it gave to the recently-ended war an overall meaning; and it was, in its most radical expression, anti-capitalist. The prevailing mind-set of the postwar period, particularly in France, to some extent in Italy, and even in newly Socialist Britain in 1945, was that Fascism was basically a capitalist phenomenon. Quite to the contrary, as Furet has pointed out, Fascism's ideological appeal rested on its rejection of capitalism as an expression of "bourgeois" culture.

## **2. The Onset of the Cold War**

Most fundamentally, the East-West conflict that developed shortly after the end of World War II was a contest between two different ways of looking at the world:

The lens of Communism presented a view of opposing ideologies, as between the socialist East and the capitalist West; The lens of the West projected a vista of liberal democracies threatened by aggressive totalitarian states.

As a general rule, neither Communism nor the West was able, or willing, to recognize the righteousness that was at the basis of the other's world-view. Just as the Soviet Union conflated fascism and democracy as two faces of capitalism, so the West grouped Nazism and communism under the rubric of totalitarianism.

From the Marxist point of view, the crisis of the late 1940s in Europe was a prolongation of the anti-fascist struggle – a struggle that had been won by the forces of reaction in the Spanish Civil War but then had been followed by the decisive victory of the forces of socialism in the Soviet Union's triumph over Nazi Germany.

From the Western point of view, there emerged a clash in a different register -- that of democracy versus totalitarianism, the latter being represented in the late 1940s by what was seen as a despotic Stalinist regime seeking to reestablish and reach out beyond the empire of the Tsars.

In the years that followed World War II, the Communist bloc and the West were to become engaged in a struggle that had overtones of a crusade, by turns in Europe and in Asia. 1947 was the pivotal year, as the West and the Soviet Union became entangled at that moment in what would come to be known as the Cold War. It had been prefigured by Winston Churchill's speech at Fulton, Missouri in March 1946 in which he stated that "an Iron Curtain" had descended on the European Continent; and it culminated in the harsh rhetoric of Andrei Zhdanov's report to a gathering of European Communist parties in Poland in September 1947 – which was, according to Scott Parrish, "best known in the West as the first public declaration by a Soviet leader of the division of Europe into two camps."

Historians are still puzzling over the rapid deterioration of the wartime alliance of the Big Three into an acceptance, by mid-1947, of the Cold War as a fact of life. The orthodox school, the revisionist school, and the post-revisionist school in turn have had their say in divining reasons or assigning blame. The orthodox school pointed the finger at the Soviets; the revisionist school emphasized American economic motives and attributed to the U.S. some of the blame for the Cold War; and the post-revisionist school operated a course correction on the revisionists, holding the Soviet Union mainly responsible for the Cold War but acknowledging that the U.S. had established its own empire in the process.

The leading exponent of the post-revisionist school, John Lewis Gaddis, on the strength of new information from Soviet, Chinese and East European archives, adjusted his sights in a 1997 work, *We Now Know*:

What is there new to say about the old question of responsibility for the Cold War? Who actually started it? Could it have been averted? Here I think the "new" history is bringing us back to an old answer: that *as long as Stalin was running the Soviet Union a cold war was unavoidable* (author's italics).

Elena Aga-Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky see the Cold War developing not from Soviet preoccupation with security or mutual distrust between the two camps but rather from a “fundamental incompatibility between the...Western liberal-democratic and Stalinist societies whose very existence represented a constant challenge and a source of permanent instability for each other.” This theme is also echoed by Vojtech Mastny in his evocation of an “unbridgeable chasm between Stalinist and Western values.”

Whatever was uppermost in Soviet motivation at any given time, one cannot help but stress the ruthless and passably paranoid personality of the one man who could have made a difference. It is conceivable that with another Soviet leader, things might have turned out differently at the end of World War II. With Stalin at the helm of Soviet affairs, as Gaddis asserts, the Cold War was more or less inevitable.

### **3. The Dispute over Germany**

The most crucial issue around which disharmony developed between East and West as peace descended on Europe was, inevitably, Germany. During World War II, the Big Three Allies had been in agreement on what to do about Germany after the fighting ended: there would have to be a draconian peace. This view held sway not only in Russia and Western Europe but in American public opinion as well (though the latter would soon turn its attention toward the Soviet Union, rather than a resurgent Germany, as the greater source of danger).

With the approach of the end of the war, the animus against Germany rose to unprecedented heights, as the full horror of Nazi atrocities against Jews in particular, but also other groups (Gypsies, Poles, Russians, etc.), became known. In the United States, the most extreme expression of the “retribution” school of thought was that represented in the Morgenthau Plan, named after President Roosevelt’s Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, who wanted to eliminate Germany as an industrial power. This approach was discarded early in the postwar period, as both Britain and the United States soon came to realize the need for Germany to get back on its feet economically, in order for Western Europe as a whole to recover and prosper.

At the October 1943 Big Three Foreign Ministers’ conference in Moscow it had been agreed to set up a European Advisory Commission (EAC) in London to settle all problems arising from the conclusion of the war, most importantly with respect to Germany. A year later, the EAC, composed of representatives of the Big Three, issued agreements for the postwar disposition of Germany. The country would be split up into occupation zones, which were defined for each of the three victorious powers. Over these zones was to be a central administration, known as the Control Council, made up of the commanders-in-chief of the Big Three. Berlin would also be split up into occupation zones, administered centrally by an “Inter-Allied Governing Authority” or *Kommandatura*, responsible to the Control Council.

There were essentially three segments of the prewar (1937) Germany that came into shape after the war. The first was what became known as West Germany and comprised the three Western zones (France having been awarded a zone belatedly, on May 1, 1945). The second was what came to be called East Germany and was the Soviet zone

of occupation. East and West Germany together comprised about 75 per cent of what had been the prewar Reich. The third segment comprised the lands east of Germany's newly imposed boundary along the Oder-Niesse line. These lands were ceded to Poland as compensation for the latter's loss of its eastern territories to Russia in the September 1939 campaign that followed the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact. (Subsequently, on August 2, 1945, a portion of the territory of East Prussia, the city of Koenigsberg and the surrounding region, was given over to the USSR).

The early signs of a division of the Continent between Soviet Communism and Western democracy became apparent at the Yalta Conference of February 1945 which brought together the United States, the United Kingdom, and the USSR, supposedly to settle the shape of the postwar world in Europe. The Soviet insistence on installing its proxy leaders in Poland, by far the largest country in Eastern Europe, and the country for which the Western Allies had gone to war in 1939, alerted Churchill in particular to the threat of Russian expansionism which was to come. The Red Army was in occupation of the terrain in Eastern Europe, however, and there was little the Western Allies could do to impose pro-Western governments in these countries.

Through a mistake, or a misunderstanding, at the Yalta Conference, Winston Churchill thought he had agreed to the eastern branch of the Niesse River as Germany's new boundary line rather than the western branch, as Joseph Stalin understood it to be. When subsequently Churchill tried to protest, Stalin said that the Poles were already in the area between the two branches of the river and nothing could be done about it. Churchill intended to try to reverse this decision at the following conference at Potsdam, which began in July 1945, but he was voted out of office in the middle of the conference, so the line stood at the western branch. The effect of the change of line was to uproot an additional three million Germans, making a total of more than eight million Germans forced to leave territories east of the country's new boundary. (Another three million Germans were displaced from the Sudeten lands in Czechoslovakia and nearly two million from other countries of central and Eastern Europe).

The Potsdam Conference divided defeated Germany into four zones of occupation, replicated by four zones of occupation in Berlin itself – without, however, being able to set down firm lines for the political and juridical future of Germany. This was put off to future meetings, and so it was that Potsdam turned out to be a confirmation of the division of Europe into spheres of interest.

It became apparent from the time of the Potsdam Conference that the Russians on the one hand and the Anglo-Americans on the other hand had sharply opposing ideas for the administration of Germany. In the broadest sense, the Russians had no intention of installing democratic institutions in their zone of Germany or in any part of central and Eastern Europe that they controlled. Another issue of contention was the Russian effort to extract huge reparations from Germany, part of which effort was the wholesale dismantling of factories in East Germany for shipment eastward into Russia. Arrangements for granting the USSR some reparations from the Allied zones in Western Germany soon broke down, and Gen. Lucius D. Clay, who took over as Commander-in-Chief of the American Zone, stopped these arrangements altogether in May 1946.

#### 4. The Plight of Western Europe and the Marshall Plan

East of the dividing line in Europe, or as Churchill had put it in his Fulton, Missouri speech, “from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic,” the Red Army was in control. Western statesmen were powerless to prevent liberal democratic leaders from being swept away, as their countries one by one became satellites of the Soviet Union. To the west of the Iron Curtain governments were faced, beginning in mid-1947, with challenges from Communist movements enjoying a wide base of popular support – notably in France and Italy.

But in the final analysis the issue of “how many divisions” the Soviets had weighed heavily: there were none to the west of the Iron Curtain; there were many to the east. Furet has described the paradox as it existed at the time:

Although Communism – apart from Yugoslavia – has its most important European bastion in France and Italy, it is powerless to conduct a revolutionary action [there]. Thus is it weak where it is strong and strong where it is weak; in both cases, the “proletarian revolution” follows in the footsteps of the Red Army more than [those of] the forces of the proletariat.

Throughout the region, there was to appear an ideological variant of the ancient dictum of *cuius regio eius religio*, (the ruler’s religion will be the religion of his realm), applied by the ruling force of Soviet arms.

The case of Italy was quite different from that of Germany, as Italy had rallied to the Allied side in the fall of 1943. But Italy’s position remained ambiguous for the rest of the war. Gradually, across the non-Communist political spectrum – liberals, left Catholics, Christian Democrats and Socialists – the hopes engendered by the defection of Italy from the Axis camp, and the formation of a pro-Allied government led by King Victor Emmanuel and Marshal Pietro Badoglio were gradually whittled away. Italy’s effort from the beginning, which was to get out from under the armistice and become an ally, had failed. The peace treaty that finally emerged on June 18, 1947 served to confirm Italy’s status: it had been neither an ally nor a co-belligerent with London and Washington. It was simply a defeated country which was nevertheless entitled to some concessions. In a larger historical context, there was a feeling across the Italian political class that Anglo-American opinion had never given due recognition to the goals of the *Risorgimento* and therefore could not appreciate the degree to which Fascism had been an act of violence against the Italian nation.

France was in a position somewhat similar to Italy, although it had not been an enemy country as Italy had been for a good part of the war. Despite France’s significant contribution to the war effort from 1944 onwards (it had 1,300,000 men under arms at the time of the German surrender in 1945), it was still considered a deficient ally by the Anglo-Americans. It was nevertheless viewed as of central importance for the future of Western Europe.

The French political class as a whole was smarting over France’s loss of status, particularly vis-à-vis Britain; it was ambivalent about the presence of Americans in the

country; and it was favorably disposed toward the Soviet Union under the all-embracing (and passably spurious) banner of anti-fascism.

In Britain, at the end of the war, there was a subtle difference: British honor was intact. But the country was spent and exhausted. It was undergoing a transition to a welfare state, as had been advocated by the Beveridge Report of 1942 and carried forward by the Labor Party which was voted into office in July 1945. Despite the expectations (and fears) that Labor's program aroused, some 80 per cent of British industry was still in private hands by the time the Conservatives returned to power in 1951.

Britain failed to live up to American – and even Soviet – expectations that it would remain a Great Power after the war. When, in early 1947, Britain turned to the U.S. to take over from it the burden of helping the threatened regimes of Greece and Turkey, and the U.S. responded favorably in what came to be known as the Truman Doctrine, Secretary of State Dean Acheson wrote that this was only a part of “a much larger problem growing out of the change in Great Britain's strength and other circumstances, [and that it was urgent to] study situations elsewhere in the world which may require analogous financial, technical and military aid on our part.”

Acheson's memorandum prefigured what most scholars agree was the watershed event that marked the real start of the Cold War: the U.S. offer of the Marshall Plan, announced by General George Marshall in a speech at Harvard University on June 5, 1947, a discourse marked by brevity and lack of luster but which was to take on enormous significance in the weeks that followed.

Although the expressed American intention at the time of the announcement of the Marshall Plan was to extend aid to all European countries, including the Soviet Union, the latter came to look upon it as a Western effort to penetrate Eastern Europe. Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov walked out of the Paris Conference on the Marshall Plan in July 1947, and the other Eastern European participants were forced to follow suit. The net effect of this U.S. initiative, by the time the summer of 1947 was over, was to create a lasting split of Europe into two blocs. The Iron Curtain, which Churchill had stigmatized publicly in the previous year, had become a political and ideological reality. In late September 1947, the Soviets retaliated by holding a secret conference of European Communist Parties at Slarska-Poreba, Poland, in which the wartime Comintern was revived under the new name of the Cominform. The meeting in Poland also marked a change from the united front strategy that had been laid down by Stalin in meetings with Communist leaders Maurice Thorez and Palmiro Togliatti in March 1944, before their return, respectively, to France and Italy. Stalin told them at that time that their parties were in a position of weakness, being within the Western sphere of influence; therefore they should widen their base as much as possible, forming blocs with other left-wing forces and pursuing a policy of national unity.

By the fall of 1947, however, Moscow had little to lose in abandoning the united front strategy, as Communists had been successively ousted from governments in Belgium, France and Italy during that spring and summer. In Italy, this had been done at U.S. instigation; in France, the Government of Paul Ramadier had acted on its own. In the meeting in Poland, the French and Italian Communists, whose parties were the only



ones represented who were not in power, were told to adopt a more aggressive strategy. That did not mean, however, that the Soviets were prepared to assist their ascent to power, except from afar.

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