"The Cold War: A World History" by Odd Arne Westad

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Starting Points

The Cold War originated in two processes that took place around the turn of the twentieth century. One was the transformation of the United States and Russia into two supercharged empires with a growing sense of international mission. The other was the sharpening of the ideological divide between capitalism and its critics. These came together with the American entry into World War I and with the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the creation of a Soviet state as an alternative vision to capitalism. As a result of world war and depression, the Soviet alternative attracted much support around the world, but it also became a focus point for its enemies and rivals. By 1941, when both the USSR and the United States entered World War II, the Soviet Union was internally more powerful than ever, but also more isolated internationally. The wartime interaction between the Soviets, the United States, and the greatest of the nineteenth-century powers, Great Britain, would determine the future framework for international relations. While the Soviet Union opposed world capitalism, the United States became its leader, though under circumstances that no European would have dreamed about a generation earlier. The history of the world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is first and foremost a history of the growth of American power, economically, technologically, and militarily. In the fifty years between the American Civil War and World War I, the US gross domestic product (GDP) multiplied more than seven times. Its steel production, which in 1870 had been at only 5 percent of British levels, by 1913 was four times that of Britain. By that year, the United States had the most industrial patents of any country in the world. The combination of technological change and abundant natural resources created a juggernaut of capitalist development that, within a generation, would put all competitors to shame. Part of the US success was how its massive economic power intersected with the daily lives of American citizens. Other rising powers in history had seen their rise mainly benefit their elites, while ordinary people had to be satisfied with the scraps left at the table of empire. The United States changed all that. Its economic rise created a domestic consumer society that everyone could aspire to take part in, including recent immigrants and African-Americans, who were otherwise discriminated against and had little political influence. New products offered status and convenience, and the experience of modernity through goods produced by new technology defined what it meant to be American: it was about transformation, a new beginning in a country where resources and ideas fertilized each other through their abundance. In the late nineteenth century, concepts of uniqueness, mission, and abundance came together to create a US foreign policy ideology of great force and coherence. In its own mind, the United States was different from other places: more modern, more developed, and more rational. Americans also felt an obligation toward the rest of the European-dominated world to help re-create it in the US image. But while few Americans doubted that the United States was a more advanced form of European civilization, they were divided about what kind of power this advantage entitled them to. Some still believed in the framework established by the American Revolution: that it was the example set by US republicanism,

thrift, and enterprise that would affect the rest of the world and make peoples elsewhere want to restart the European experience, the way Americans themselves had done. Others believed that in a world of expanding empires the United States had to lead from the front. Instead of only acting as an example it had to intervene to set the world right; the world needed not only American ideas but American power. Ideas and power came together at the turn of the century with the US victory in the Spanish-American War. Though the war lasted less than four months, the United States got a colonial empire that included the former Spanish possessions of the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. The first US governor of the Philippines, William Howard Taft, made the islands an experiment in what he saw as an American type of development: capitalism, education, modernity, and orderliness. When elected US president in 1908, Taft stressed the beneficial role US capital could play abroad, in the Caribbean, Central America, or Pacific Asia. But he also underlined the plentiful opportunities for US companies to earn money abroad and the government's duty to protect them. Taft's "dollar diplomacy" was a sign of his country's global ascendance. By 1914 the United States was a world power. But its leaders were still uncertain about their country's role on the world stage. Should the American purpose be effective intervention or effective insulation? Was the main aim of American power to protect its own people or save the world? These debates came together in President Woodrow Wilson's decision to join World War I in 1917. Wilson believed that part of the US mission was to help set the world right. His policy toward Mexico, where he intervened twice, was based on the principle that it was in the interest of the United States to push its southern neighbor toward constitutionalism and an American form of democracy. Wilson's sympathies were entirely with the Allied Powers, headed by the British, French, and Russians, fighting against the Central Powers led by Germany and Austria-Hungary. What pushed him to intervene was German submarine warfare against international shipping between the United States and the Allied countries. In his declaration of war, Wilson promised to "vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power" and make the world "safe for democracy."1 His rhetoric during America's short war in Europe focused on the need to battle against chaos and unrest, and to preserve freedom, for men, for commerce, and for trade. Wilson was the first southerner elected president since before the Civil War, and his views on race and the US mission reflected those held by white men of his time. To the president, part of America's global task was to gradually improve the ability of others to practice democracy and capitalism. For this mission, Wilson thought in terms of a clear racial hierarchy. White Americans and western Europeans were already well suited for the task. Central, eastern, and southern Europeans had to be prepared for it. Latin Americans, Asians, and Africans had to be enlightened and educated through guidance or trusteeships until they could really start to take responsibility for their own affairs. To Wilson, who was essentially a liberal internationalist, the capacities to make rational political decisions and to make economic decisions went together. Only those who had mastered the latter would master the former. The American role was to prepare the world for a time when such decisions would universally be made, and when a peaceful equilibrium would be promoted through trade and free economic interaction.

While the United States, at least in the eyes of most of its citizens, came to fulfill the promise of capitalism and the market, Russia in the late nineteenth century was for many about the negation of these values. Though business and industrial production expanded under Tsar Nicholas II's reign (1894–1917), both the government and much of the opposition attempted to find alternatives that would not take Russia through the furnace of a market transformation. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire relentlessly expanded from eastern Europe to central Asia to Manchuria and Korea. Just as many Americans believed in a continental definition of their country, well before any such possibility existed, many Russians felt their destiny was to forge a dominion from sea to sea, from the Baltic and the Black Sea to the Caspian and the Pacific. Empires such as Britain and France might have expanded through sea power, but Russia aimed at creating a contiguous land empire, settled by its own people, in a territory almost twice the size of the continental United States. Inside this new Russia, old and new ideas wrestled for primacy. Sometimes they came together in surprising combinations. The tsar's advisers often denigrated the market as a pollution of the values that upheld Russian-ness and empire: hierarchy, authenticity, empathy, and religion, as well as learning and culture, were being lost in a frenzied search for material advantage. Even those who did not support the tsar felt that natural, direct, genuine forms of personal interaction were being lost, and might be replaced by inauthentic and foreign ways of living. All of this fueled anticapitalist resistance in Russia both on the Right and the Left in the years before World War I. The few who believed in the ideas of liberal capitalism were often lost in the melee. In this anticapitalist chorus in Russia, the Social Democratic Party stood out as one of the movements that linked the empire to broader trends in Europe. Founded in 1898, the party's background was in Marxist thinking, which of course connected it to significant parts of the labor movement in Germany, France, and Italy. Already before its Second Congress, in 1903, the tsar's police had driven most of the Social Democratic leaders into exile abroad. And so the Second Congress convened in London, where the party split into two factions, the "majority" (Bolsheviks in Russian) and "minority" (Mensheviks). The split was as much personal as political. Many party members resented the personal control that Lenin, now the head of the Bolsheviks, was trying to install over the party organization. The split contributed to chaos among the tsar's opponents. Lenin was not a man of easy compromise. Since well before the London Congress, Lenin had sustained his followers on dreams of a Russian revolution and the conquest of state power. He was born Vladimir Illich Ulianov in 1870, into a liberal bourgeois family in a town five hundred miles east of Moscow. The key moment in his young life came in 1887. His older brother, Aleksandr, a member of a Left-wing terrorist group that planned to assassinate the tsar, was arrested and executed. Vladimir soon joined a radical student association and read voraciously not just in Russian but in German, French, and English. In 1897 he was arrested and banished to Siberia, where he took his nom de guerre, Lenin, from the river Lena. Living in a peasant's hut under police surveillance for three years, he read, wrote, and organized. In his first major published work, What Is to Be Done?, from 1902, he quotes an 1852 letter from the German socialist Ferdinand Lassalle to Marx: "Party struggles lend a party strength and vitality; the greatest proof of a party's weakness is its

diffuseness and the blurring of clear demarcations; a party becomes stronger by purging itself."2 Released from exile, Lenin was ready for battle. The first opening for the Russian revolutionaries came very unexpectedly. In 1905, the Russian empire lost its war against Japan, and the shock of defeat set off massive antigovernment demonstrations in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In the capital the socialist Lev Bronshtein, who called himself Trotsky, led an autonomous workers' council (a soviet), which opposed the authorities. All the Russian opposition demanded free elections and the introduction of some form of parliamentary democracy. The tsar gave in to a few of the demands, but he and his advisers tried to control the government and steer it away from a dependence on the new elected parliament, the Duma. The Bolsheviks participated in the 1905 events, but Lenin did not believe in elections as the road to socialism. Combined, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks never gained more than 5 percent of elected representatives. The wider world around the turn of the century was in a state of increasing social and political tension. New conflicts were gradually gnawing away at the optimistic European vision of a future imbued by scientific rationalism, gradual progress, and new opportunities. The economic crisis of 1893 had hit particularly hard in the United States, with increases in unemployment and decreases in working-class income that were to last for several years. While more territory in Africa and Asia was being colonized in a relentless hunt for resources, markets, and prestige, the first organized anticolonial movements appeared in India, South Africa, southeast Asia, and the Middle East. But in spite of this dissonance, which led to increased class conflict and armed resistance, the concept of a better tomorrow held fast in Europe and in the European offshoots elsewhere. There had been no all-European war for close to a hundred years, and most people assumed that rational thinking, commitment to people's welfare, and economic interdependence would prevent one in the future. The new century would surely get a few hiccups, but the overall path to progress was linear and permanent. 1914 changed all of that. As they marched their young men off to war, European elites began a form of collective suicide that would kill off many of them and deprive those still left of much of their wealth and their position in the world. World War I was the beginning of a thirty-year European civil war that would give rise to revolutions, new states, economic dislocation, and destruction on a scale that nobody at the start of 1914 would have thought possible. More than fifteen million died in World War I, most of them European men in their prime. More than twenty-one million were wounded. In France, GDP declined by 40 percent, in Germany by more than twice that. The Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires vanished. Britain introduced the rationing of food for the first time in its history. But worse than the physical effects of total war were its psychological consequences. A whole generation of Europeans learned that killing, destroying, and hating your neighbors were regular, normal aspects of life, and that the moral certainties of the nineteenth century were mainly empty phrases. They learned to distrust the existing order, which had led them into a war that had no victors and no noble purpose. After the battle of the Somme in 1916, one young Welshman wrote in his diary: "It was life rather than death that faded into the distance, as I grew into a state of not-thinking, not-feeling, not-seeing …. Men passed me by, carrying other men, some crying, some cursing, some silent. They were all shadows, and I was no greater than they. Living or dead, all were unreal ….

Past and future were equidistant and unattainable, throwing no bridge of desire across the gap that separated me from my remembered self and from all that I hoped to grasp."3 It was the World War I generation who went on to shape the Cold War. All the elements of the Great War were in it: fear, uncertainty, the need for something to believe in, and the demand to create a better world. The desperation created by total war in Europe and the fear that it would spread to much of the rest of the globe was in the minds of all those who experienced it, regardless of where they experienced it. Major Clement Attlee, later British prime minister, fought in Turkey and Iraq. Captain Harry Truman fought in the important Meuse-Argonne offensive. Second Lieutenant Dwight D. Eisenhower trained soldiers for the front. Konrad Adenauer, later West German chancellor, was mayor of war-stricken Cologne, Germany's fourth-largest city. Joseph Stalin, who created the Soviet Union, castigated the war from his revolutionary exile in Siberia. Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese Cold War revolutionary, saw France reduced and formed his country's first independence movement. They all grew out of the disasters of World War I. The Communist challenge to the capitalist world system also started with the Great War. The war split Social Democratic parties everywhere into prowar and antiwar camps. Some Social Democrats supported the war efforts out of a sense of obligation to the nation. But in Germany, France, Italy, and Russia, minority socialists, including the Russian Bolsheviks, condemned the fighting as a conflict between different groups of capitalists. Karl Liebknecht, the only socialist who voted against the war in the German parliament, bravely argued that "this war, which none of the peoples involved desired, was not started for the benefit of the German or of any other people. It is an imperialist war, a war for capitalist domination of world markets and for the political domination of important colonies in the interest of industrial and financial capital."4 Revolutionaries such as Liebknecht and Lenin contended that soldiers, workers, and peasants had more in common with their brothers on the other side than with their superior officers and the capitalists behind the lines. The war was between robbers and thieves, for which ordinary people had to suffer. Capitalism itself produced war and would produce more wars if it was not abolished. The answer, the ultra-Left proclaimed, was a transnational form of revolution, in which soldiers turned their weapons on their own officers and embraced their comrades across the trenches. The Great War jump-started the destinies of the two future Cold War Superpowers. It made the United States the global embodiment of capitalism and it made Russia a Soviet Union, a permanent challenge to the capitalist world. The outcome of the conflict therefore prefigured the Cold War as an international system, even though much was to happen before the full bipolarity of the late twentieth century came into being. The radical Communists emerging from World War I were not the only challengers to capitalism, however. The Italian Fascists (Partito Nazionale Fascista) and the German Nazis (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) came out of the same Great War cauldron. But it was the birth of Communist power in the world's biggest empire that set the course for the longest conflict of the twentieth century, through the state it created and through the impact it had elsewhere. The Bolshevik takeover in Russia came because the empire, a wartime ally of France and Britain, was weakened by the war. As 1917 began, the situation at the front was dismal, with no victory in sight. The liberal opposition was tarnished among the

population because of its support of the war. When the Russian monarchy was overthrown in a revolution in March 1917, the influence of the Bolsheviks was limited. But the liberal-socialist coalition that came to power after the revolution could not end the war or deal with its catastrophic economic effects. Lenin's slogan "Land, Bread, Peace," as well as his popularity among other socialists because of his opposition to the war, increased his political sway. In November 1917, with the provisional government further weakened through infighting, the Bolsheviks pulled off a coup d'état and took power in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) and Moscow. The October Revolution, which, following the old Russian calendar, was the Bolshevik term for their November coup, began a profound transformation of Russia. In 1918 the Bolsheviks chased out the elected constitutional assembly and established the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic. The civil war that followed, between the Bolsheviks' Red Army and a multifaceted anti-Bolshevik White Army, killed two million people. The Bolsheviks gradually, and very surprisingly, even to themselves, were able to turn the military tide to their advantage. In 1922 the Russian Soviet republic became the centerpiece of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), a federation of sixteen republics carved out from the former empire, all ruled by the Bolsheviks. Lenin's followers, who now called themselves Communists, won the war because they had genuine support in the population, most of whom did not want to go back to the discredited old imperial state. Liberals and socialists, who had provided many of the leaders in the struggle against Lenin's coup, had to depend on tsarist officers for military support, and that cost them much esteem in the eyes of the population. The Bolsheviks' coming to power horrified elites in the countries that had been Russia's allies in World War I. To them, the Bolsheviks were a nightmare within a bad dream: not only did Lenin end Russia's war against Germany, he proclaimed that the supreme aim of his state was revolution in all European countries, preferably by violence, as had happened in Petrograd. The allies intervened in the Russian civil war at first to help those non-Bolsheviks who wanted to continue to fight against Germany and Austria-Hungary. But the intervention soon became directed against the Bolshevik regime itself. The foreign forces remained in place after the European war ended in 1918. Their Russian protégés were militarily unreliable and politically weak, and the interventions ultimately had little effect. But they did convince new recruits to the Bolshevik cause that the capitalist world would not hesitate to use arms against them if given a chance. Lenin's regime could now rightly call itself the defender of Russia against foreigners. The end of the war saw the United States as the main economic and political power in the world. It alone held a surplus of credit and industrial supplies. The war also ended with the United States as the world's foremost moral authority in politics. In his Fourteen Points, describing American war aims and peace terms, President Wilson had proclaimed that the United States fought for a just world, not simply for national advantage. As a state built on ideas and principles, it stood above mere nation-states. It believed that all competent nations had the right to self-government and to participation in a new world organization, the League of Nations. When the United States intervened against the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1918, it claimed to do so because it would "render such aid as may be acceptable to the Russians in the organization of their own self-defense."5 In reality, US elites were as

horror-struck by Lenin's rule as were the Europeans. It was rare to see, either in the press or in Congress, a reference to the Communists that did not include terms such as "murderers" or "savages." Wilson, himself more cool-headed, saw the Soviet project as a competing form of internationalism to his own variant. Just as the USSR in the 1920s would give up on immediate revolution in Europe, the United States soon gave up on Wilson's dream of rearranging Europe through the League of Nations. But the isolationism that America is often blamed for in the 1920s and '30s was never a reality. More Americans than ever before went abroad to Europe and elsewhere. The cultural exchange, and the exchange in goods and services, between America and the rest of the world increased sharply. In Europe, Asia, and Latin America, US consumer products were all the rage: cars, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, radios, and films did more to transform families and societies than did most political projects. Even in an era dominated by high tariffs and import restrictions, US foreign trade and investment increased sharply. From the 1920s on, the financial center of the world moved from Great Britain to the United States, from London to Wall Street. Nowhere was this increased US influence more striking than in Europe. For centuries European elites had been the arbiters of global taste and purpose. In Russia, in America, and in the colonized world, the ideal of the English gentleman or the learned French philosophe ruled. But in the interwar years, America brought change to Europe in ways nobody could have foreseen before World War I. US ways of conducting business replaced old European traditions: on crucial matters such as management styles and accounting methods, and also—though more gradually—principles of investment. In factories the assembly line, pioneered by Henry Ford in Detroit, objectified output and linked man and machine. Fordism, meaning synchronization, precision, and specialization in production, also spread to other spheres of life, and the technological approach to organization was taken up not just by western European liberals, but by Fascists, Nazis, and Soviet Communists.6 But the Americanization of Europe went further than the assembly line in advanced production. Attitudes and ideals were also gradually changing. The concept of holding a job with regular hours and regular pay was foreign to most Europeans at the turn of the century. Even for those who worked in industry, older, more paternalistic mores applied, as did rules set by guilds or hometown associations. Aristocrats never held a job, of course, but neither did the peasants and laborers over whom they lorded. Europe had been changing in this sense for a very long time. But the Americanization of the post-1918 era capped the turn toward a market economy with distinctive US characteristics. The rapid change created by war and its effects gave rise to an extraordinary climate of fear among many people in Europe and elsewhere. The most destructive of these fears centered on individual or national humiliation and destitution. It was claimed that radicals, Jews, capitalists, Communists, or neighboring states were out to exploit those who had already suffered and sacrificed in the Great War and its aftermath. In Europe the fear gave rise to nationalist authoritarian movements such as Fascism and Nazism. But it also created new forms of antirevolutionary thinking that focused on the threat that Communism and the Russian revolution posed to religion, individual liberty, and social advancement through self-improvement. In the United States, the Red Scare of 1919–20 led

to arrests and deportations of suspected radicals, restrictions on the freedom of speech, and federal assistance for employers to break strikes and workers' protests. In 1920, Seattle's mayor, Ole Hanson, embodied the Scare: With syndicalism—and its youngest child, bolshevism—thrive murder, rape, pillage, arson, free love, poverty, want, starvation, filth, slavery, autocracy, suppression, sorrow and Hell on earth. It is a class government of the unable, the unfit, the untrained; of the scum, of the dregs, of the cruel, and of the failures. Freedom disappears, liberty emigrates, universal suffrage is abolished, progress ceases, manhood and womanhood are destroyed, decency and fair dealing are forgotten, and a militant minority, great only in their self-conceit, reincarnate under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat a greater tyranny than ever existed under czar, emperor, or potentate.7 In the United States and Britain, liberalism split under the pressure of war and radical challenges. In ways similar to what would happen after World War II, many liberals joined with conservatives in a wave of antirevolutionary activism. Winston Churchill, in 1920 still a Liberal member of Parliament, said, "In every city there are small bands of eager men and women, watching with hungry eyes any chance to make a general overturn in the hopes of profiting themselves in the confusion, and these miscreants are fed by Bolshevist money …. They are ceaselessly endeavoring by propagating the doctrines of communism, by preaching violent revolution, by inflaming discontent, to infect us with their disease."8 Only a few liberal skeptics remained. While criticizing the methods the Bolsheviks used, the philosopher Bertrand Russell believed that "the heroism of Russia has fired men's hopes."9 For Russell, in the early years of the Russian Revolution, the possibility for a better world explained its attractiveness. In the interwar years, many people felt a great betrayal. Instead of the good life, their countries' elites had given them war. Instead of increased opportunity, they got unemployment and more exploitation. In the colonies, many local leaders concluded that the war and the subsequent economic crises proved that the Europeans only cared about themselves, not about progress for those they ruled overseas. Soviet Communism seemed a viable alternative to war, destitution, and oppression. The new Communist International organization (the Third International, or the Comintern), set up by Lenin in 1919, included brand-new Communist parties in many countries, constructed after the Bolshevik model. It defined national Communist parties simply as branches of the Comintern, under a strong, centralized, Soviet leadership. Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese anticolonial activist who would eventually lead North Vietnam, wrote, "At first, patriotism, not yet Communism, led me to have confidence in Lenin, in the Third International. Step by step, along the struggle, by studying Marxism-Leninism parallel with participation in practical activities, I gradually came upon the fact that only Socialism and Communism can liberate the oppressed nations and the working people throughout the world from slavery."10 The voice of Communist revolution, wrote the Norwegian poet Rudolf Nilsen, called out to "burning hearts" everywhere: Yes, give me the best from amongst you, and I shall give you all. No one can know till victory is mine how much to us shall fall. Maybe it means we shall save our earth. To the best goes out my call.11 The call of the Comintern was heard throughout a world that was tired of war and colonial oppression. Most Communist parties began small and formed alliances with other, larger movements. For example, the Chinese Communist

Party (CCP), founded in 1921, worked with the Guomindang, the National People's Party, a much bigger nationalist group founded in 1919 by the physician and revolutionary Sun Yat-sen. In Iran, where an ill-fated Soviet republic had been set up in the north in 1920, the Communist Party was forced underground, where its members concentrated on setting up trade unions and urban organizations. In South Africa, its Communist Party, also founded in 1921, appealed "to all South African workers, organized and unorganized, white and black, to join in promoting the overthrow of the capitalist system and outlawry of the capitalist class, and the establishment of a Commonwealth of Workers throughout the World."12 It later worked within the African National Congress (ANC) and provided many of the leaders in the struggle against apartheid. The Comintern linked all of these parties together and, gradually, helped turn them into instruments of Soviet foreign policy. But the Communist International had an influence that went beyond just the Communist parties themselves. The first global anti-imperial movement, the League Against Imperialism, set up in Brussels in 1927, was, for instance, funded and mostly organized by the Comintern. While dreamers dreamed of a Communist revolution that would save the world, Lenin and his successors began constructing socialism in their new state. But the plans went awry almost immediately. Not only did the economy collapse, as wealthy and educated people fled the Communist regime and untrained political devotees replaced them; but the civil war, the war against foreign intervention, and the bloody invasions of Soviet power into former parts of the Russian Empire that had declared themselves independent all cost the regime dearly. By 1920 it was reduced to confiscating food from peasants to transport to workers in the cities. Lenin's decision the following year to test out market incentives in order to get the economy going again, the so-called New Economic Policy (NEP), was never more than a tactical ploy and was abolished as soon as it had brought immediate results. The low point for the Communists was a costly and badly fought war against Poland, in which the USSR lost much territory that used to be part of the Russian Empire to the new Polish state. The Polish victory forestalled Soviet attacks on the Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which now solidified their independence. But for the Soviet leaders the failure of revolution elsewhere in Europe was even worse than the loss of territory for the Soviet state. A core idea behind Lenin's seizure of power in 1917 had been that his revolution would soon be followed by others in more socially and technologically advanced parts of Europe. Together they would form a continent-wide Soviet Union fueled toward a higher stage of modernity by European know-how and Russian resources, including its revolutionary discipline. But there were to be no successful revolutions elsewhere. In Berlin, an uprising of Left-wing socialists was crushed in January 1919, and its leaders—Karl Liebknecht among them—were murdered. The Bavarian Soviet Republic lasted a mere twenty-seven days before it was defeated in May 1919 by remnants from the German Army in the streets of Munich. In Hungary, the center of the eastern part of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Communists held out the longest. But in August 1919 the Hungarian Soviet Republic went down in flames in the face of invading Romanian troops supported by France and Britain. Preoccupied with its own civil war, the USSR could do nothing to help. By the early 1920s it was clear that no other Communist revolutions would follow that in Russia, at least

not anytime soon. But the deep enmity of the victorious powers against the Soviet Union would remain. The outlook seemed bleak for Moscow's new rulers. Even so, the Communists gradually managed to stabilize the Soviet government, albeit in a different form from what they had first thought. After Lenin's death in 1924, the party organization was led by Iosif Dzhugashvili, a Georgian Communist who called himself Stalin, the "man of steel." Born in 1878 in a small town in rural Georgia, Stalin had very little formal education. From the age of twenty-one, he worked for Lenin and his party, specializing in the most dangerous jobs such as bank robberies and occasional assassinations. By 1922, Stalin had become general secretary of the Communist Party, meaning head of the central party administration. Six years later he had defeated all his political rivals to become uncontested master of the party and the Soviet state. While doing so, Stalin and his followers had probably saved the government they represented. How did they do this? They could rely on the abundant natural and human resources of the former empire. They had the organizational ability of the Communist Party to use those resources. They employed centralized power and economic and social planning for greater efficiency. Finally, they used terror against enemies, real and imagined. Stalin's aim was a totalitarian society, in which everyone followed one will and one set of aims in pursuit of socialist construction. And although he never entirely managed to build such a society, the state that had Stalin as its leader seemed an impressive machine to friends and foes alike. The human cost of Stalin's state-building was immense. Lenin had set a bloody pattern by executing at least one hundred thousand people without any form of judicial process.13 Most were killed simply because they were "class enemies" or had worked for the old regime. Lenin had also instituted the one-party dictatorship and intolerance toward any opposition. But Stalin, the man his closest associates called vozhd, the Boss, took these murderous and antidemocratic principles to genocidal lengths. The campaigns against Trotsky and those who had supported him in the inner-party struggle after Lenin's death set the pattern in the late 1920s. Then came the terrible campaign against kulaks, rich peasants, to "exterminate them as a class" and thereby ease the transfer of all land into public hands. In the 1930s millions of innocent Soviet citizens were arrested, imprisoned, deported, or shot. The total figures are hard to estimate. At least ten million Soviet people were killed by Stalin's regime from the late 1920s up to his death in 1953. Twenty-three million were imprisoned or deported. In addition, at least three million died in the Ukrainian famine, which the regime did much to provoke and nothing to prevent. Massacres and executions of Poles, Karelians, Baltic peoples, or peoples of the Caucasus are impossible to estimate in numbers, but are rightly characterized as genocide. The Soviet regime under Stalin was savage to its own people and to other peoples alike, in ways that did nothing to contribute to the economic growth it recorded. How could the Soviet system, based on terror and subjugation, appeal to so many people around the world? The Great Depression provided the opportunity. If it had not been for capitalism doing so very badly, Communism would not have won the affection of large numbers of dedicated and intelligent people everywhere. In the eyes of many, capitalism had already produced war and colonial enslavement. After the stock market crash in 1929, it produced poverty, too, even in the most advanced industrial economies. The Soviets did not do so well, at least

not after the mid-1920s, although the regime managed to survive. But world capitalism was seemingly intent on self-destruction in the 1930s. In the first three years after the crash, world GDP fell by about 15 percent, and it stagnated after that. Overall capitalism had a very bad run in the first half of the twentieth century. It was easy to inflame world opinion against it and in favor of ideals of social justice and defense of local communities, even when such values were presented by thugs and murderers. The Soviet Union was not the only collectivist challenger to liberal capitalism in the interwar years. In Italy, the Fascists, headed by Benito Mussolini, claimed that their combination of nationalism and socialism was the way forward. In Munich in 1923, just four years after the defeat of the Bavarian Soviet Republic, a young German extremist, Adolf Hitler, tried to grab power on behalf of his Nazi Party. Hitler failed at first, but his party built on its extreme nationalism, anticapitalism, and anti-Semitism to present an alternative both to the liberal Weimar Republic and its Communist challengers. In the 1928 elections the Nazis still got less than 3 percent of the vote. After the worldwide economic crisis hit Germany, with 40 percent unemployment and inflation spiraling out of control, in 1930 the Nazis got 18 percent and two years later 37 percent, making them by far the biggest party in the country. Hitler took over the German government in 1933 and made the country a one-party state, like the Soviet Union and Italy. A number of eastern European, Asian, and Latin American countries also moved toward one-party dictatorships. By the mid-1930s, it seemed that not only capitalism but also political pluralism were dead or dying everywhere except in Britain and its dominions, and in the United States. The new one-party states formed a collectivist challenge to capitalist ideals. Though they shared a disdain for individual freedom and democratic practices, for the bourgeoisie, and for Social Democratic mass parties, they saw each other as worst enemies because each aspired to exterminate any rival ideology on its territory and because, for most of them, their nationalisms were constructed in opposition to the nationalisms of their neighbors. The exception to the latter was the Soviet Union, which under Stalin constructed a very peculiar form of national identity, idealizing the Soviet state as the natural “homeland” of workers everywhere while also drawing on symbols of the Russian past to gain support at home. Communism was fundamentally different from Fascist and Nazi ideologies in this sense: in spite of Stalin’s visibly prioritizing the Soviet state, Communist ideology was internationalist, not nationalist. It was authoritarian and ruthless, while at the same time appealing to global solidarity and social justice. Communists in Europe and elsewhere were often among the bravest and most unselfish opponents of Fascist dictatorships in their own countries, while refusing to speak out against oppression in Stalin’s USSR. As Nazism and Fascism grew stronger, Stalin’s Communists prevented working-class organizations from joining together to resist them. Between 1928 and 1935, the Comintern defined Socialists and Social Democrats as “Social Fascists,” telling workers everywhere that there was really no difference between Adolf Hitler and German democrats such as the liberal Gustav Stresemann or the Social Democrat Hermann Müller. However unreasonable this view was, most Communists were willing to follow it. Young German Social Democrats, such as Herbert Frahm (who during the Cold War became chancellor of West Germany under the name Willy Brandt), condemned Communist attacks on the other parties of the Left and blamed

them for indirectly assisting Hitler's rise. The German Communist Party, which by 1932 had three hundred thousand members and one hundred representatives in the Reichstag, stuck with Stalin's views, summarized by the Comintern: "Fascism is a militant organization of the bourgeoisie resting on the active support of Social Democracy. Social Democracy is objectively the moderate wing of Fascism."14 As international tensions rose in the mid-1930s, Stalin consolidated his hold on the Communist Party and the Soviet state. He was already firmly in charge, but in his suspicious mind he convinced himself and others that there were large-scale plots afoot to undermine Communist power from within the USSR. Stalin turned on all who could seem a threat to him. Arresting, deporting, or executing perceived class enemies was of course nothing new in the Soviet Union. But the late 1930s Great Purge, as it became known, was also directed against Communist Party members. By 1937 nobody was safe. Close to a million people were executed for crimes that were largely invented by the regime. Many times that number died during the decade from deliberate starvation, overwork in labor camps, or from neglect and ill-treatment during large-scale deportations. Among those arrested were almost all of the original leaders of the Bolshevik party. It was as if Stalin's rule could not be safe unless all those who had been witness to his rise were eliminated. Nikolai Bukharin, who had been Lenin's favorite colleague, was arrested and executed in 1938. After having been tortured and, presumably, out of a perverted loyalty to the party he had helped found, Bukharin agreed to sign a confession written in part by Stalin himself: "I am guilty of treason to the socialist fatherland, the most heinous of possible crimes, of the organization of kulak uprisings, of preparations for terrorist acts and of belonging to an underground, anti-Soviet organization …. The extreme gravity of the crime is obvious, the political responsibility immense, the legal responsibility such that it will justify the severest sentence. The severest sentence would be justified, because a man deserves to be shot ten times over for such crimes."15 The Moscow trials did little to dampen the faith of Communists elsewhere. Most of them believed in Stalin's claims: that he had saved the USSR from attacks by its enemies. In the Spanish Civil War, Communists from all over the world met up to help fight the forces of General Francisco Franco. With the help of Hitler and Mussolini, Franco was trying to unseat the constitutional government in Spain and set up a Fascist dictatorship. It was not only Communists who offered their help to the Spanish government; anarchists, trade unionists, and Social Democrats joined, too. But the democratic powers refused to get involved, and soon Franco's forces were on the march toward Madrid. In the spring of 1939, the final resistance was crushed. But before that happened the Communists had had a complete falling-out with the other internationalists in Spain. Following Stalin's instructions, the Soviet advisers spent as much time organizing Communists to fight against Social Democrats, anarchists, and (suspected) Trotskyists in Spain as they spent on fighting Franco. The experience of the lost war against Franco taught Communists and Social Democrats much about what divided them. But it also taught both that Britain, France, and the United States were unlikely to stand up to Hitler except in the most extreme circumstances. The latter half of the 1930s is rightly called the age of appeasement. Britain had lost its leading role, and its elite was not inclined to confront the buildup of Hitler's power. France was militarily weak and politically divided. The United

States had no appetite for getting involved in another war in Europe. Hitler swallowed first Austria (in 1938) and then the western part of Czechoslovakia (in early 1939). The British, French, and Americans did nothing to stop him. Leaders in those countries hoped that Hitler's territorial demands were satisfied, and some of them expected a German-Soviet war to follow. Many British Conservatives were not unhappy with the prospect of the two dictatorships tearing each other to pieces. Very few listened to the likes of Winston Churchill, who, in spite of his visceral anti-Communism, had realized that only cooperation between France, Britain, and the Soviet Union could stop Hitler's expansion. Stalin's desperate attempts at negotiating a collective security arrangement with the western powers came to nothing. In Britain, France, and the United States, more attention was paid to welfare than warfare in the 1930s. Leaders in all three countries realized that if the disastrous social effects of the Great Depression were not ameliorated, their political systems would be threatened from within, from the same kind of forces that had taken power in Russia, Germany, Italy, and Spain. In Britain the government introduced unemployment benefits, commenced a program of public works, and doubled overall welfare spending. France went even further, with obligatory insurance arrangements and regulated working hours set by the state. The new administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the United States broke with the policies of its predecessors and launched what it called a New Deal. The president termed it "a tremendous adjustment of our national life." It meant using unprecedented methods of planning and government regulation to provide relief and stabilize the economy. In his methods, FDR drew on great American campaigns from the past: the progressive welfare movement at the turn of the century and the mobilization of all of US society to fight World War I. The New Deal was a campaign of great political intensity, intended to jump-start the economy by getting people back to work. Roosevelt's intention was not to abolish capitalism, but to use the state to strengthen it so that its critics both on the Right and the Left could be outplayed and outnumbered. Roosevelt's policies divided America. Most supported him, and he won four presidential elections in a row. But a vocal minority detested his policies and saw them as socialist and authoritarian. His foreign policy was equally contentious. Right after becoming president in 1933, FDR had established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Much was made of this at the time (and later) by both the president's enemies and friends, but in fact Roosevelt did little beyond what Britain, France, and even Germany and Italy had done a long time before: recognize the Soviet regime as a reality that would not soon go away. By the late 1930s, FDR understood that Nazi Germany was the greatest threat to international peace, but he had to work hard to get US public opinion to accept that German aggression might also be a threat to the United States. A massive majority of Americans, 95 percent in 1936, thought that the United States should stay out of any war in Europe.16 The memory of US intervention in World War I, which most people regarded as a failed crusade, hung heavy over FDR's foreign policy. Knowing that at least some western leaders would gladly sacrifice the USSR to German aggression, Stalin made the move that would unleash World War II. In August 1939 he signed a treaty of nonaggression with the enemy he feared most, Adolf Hitler. The pact was not just about not attacking each other. It was also about dividing parts of eastern Europe between the two dictators:

western Poland went to Hitler, while the pact allowed Stalin to invade eastern Poland, Finland, the Baltic states, and Romania. Even if the details of the unlikely compact were not fully known at the time, the deal between the two archenemies led to incredulous and furious reactions all over the world. "Whatever the agreement means," editorialized the New York Times, "it is not peace; it serves only to aggravate the crisis."17 Hitler attacked Poland on 1 September. Two days later, because of their defense agreement with the Poles, Britain and France declared war on Germany. On 17 September, the Soviets moved into Poland from the east. At first, the new European war seemed so slow-moving that it got called the Phony War. Both sides were wary of the enormous sacrifices the World War I offensives had demanded. Stalin stubbornly planned to cash in on his pact with Hitler, even though there were plenty of warnings that the Nazis were preparing an attack on the Soviet Union. The new war, the vozhd told his followers, was "between two groups of capitalist countries—(poor and rich as regards colonies, raw materials, and so forth)—for the re-division of the world …. We see nothing wrong in their having a good, hard fight and weakening each other …. Next time, we'll urge on the other side."18 In the spring of 1940, eight months after it broke out, the Phony War ended and the real one began as German forces occupied the Netherlands and Belgium, broke through the French lines, and attacked Denmark and Norway. France capitulated on 18 June. For an agonizing year, Britain would be left alone to face a Nazi Germany that dominated the continent. For the British, as for most people in German-occupied Europe, the Soviets seemed to be on the German side. For Communists everywhere the pact between Moscow and Berlin was the first serious test of their faith. Most stuck with the Soviet version: that World War II, like World War I, was a war between capitalist robbers and thieves, in which Communists had no part. The pioneering folk singer Woody Guthrie, then a Communist sympathizer working in California, was fired from his first radio job for refusing to condemn Stalin.19 But for French, Dutch, Czech, or Norwegian Communists, who saw their societies take the full brunt of the Nazi occupation, the fiction was hard to keep up. On the coast of Norway, some Communists joined with other Leftists to fight the German presence. "Our country must again become free," they declared in July 1940. "Fight against the forces of darkness, which want to destroy our national independence, to tie our people down as slaves, and to abolish the rights we have gained through hard struggle."20 But the Communist Party leaderships did not accept such behavior. The Bulgarian Communist Georgi Dimitrov, the head of the Comintern, instructed the French Communist Party that "this is not a war of democracy against fascism; this is an imperialist, reactionary war on the part of both France and Germany. In this war a position of national defense is not a correct one for the French Communists."21 Stalin even sent German Communists, who had fled Hitler's oppression, back to prison in Germany, because he wanted to show his good faith to Hitler.22 Hitler, however, had never wavered in his long-term plan to attack and destroy the Soviet Union. But he needed to find the right time for violating his treaty with Moscow. In the summer of 1941, with most of Europe occupied, Britain isolated, and no signs of a direct American involvement in the war, Hitler deemed that the moment had come. On 22 June 1941, 117 German divisions crossed into Soviet territory, and the Nazi air force devastated Soviet airfields. Stalin was so shocked that for hours he refused to

believe he was facing an all-out German offensive.23 On 29 June, he growled to his closest comrades, “Lenin founded a great state, and we fucked it up.”24 The German attack continued. By November 1941 Hitler’s troops conquered Belorussia, the Baltic states, and western Ukraine. They laid siege to Leningrad (formerly St. Petersburg, or Petrograd) and stood less than six miles from Moscow. The years since 1914 had turned many things upside down. World War I had devastated Europe and opened up a set of challenges from radical anticapitalist movements that wanted to transform the world in a collectivist direction. In the colonial countries, resistance was brewing. The United States had become the world’s most powerful country, but, except in an economic sense, it was uncertain of its global role. The ideological Cold War, Communism versus capitalism, had intensified, but it had not yet created a bipolar international system of opposing states. By 1941 it was Nazi Germany, driven by an aggressive nationalist ideology, that seemed to benefit most from this state of affairs. But while the Germans had reached most of their European objectives, they had not managed to knock Britain and the USSR out of the war. The two holdouts, diametrically opposed as they were in ideological orientation, would now make an alliance of convenience that would defeat their wartime enemies and redraw the map of the world."