

# *World War II and the War Guilt Question*

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AS IS DOUBTLESS the case in most other countries, historiography in the United States is dominated by a historical orthodoxy, the tendency if not the function of which is to defend the foreign policy of the past and to support that of the present. It is important for political science to understand the historical orthodoxy of a nation, since history provides the conceptual framework in which current foreign policy is shaped.

Historical orthodoxy in America is both the expression and the supporting ideology of a political attitude characterized as "legalism-moralism" by the perspicacious analyst George F. Kennan. This attitude was most clearly manifested in the political ethics of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt, as well as in the "non-recognition doctrine" of Secretary of State Stimson. The essence of legalism-moralism lies in the attempt to apply to the international politics of sovereign states the same principles of law and morality that individual members of civilized communities observe in their interpersonal relations.

The classical orthodox account of the outbreak of World War I is Professor Bernadotte Schmitt's *The Coming of the War, 1914*.<sup>1</sup> Since the Allies understood

better than the Central Powers how to camouflage their goals of power politics behind a democratic ideology, Schmitt—who accepted Allied "idealism" at face value—confirmed for the most part the verdict of the Versailles Treaty. This orthodox perspective is shared by America's best known diplomatic historians, Samuel F. Bemis, Thomas A. Bailey, and Dexter Perkins.

Confronting the orthodox school, the intellectual lights of which are too numerous to mention here, are the so-called revisionists, among whom Charles A. Beard enjoyed the greatest prominence. Beard's successor as elder statesman of this group was the late Harry Elmer Barnes, who led the way for Charles Callan Tansill and Sidney B. Fay. Revisionists prominent since World War II have included William Henry Chamberlin, George Morgenstern, Freda Utley, and, in a more popular vein, John T. Flynn, Austin J. App, and Edward L. Delaney.

The ideological roots of legalism-moralism reach back into the first half of the nineteenth century. The American people were at that time preoccupied with the expansion of commerce and industry and with the realization of "Manifest Destiny"—that is, with the conquest and exploita-

tion of a continental *Lebensraum*. Alongside these practical concerns, however, there arose a utopian idealism, the alienated character of which was noticed by the French observer de Tocqueville, and which culminated in the messianic conviction that the American Union was the model for the future federation of mankind. Ignorant of the problems of other regions but deeply impressed by the flamboyant exploits of democratic heroes such as Bolivar, Mazzini, Kossuth, and Garibaldi, American idealists assumed uncritically the identity of national liberation struggles with their own revolutionary tradition. No consideration was given the certainty that the uninhibited quest for national statehood by minor, minuscule, interlocking and overlapping European nations would lead to a series of bitter wars and to majority tyranny between these wars.

With the Monroe Doctrine, the United States assumed an anti-imperialist position. As the historian Hans Kohn has observed, however, American politicians defined imperialism as *overseas* expansion—a category that specifically excluded the continental expansion of their own “Manifest Destiny.”<sup>2</sup> When the United States pushed beyond its own maritime boundaries by annexing Samoa, Hawaii, and the former Spanish possessions, a vehement quarrel arose between opponents of expansion, among whom the Democratic leader William Jennings Bryan and the Professor W. G. Sumner of Yale were to be found, and the “imperialist” faction led by Senator Albert J. Beveridge. The disagreement was resolved by a compromise that reconciled idealist conceptions with practical interests: the United States retained its new possessions and secured the Panama Canal Zone unto the bargain, but embraced the principle of systematic disapproval of the imperialist adventures of *other* powers. This principle was applied to the encroachments

of other powers against Chinese sovereignty in the “Open Door” policy introduced by Secretary of State John Hay. As Kennan observes, this policy, which was never backed with enough military force to make it effective, stemmed from an incorrect evaluation of the situation in China and contributed greatly to arousing the Japanese to eventual war against the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Legalism-moralism assumed concrete form as a principle of foreign policy after the outbreak of World War I. American history books show little agreement as to why the United States entered the war. Some authors claim that the German resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917 was the deciding factor; others agree with Walter Lippmann that the U-Boats merely provided a convenient pretext, and that the real reason lay in the fear (which Lippmann and most academic historians find justified) that the power constellation after a victory of the Central Powers might be dangerous for the United States.

The historiography of the 1920's and 1930's was dominated by revisionism, which annihilated whatever factual basis the war-guilt clause in the Versailles Treaty had seemed to possess. The most important American revisionist studies of European diplomacy were Harry Elmer Barnes' pioneer book, *Genesis of the World War* (1926) and the more exhaustive two-volume study by Sidney Fay, *The Origins of the World War* (1928). Barnes considers the Russian diplomats Izvolski and Sazonov and the French politicians Poincaré, Viviani, and the Cambons the principal perpetrators of the war, and assigns a somewhat lesser responsibility to Grey and Berchtold. Fay, on the other hand, distributes the burden of war guilt more equally between the two sides, but with emphasis on Allied responsibility. Fay was

the first to document the complicity of the Belgrade government in the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Space does not permit a more detailed survey of revisionist writings between the wars.

At this point, however, an important fact must be registered. The opponents and the supporters of American entry into World War I proceeded for the most part from the same legalist-moralist premises that had become traditional in our foreign-policy thinking. The ethical considerations that led William Jennings Bryan to resign as Secretary of State rather than sign the second *Lusitania* note, which he judged a step toward war, were the same that motivated President Wilson to insist that the note be dispatched. *This common legalism-moralism was inherited by both orthodox and revisionist historians.* Since under legalist-moralist rules the aggressor in war is automatically wrong (the sinking of the *Maine* having served as "aggression" in the war with Spain), American revisionists simply reversed the sign on an existing equation to the extent that they shifted the "guilt" for World War I to the Allies or distributed it symmetrically. By establishing that Germany and Austria were not solely or not even primarily responsible for starting the war, they proved to their own satisfaction that the United States should have stayed out of the war, even at the cost of victory by the Central Powers. The sensational findings of the Nye munitions investigation compounded the impression spread by books such as Walter Millis' *Road to War* (1935) that America had been maneuvered into war by selfish Europeans. Public clamor arose for a law that would banish forever the danger of involvement in foreign wars.

The specific result of American revisionism was thus the neutrality legislation of the late 1930's—legislation which temporarily paralyzed American foreign policy,

particularly with regard to the Spanish Civil War. Neither the orthodox nor the revisionist historians had really faced, let alone analyzed, the basic question of national interests. The American people therefore remained incapable of producing a workable foreign policy for their encounter with the rival totalitarian systems of National Socialism and Communism.

Whatever judgment is passed on the causes of American entry into the First World War, the sources now available make one thing manifestly clear: that a majority of the American people found itself in war without at first knowing why, and in any case without awareness of a clearly defined national interest. Two weeks after the declaration of war, the British propaganda headquarters at Wellington House reported a disappointing lack of enthusiasm on the part of the American press and public.<sup>4</sup> The way into the war had to be justified *ex post facto*, a task to which President Wilson and his energetic propaganda director George Creel addressed themselves.

As a reformer in the Puritan tradition, Wilson rejected any justification of belligerency on the basis of national interest as "Machiavellian" and therefore incompatible with the American conscience. The justification thus had to be drawn from the war itself, a psychological process that Kennan describes as follows:

A democracy is peace-loving. It does not like to go to war. It is slow to rise to provocation. When it has once been provoked to the point where it must grasp the sword, it does not easily forgive its adversary for having produced this situation. The fact of the provocation then becomes itself the issue. Democracy fights in anger—it fights for the very reason that it was forced to go to war. It fights to punish the power that was rash enough and hostile enough to provoke it—to teach that power a lesson

it will not forget, to prevent the thing from happening again. Such a war must be carried to the bitter end.

. . . a line of thought grew up, under Wilson's leadership, which provided both rationale and objective for our part in fighting the war to the bitter end. Germany was militaristic and antidemocratic. The Allies were fighting to make the world safe for democracy. Prussian militarism had to be destroyed to make way for the sort of peace we wanted. This peace would not be based on the old balance of power. Who, as Wilson said, could guarantee equilibrium under such a system? It would be based this time on a "community of power," on "an organized common peace," on a League of Nations which would mobilize the conscience and power of mankind against aggression. Autocratic government would be done away with. Peoples would themselves choose the sovereignty under which they wished to reside. Poland would achieve her independence, as would likewise the restless peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. There would be open diplomacy this time; peoples, not governments, would run things. Armaments would be reduced by mutual agreement. The peace would be just and secure.<sup>5</sup>

Wilson's idealistic war ideology proved very convenient for the Allied statesmen. Their use—and in the opinion of many misuse—of it has been documented in detail by the late Wenzel Jaksch, a Social Democratic leader in the Czechoslovak and later in the West German parliament. As Jaksch points out in his study of wartime politics, the Allies in World War I suffered an embarrassing lack of plausible war aims.<sup>6</sup> Masaryk, for instance, summarized a conversation with Briand in February 1916 as follows:

It is no exaggeration to say that our policy of resolving Austria into her constituent parts gave the Allies a posi-

tive aim. They began to understand that it would not be enough to overthrow the Central Powers and to penalize them financially and otherwise, but that Eastern Europe and Europe as a whole must be reorganized.<sup>7</sup>

The following winter Wilson's peace offensive, aborted by the President's own lack of persistence, caused Doctor Benes to fear a "premature end of the war"—which in his opinion would have frustrated Czech national aims. "Morally," he admitted, "this was a painful situation." Democratic war ideology, which took off from legalist-moralist premises to transform a power struggle between fundamentally similar states of the same cultural community into a crusade against supposed international criminals, provided a "moral justification" for goals of power politics which never could have been justified on their own merits. That only those peoples with the acumen to shift to the victorious side at the proper moment would enjoy the self-determination so glorified by Wilson was an inevitable result to the crusade psychology of the war.

In Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles Germany was forced to accept "the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies." A few years after the war, Lord Grey admitted to the historian G. P. Gooch, "It was a very bad mistake to attribute the whole responsibility for the war to the Central Powers in the Treaty of Versailles. . ."<sup>8</sup> The opinion that finally prevailed was that the notorious war-guilt clause constituted a superfluous and annoying appendage to the treaty, and that the Allies in their own interest would have done better to dispense with it. In reality, how-

ever, article 231 was the ideological core of the Peace of Paris.

Had the standards of international morality under which World War I was fought still prevailed during the 1930s, a second war launched by Germany—let us say by a non-totalitarian Germany in order to set aside the special problem of National Socialism—for the purpose of treaty revision would have been considered a just war or at least a tolerable war, inasmuch as the Versailles Treaty, resting squarely on the war-guilt clause, was by then generally recognized as a falsified verdict. In the meantime, however, American legalism-moralism, reinforced by a new international legalism-moralism with its seat in the League of Nations, had staked itself a higher goal: to change the rules of international politics through a categorical prohibition of war, which was proclaimed to the world in the Kellogg-Briand Pact of August 27, 1928. This pact is of historical importance, not because it ever prevented a war, but because it provided the juridical basis for convicting the so-called war criminals—in reality for convicting Germany—in the Allied trials at Nuremberg at the close of World War II.

Article I of the Kellogg-Briand Pact reads:

The High Contracting Parties solemnly declare in the names of their respective peoples that they condemn recourse to war for the solution of international controversies and renounce it as an instrument of national policy in their relations with one another.

Almost all states in the world, including the German Reich and the Soviet Union, adhered to the pact, which the public greeted with groundless optimism, especially in the United States, but which diplomats tended to regard as a pious wish rather than a valid legal norm. The principle of the Kellogg-Briand Pact also forms the basis

of Article II, paragraph 4, of the Charter of the United Nations, which reads:

All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.

The prohibition of war contained in the Kellogg-Briand Pact and repeated in Article II, paragraph 4 of the United Nations Charter constituted the legal basis for the Nuremberg trial. The organizers of the International Military Tribunal were fully aware that the practical application of this legal thesis was an innovation. In a commentary to the charter of the court, the American chief prosecutor, Justice Jackson, explained that the "crime against peace" consisted in *starting* a war, not in *causing* it. "We must make clear to the Germans," he said, "that the wrong for which their fallen leaders are on trial is not that they lost the war, but *that they started it*. And we must not allow ourselves to be drawn into a trial of the causes of war, for our position is that *no grievances or policies will justify resort to aggressive war.*"<sup>9</sup>

The proposition, however, that aggressive war is forbidden by a truly valid principle of international public or criminal law—in the form of the League of Nations Covenant, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, or the Charter of the United Nations—such as would find application in trials lacking the political motivation of Nuremberg, is open to the greatest doubt. The Kellogg-Briand Pact was ratified by most of its signatories with reservations going far beyond the right of self-defense specified in the letter circulating the treaty. In addition to wars of national defense and in execution of sanctions imposed by the League of Nations, major powers exempted wars for the defense of specific regions and vital na-

tional interests as well as those in fulfillment of treaty obligations from the scope of the pact. As Professor Edwin M. Borchard, who held the chair of international law at Yale, declared in a lecture at the time of ratification, the reservations expressly stated were so numerous and comprehensive as to *sanction almost every conceivable war in advance*. France, in particular, reserved the right to take military action against Germany should the latter concentrate troops in the Rhineland in violation of the Locarno Pact.

In contrast to the Locarno treaties, the specific provisions of which represented a true extension of international law, the Kellogg-Briand Pact was, in the words of the diplomatic correspondent Sisley Huddleston, who witnessed its signature, "not worth the paper on which it was written." Anticipating the possibility that aggressive war might be justified against a concentration-camp regime, Professor Wesley L. Gould of Purdue University observes that:

Definition of the term "aggression" becomes a problem of placing the law in support of justice before placing force in support of law. If this is not done, then international law, at least in its treatment of war, would be of as much value as municipal law that gave a cornered criminal a license to kill with impunity if a policeman fired the first shot.<sup>10</sup>

The most interesting point of view is that of the former Vienna Professor Hans Kelsen (most recently at the University of California in Berkeley), who regards the war-guilt clause of the Versailles Treaty as a specific application of the doctrine of *bellum justum*, which permits war as a reaction against a violation of international law. Kelsen describes the legal effect of the Kellogg Pact as follows:

The Kellogg Pact forbids war, but

only as an instrument of national policy. This is a very important qualification of the prohibition. A reasonable interpretation of the Kellogg Pact, one not attempting to make of it a useless and futile instrument, is that war is not forbidden as a means of international policy, especially not as a reaction against a violation of international law, is an instrument for the maintenance and realization of international law. This is exactly the idea of the *bellum justum* theory.<sup>11</sup>

Kelsen's reasoning that the *bellum justum* theory forms the basis of the Treaty of Versailles, especially of Article 231 which provides the rationale for its various punitive provisions, opens the way to the following conclusions: the legal validity of a unilaterally imposed punitive treaty, such as that of Versailles, depends upon the qualification of the war that has been fought as a *bellum justum* and of the treaty as punishment of an offense against international law. If, however, this condition is removed through the process of historical revision, as happened in the case of World War I, the war then turns out to be a *bellum injustum* insofar as it went beyond restoring the situation that had existed before the war. The punishment imposed by the victors is then likewise revealed as a violation of international law, the correction of which is an *international concern* dictated by justice and not mere national interest. Once efforts to secure peaceful revision have definitely failed, a war to change a treaty violative of international law may be considered a *bellum justum*, according to Kelsen's construction of the Kellogg-Briand Pact.

Since the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, but more particularly since the outbreak of World War I, American foreign policy has moved within the framework of a doctrine of *bellum justum*, which is explained lucidly by Professor Robert W.

Tucker in a short book entitled *The Just War* (1960).<sup>12</sup> According to this American doctrine, the moral character of belligerency as good or evil is determined, not by the deeper causes of the war and even less by the issues in dispute, but solely by the circumstances under which hostilities are opened. Whichever state first invokes military force in pursuit of its national interests becomes *ipso facto* the aggressor, whom "international justice" demands to be *not only defeated but also punished*.

This form of the "just war" doctrine is, however, political rather than legal in nature. It is only employed when it happens to coincide with the political policy of the time. (Its nonapplication to Vietnam is notorious: if punishment were a necessary instrument of international politics, then the Hanoi government and the Russians and Chinese who incite its aggressions would certainly be targets.) When the doctrine is invoked, the language is always that of unsullied rectitude, as in the opening speech of chief prosecutor Jackson at Nuremberg:

Our position is that whatever grievances a nation may have, however objectionable it finds the *status quo*, aggressive warfare is an illegal means for settling those grievances or for altering those conditions.

A defensive war in the strict sense must be limited to those measures needed to repel the attack and to restore the *status quo ante bellum*. Since, however, the American doctrine of "just war" demands punishment of the aggressor, it sanctions total warfare aiming for unconditional surrender and not shrinking from the use of mass-destruction weapons. It furthermore permits the victor who has defeated aggression to exploit the fortunes of war in order to obtain political and territorial gains that would otherwise be forbidden objects of military campaigns. After both world wars, American adminis-

trations were not opposed to territorial changes at Germany's expense; the question was only "how large?"

Our present context does not include analysis of the reasons that moved President Roosevelt to lead, or if one prefers maneuver the United States into World War II. Suffice it to say that the fashionable "legalism-moralism," of which Roosevelt himself was a prominent representative, forbade the justification of war policies with arguments of supposed national interest. To move from the "semi-war" of Lend-Lease to a full state of war, it was necessary that the United States be attacked. "The question was," Secretary of War Stimson wrote in his diary after a cabinet meeting on November 25, 1941, "how we could maneuver them [the Japanese] into firing the first shot without too much danger to ourselves."<sup>14</sup> Since the Japanese fulfilled Stimson's (and evidently Roosevelt's) wish on December 7, 1941, the Administration was able to lead the nation into war without qualms of conscience and with the full support of a united though badly deceived American people.

American World War II revisionism has dealt mainly with the chain of events that led to Pearl Harbor and only incidentally with the outbreak of the European war. In Europe, serious revisionism has been limited to the Munich crisis and certain aspects of Allied strategy during the war; the politics and diplomacy of the German-Polish dispute of 1939 have been left largely untouched. The court historians of America, who are inclined to hold Poland and Britain blameless in the affair, are supported by a West German school of historical orthodoxy, the philosophy of which can be summed up in a sentence widely quoted in popular books and newspapers: "Whoever casts doubt upon the exclusive guilt of Germany for World War II thereby destroys the foundation of postwar politics."<sup>15</sup>

Few academicians on either side of the Atlantic have been disposed to question what the orthodox Professor Walther Hofer calls "Nuremberg historiography" (*das Geschichtsbild von Nürnberg*)—the axiom that the "catastrophic personality" of Adolf Hitler, his totalitarian rule, and his territorial expansionism constituted the single decisive cause of World War II.<sup>16</sup>

The possibility that respectable historians might challenge the Nuremberg thesis was indicated when the British historian A. J. P. Taylor produced a slim volume entitled *Origins of the Second World War* (1961), the main contention of which was that neither Hitler nor the British cabinet really wanted war, which nevertheless broke out as the result of inept diplomacy.<sup>17</sup> Yet no German historian of repute has come forth with a revisionist book about 1939, despite the fact that such a book would have an instant market since it would fulfill two wishes: that of Germans generally for an acquittal of their country, and that of former National Socialist functionaries for an exoneration of Adolf Hitler and thus of their own past.

An extensive study of the published diplomatic documents (and some unpublished documents) and considerable secondary literature having to do with the 1939 crisis—the details of which are too voluminous to report here—has convinced this writer of the correctness of a number of theses that can be classified as revisionist, since they conflict with "Nuremberg historiography." These theses, which are in each case supported by the pertinent documentation, may be summarized as follows:

1. Hitler and Ribbentrop complained repeatedly to the Polish foreign minister, Colonel Beck, and his Berlin ambassador Lipski indicating that Germany regarded the situation in Danzig and that of the Germans in Poland as intolerable. They proposed various compromises for the set-

tlement of German-Polish differences. The acceptability of these proposals is of course a matter of opinion.

2. Against the advice of his colleagues, Colonel Beck rejected every opportunity to reach solutions of the Danzig Corridor, and minority questions acceptable to Germany, although he must have known that renitent insistence on the *status quo* of Versailles would inevitably provoke the Hitler regime to violence. During the fall and winter of 1938-39 he followed a policy of dragging things out; after the British guarantee of March 31, 1939, Beck refused any serious negotiation on these controversial questions and indulged in an openly anti-German policy.

3. Hitler made serious efforts to achieve a settlement of German-Polish differences as the basis for a rapprochement of the two governments. In so doing, he insisted on the return of Danzig to the Reich and on extra-territorial transit rights through the Corridor as the essential minimum for Germany. Only after the British guarantee, when Polish obduracy seemed to prove the impossibility of reaching an agreement, did Hitler decide to destroy Poland militarily. The documentation so far available does *not*, however, prove that Hitler was still willing to negotiate in late August 1939. It must also be observed that Beck, particularly after March 1939, had every reason to fear that fulfillment of Hitler's initial demands would lead to further demands and perhaps to the total dependency or destruction of the Polish state.

4. After September 1938, the British foreign minister, Lord Halifax, succeeded in recapturing control of British foreign policy from Prime Minister Chamberlain, who had managed the British end of Munich singlehandedly and without keeping the cabinet fully informed. By 1938 at the latest, Halifax reached the conviction that

Hitler's power system represented a direct danger for England. His post-Munich policy was directed at achieving a decisive defeat of the Third Reich—through diplomatic means if possible, otherwise with armed force.

5. To make the war morally and politically acceptable to the British people (and, what is more important, to the American people), Germany had to be induced to commit aggression. For this purpose, Halifax needed a trip-wire—a role that Poland was admirably suited to play. His diplomacy was therefore calculated to stiffen Polish resistance against German demands, but with a surface tone of moderation so that London could claim credit for appeasement to the bitter end. Cleverly backing his minister's policy, the British ambassador in Warsaw, Sir Howard W. Kennard, undermined any tendency toward Polish accommodation with Germany. Although the British public would not have supported a war on account of Danzig, the unconditional guarantee against German attack worked as a pledge against German reannexation of the so-called "Free State."

6. That England was interested in Poland mainly as a trip-wire is obvious, since geography rules out England as a base for the effective defense of the Polish western border. When Poland asked in June 1939 for sixty million pounds sterling to purchase war materials, Halifax responded with a credit of only eight million pounds restricted to purchases in England, under which no deliveries actually took place. The British government did *not* guarantee the Polish eastern border against Soviet annexations. Churchill's negotiations with the Polish exile government in 1944 were mainly devoted to persuading the Poles to accept Stalin's territorial demands.

Once we can make up our minds to depart from the legalist-moralist standpoint,

we will judge the war not according to who fired the first shot, but on the basis of the larger issues at stake. In this case, the proof that Halifax deliberately permitted a German-Polish war to take place with the purpose of Franco-British intervention does not lead automatically to the conclusion that he thereby committed an international crime.

Two important observations must be made at this point:

1. the question as to the specific chain of events that led to the outbreak of World War II and the roles of the various actors in these events is a very different question from that concerning the nature and long-range goals of National Socialism. Each question must be answered separately.
2. the National Socialist program of expansion must be rigorously distinguished from genuine German national interests, including that of treaty revision.

Since the facts of prewar diplomacy disprove the thesis of *unprovoked* German aggression in World War II, Allied warfare against Germany to the point of unconditional surrender cannot be justified as a war of retribution—even on legalist-moralist premises. The question remains whether a war to overthrow the Hitler regime was justified. Since two totalitarian systems were fighting each other after June 1941, the question necessarily arises as to the extent to which warfare *by the Germans* was justified.

The moral question of World War II—a question we must answer again in our confrontation with Communism—is whether and under what circumstances war for the elimination of a totalitarian regime is justified, as a war of aggression if need be. The traditional doctrine of sovereignty would suggest a negative answer, since each state is considered entitled to manage or mismanage its internal affairs. The advent of modern totalitarianism has, however,

broken down the barrier between domestic and foreign policy, for the following reasons:

1. The doctrine of internal sovereignty within the Western cultural community is based on the assumption that governments will adhere to the rules of civilized statesmanship, which is not the case with totalitarian regimes.
2. Human responsibility does not stop at political boundaries. Since the contemporary technology of weapons, propaganda, and political control favors inordinately those who exercise state power, totalitarian dictators in particular, the overthrow of a totalitarian regime without outside help has become almost unthinkable. Because human rights are universal, mankind is under a universal obligation: the fight for freedom is the cause of all men of good will.
3. the dynamics of totalitarian systems, which prevent the achievement of internal political balance, propel these systems automatically into expansionist adventures. Communism, exactly like National Socialism, requires conflict with an external or at least externalized enemy as an element of internal stability.

It is obvious from these reasons that the question of free systems versus totalitarian systems must be included in every realistic evaluation of contemporary history and politics. The German annexation of Austria in March 1938 presents values quite different from those involved in the proposed *Anschluss* of German Austria with the then constitutional Weimar Republic, which the Allies prevented in 1919 and again in 1931.

Long before Hitler rose to power, the Versailles peace was recognized in America as the main cause of the expected Second European War. Most Americans were firmly determined to remain neutral in this war. The slogan in the early 1930's was: "We'll sit this one out."

The factor that moved America to give Great Britain its unconditional support and finally to take part in World War II was *not* the German aggression against Poland, but the brutality of the Hitler regime and particularly its persecution of the Jews. If a *non-totalitarian German government* had invoked military force to secure the return of Danzig and extraterritorial transit rights through the Corridor after the failure of diplomatic efforts, Warsaw would have fought alone. None of the West European powers, and much less the United States, would have seen its national interest served by a second world war to prevent the overthrow of a territorial settlement already recognized as fragile and dangerous. In this case the German war against Poland, while it might not have qualified as a "just war" under pseudojuristic American doctrine, would in any case have been a tolerated war in political practice. While there may remain room for dispute as to how responsibility for the German-English and German-French war of 1939 is to be distributed, there is no doubt whatever that the totalitarian nature of National Socialism and not German aggression provoked the Western declarations of war.

As soon as the reality-alienated "Nuremberg historiography" is dispensed with, World War II is seen, not as a fight between aggressors and victims of attack, but as the struggle of free men against the unfreedom of totalitarian dictatorship. Only the maintenance of human freedom and the restoration of the threatened values of Western culture can justify the sacrifice of millions of human lives and the destruction that was militarily unavoidable. (The latter category does not include the bombing of Rotterdam, Dresden, or Hiroshima.)

Once the ideological nature of World War II is recognized, the front lines necessarily appear both complex and contradictory. The conflict of constitutional and

totalitarian systems was interlocked with a series of simultaneous and only loosely related national wars in such a fashion that the armed forces of *both sides* were fighting *both for and against freedom* at various times and places.

Large-scale war might perhaps have been avoided by granting the German claim to treaty revision in the East—a claim that the constitutional government of the Weimar Republic had also asserted in refusing to sign an eastern Locarno. The Reich had a justified *and limited* claim against Poland. Experience with Hitler and with Communist dictatorships raises the question, however, whether a totalitarian system is capable of waging a national war. Insofar as national interest, conceived in organic, geopolitical terms, is overshadowed by the messianic pretensions of a totalitarian ideology, the question seems to demand a negative answer.

The specific justification of the ideological war against Hitler's totalitarian Reich had the effect of determining and limiting its morally admissible war aims. The ideological goal was the removal of Hitler and the restoration of a stable rule of law in continental Europe. This goal was not fulfilled but frustrated by the total liquidation of German political and military power.

Whether the ideological struggle against Hitler's Germany justified an American war against Japan is another question altogether. A national interest in such a war did not exist; the total value of American investments in the Far East was only a few billion dollars, and the projected Japanese "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" did not at any point overlap the area of predominant American power. Inasmuch as the Hitler regime avoided carefully any collision with the United States, however, President Roosevelt chose the "back door": the provocation of Japan. The tactics

through which he incited Japan to its foolhardy attack on Pearl Harbor have been described in detail by Tansill, Beard, Morgenstern, and W. H. Chamberlin, whose historical thesis—that the Roosevelt Administration deliberately sought war—has found general if grudging acceptance. Four days after Pearl Harbor, the Hitler regime fulfilled Roosevelt's wish with a declaration of war against the United States.

In Chapter III of his *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950*, George F. Kennan shows that the American conflict with Japan represented no true national interest, but only the expression of a rigid legalism-moralism with little relation to political reality. Whether the ideological interest in the defeat of Hitler, had that aim been pursued without presenting half of Europe to Soviet Russia, was worth the price of an unnecessary war with Japan, with its consequences of the bolshevization of China and a series of limited wars that pin down American troops in Asia to this very day, is a question that need not be answered here. Insofar as Western strategy merely replaced one dictatorship with another, equally vicious, the American sacrifice was not worth while.

In the European theater of war, the ideological goal of overthrowing Hitler dictated unqualified Western support of the German resistance. This would have included the offering of acceptable peace conditions to a non-National Socialist German government willing to vacate the occupied territories in western and northern Europe and to make restitution for damages caused by the war and the occupation. The politics of unconditional surrender frustrated this ideological goal, undermined the anti-Hitler underground, and transformed the Second World War into a senseless national war. It may well be contended that the last nine months of the war—from July 20, 1944 to May 8, 1945—and the deaths and destruction that took place during this

interval, are a direct result of this perverse policy, chargeable to Washington and London, not to Hitler and even less to the German *Wehrmacht*.

Through the involvement of Soviet Russia, the European war assumed an ambivalent aspect. Stalin and his henchmen had always been enemies of freedom and of European culture, the material output of which they hoped to confiscate. The German-Soviet Pact of August 23, 1939 fulfilled the Communist aim of provoking war among the capitalist powers, so that when both sides were in a state of exhaustion, the "second wave of world revolution" could roll unhampered.

Under these conditions, the politics of freedom indicated sufficient help to the Soviet Union so that the German armies would bog down there, but in no case enough to permit a Communist conquest of Europe. Few Western statesmen understood the fact that Stalin remained their enemy through all phases of the war and, with revolutionary weapons, *waged uninterrupted war against the West*.<sup>17</sup> Stalin-grad was the great turning point of the war. After the encirclement of General Paulus and his army and the destruction of German offensive force, the most urgent danger for Europe was no longer that of a continuation of National Socialist rule, the days of which were numbered, but that of a continental Communist dictatorship. *After Stalin-grad, the German army was fighting for Europe*. Had the Western powers appreciated this and planned their strategy accordingly, so as to end the war with the eastern front as far removed as possible, the history of the last two decades would have been very different. In fact, however, Allied, principally American, deliveries of trucks, tires, weapons, airplanes, and other war materials to the Soviet Union were stepped up enormously in 1943 and 1944, while the German forces were already in

continuous retreat. The continuation of "Lend Lease" to the U.S.S.R. to the end of the war and to a total figure of eleven billion dollars—although the Russians had major reserves of men and materials—gave the Red Army the mobility it needed to advance to the center of Europe.

The saving of East-Central Europe was totally incompatible with the policy of "unconditional surrender." A continuity of the German state and the German military command was urgently necessary *in the interest of the West*. The security of Europe required that the Balkans, Poland, and as much of the Baltic lands as possible be held by German troops, while the Allies assumed the functions of military government until national governments could be restored. The only way to avoid the Soviet filling of power vacuums was not to create such vacuums.

The events at the end of the war, including the sovietization of East-Central Europe and the expulsion of national and ethnic Germans from the eastern *Reich* and *Volksdeutsche* settlements into what was left of Germany, were a consequence, not only of World War II as such, but also to a very large degree of Allied war policy, which guaranteed war "to the bitter end." For the fact that things did not turn out even worse we can thank those elements of the *Wehrmacht* who took care that the Russians were not the first to cross the Rhine.

Seen in this perspective, World War II does not present a black-and-white picture, but a mosaic in diverse shades of gray. Whatever the importance of National Socialism as one of the decisive causes of war, it must be kept in mind that totalitarianism is an endemic disease of modern society, the germs of which are present in every country and which becomes virulent in times of national crisis. The nation that has fallen victim to totalitarianism should be liberated and healed, not punished. Even

the most uncompromising opponent of Communism would never think of demanding that the Russian people "expiate the sin of Bolshevism."

Once the concept of "war guilt" is given a concrete and realistic meaning—responsibility for political or military measures that did not serve freedom or were actually injurious to freedom—then it is obvious that the answer to the "war guilt question" must be complex. Both sides offended against freedom and the dignity of man; both sides forgot the strategy of prudence and let themselves be swept to disaster by the passions of war. The common people of both the former Allies and the former Axis Powers are with indistinguishable differences guilty or innocent: World War II brought them a common destiny that must now be mastered. Individual crimes should

be impartially punished by due process of whatever law existed at the time of their commission. The German people as a whole, however, has no reason for particular guilt feelings; it was the first victim of National Socialism and today occupies the front line against totalitarian Communism. It is absurd to maintain that Germany has a particular obligation, not shared by the other nations of Europe, to make special sacrifices in the liquidation of World War II. That war was a common catastrophe with multiple causes. If it is essential to have a villain, that role can only be filled by the exaggerated nationalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; which shattered the concert of Europe and brought forth a half century of conflict, but is now yielding to a restored sense of European unity.

<sup>1</sup>Bernadotte E. Schmitt, *The Coming of the War, 1914* (New York: H. Fertig, 1958).

<sup>2</sup>Hans Kohn, *Reflections on Colonialism*, Memorandum Number Two, Foreign Policy Research Institute, University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: 1956).

<sup>3</sup>George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 44-48.

<sup>4</sup>Harold Lavine and James Wechsler, *War Propaganda and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), pp. 31-32.

<sup>5</sup>Kennan, *op. cit.*, pp. 67.

<sup>6</sup>Wenzel Jaksch, *Europe's Road to Potsdam* (translated and edited by Kurt Glaser, New York: Praeger, 1963), pp. 118-22 and 142-47.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas G. Masaryk, *The Making of a State* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1927), p. 103.

<sup>8</sup>Verbatim quote from G. P. Gooch, *Studies in Diplomacy and Statecraft* (London: Longmans Green, 1947), p. 107.

<sup>9</sup>*Department of State Bulletin*, 1945, XII, p. 228.

<sup>10</sup>Wesley L. Gould, *An Introduction to International Law* (New York: Harper, 1957) p. 607.

<sup>11</sup>Hans Kelsen, *General Theory of Law and State* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), p. 334.

<sup>12</sup>Robert W. Tucker, *The Just War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1960).

<sup>13</sup>Quoted, *ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup>Quoted in U.S. Congress, *Pearl Harbor Attack*,

hearings of the joint committee (Washington, 1946), Volume XI, p. 5433. Richard N. Current has undertaken to explain this entry in his article "How Stimson Meant to 'Maneuver' the Japanese," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XL, No. 1 (June, 1953), pp. 67-74. Current contends that Stimson anticipated a Japanese attack on British or Dutch, rather than United States possessions. But he also points out that Stimson told FDR of his preference that U.S. bombers from the Philippines attack the Japanese naval force that had been observed moving southward, without a declaration of war.

<sup>15</sup>This is an incorrect but widely repeated version of a statement by Professor Theodor Eschenburg, in a newspaper article reprinted in *Institutionelle Sorgen in der Bundesrepublik* (Stuttgart: Schwab, 1961), p. 164, that recognition of the unquestioned and exclusive guilt of Hitler was "a foundation of the politics of the Federal Republic."

<sup>16</sup>Walther Hofer, "Entfesselung oder 'Ausbruch' des Zweiten Weltkrieges?, eine grundsätzliche Auseinandersetzung mit dem Buch von A. J. P. Taylor über die Ursprünge des Zweiten Weltkrieges," reprinted in: *Die Vorgeschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges—Legende und Wirklichkeit* (Zürich: Buchverlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 1963), p. 23.

<sup>17</sup>See George B. deHuszar, "The Success of Kremlin Policy," in George B. deHuszar, ed., *Soviet Power and Policy* (New York: Crowell, 1955), pp. 8-14.