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Decolonization and Cold War

After the First World War it had still been possible to embrace the illusion that an old order might be restored. In 1945, no one in authority could believe such a thing. This was one healthy contrast between the circumstances of the two great attempts of this century to reorder international life. Neither, of course, could start with a clean sheet on which to plan. Events had closed off many roads, and crucial decisions had already been taken, some by agreement, some not, about what should follow victory. One of the most important of the Second World War had been that, once more, an international organization should be set up to maintain international peace. The fact that the great powers saw such an organization in different ways, the Americans as a beginning to the regulation of international life by law and the Soviets as a means of maintaining the Grand Alliance, did not prevent them from pressing forward. So the United Nations (UN) organization came into being at San Francisco in 1945.

Much thought, naturally, had been given to the failure of the League of Nations to come up to expectations. One of its defects was avoided in 1945: the United States and the USSR belonged to the new organization from the start. Apart from this, the basic structure of the United Nations resembled that of the League in outline. Its two essential organs were a small Council and a large Assembly. Permanent representatives of all member states were to sit in the General Assembly. The Security Council had at first eleven members, of whom five were permanent; these were the representatives of the United States, the USSR, Great Britain, France (at the insistence of Churchill) and China (at the insistence of Roosevelt). The Security Council was given greater power than the old League Council and this was largely the doing of the Soviets. They believed that there was a strong likelihood that they would always be outvoted in the General Assembly – where, at first, fifty-one nations were represented – because the United States could rely not only on the votes of its allies, but also on those of its Latin American satellites. Naturally, not all the smaller powers liked

this. They were uneasy about a body on which at any one moment any of them was likely not to have a seat, which would have the last word and in which the great powers would carry the main weight. Nevertheless, the structure the great powers wanted was adopted, as, indeed, it had to be if any organization was to work at all.

The other main issue which caused grave constitutional dispute was the veto power given to the permanent members of the Security Council. This was a necessary feature if the great powers were to accept the organization, though in the end the veto was restricted somewhat, in that a permanent member could not prevent investigation and discussion of matters which especially affected it, unless they were likely to lead to action inimical to its interests.

In theory the Security Council possessed very great powers, but, of course, their operation was bound to reflect political reality. In its first decades, the importance of the United Nations proved to lie not in its power to act, but rather in the forum it provided for discussion. For the first time, a world public linked as never before by radio and film – and, later, by television – would have to be presented with a case made at the General Assembly for what sovereign states did. This was something quite new. The United Nations at once gave a new dimension to international politics; it took much longer to provide effective new instrumentation for dealing with its problems. Sometimes, the new publicity of international argument led to feelings of sterility, as increasingly bitter and unyielding views were set out in debates which changed no one's mind. But an educational force was at work. It was important, too, that it was soon decided that the permanent seat of the General Assembly should be in New York; this meant that the Americans would focus more on the organization than they otherwise would have done.

The United Nations General Assembly met for the first time, none the less, in London in 1946. Bitter debates began at once; complaints were made about the continued presence of Russian soldiers in Iranian Azerbaijan, occupied during the war, and the Soviets promptly replied by attacking Great Britain for keeping her forces in Greece. Within a few days the first veto was cast, by the Soviet delegation. There were to be many more. The instrument which the Americans and British had regarded and continued to use as an extraordinary measure for the protection of special interests became a familiar piece of Soviet diplomatic technique. Already in 1946 the United Nations was an arena in which the USSR contended with a still inchoate western bloc which its policies were to do much to solidify.

Though the origins of conflict between the United States and the USSR are often traced back a very long way, in the later years of the war the Brit-

ish government had tended to feel that the Americans made too many concessions and were over-friendly to the Soviet Union. Of course, there was always a fundamental ideological division; if the Soviets had not always had a deep preconception about the roots of behaviour of capitalist societies, they would certainly have behaved differently after 1945 towards their wartime ally. It is also true that some Americans never ceased to distrust the Soviet Union and saw her as a revolutionary threat. But this did not mean that they had much impact on the making of American policy. In 1945, when the war ended, American distrust of Soviet intentions was much less than it later became. Of the two states the more suspicious and wary was Stalin's USSR.

At that moment, there were no other true great powers left. The war had catalysed the realization of de Tocqueville's intuition a century before, that between them America and Russia would one day dominate the world. For all the legal fictions expressed in the composition of the Security Council, Great Britain was gravely overstrained, France had barely risen from the living death of occupation and was stricken by internal divisions (a large Communist Party threatened its stability), while Italy had discovered new quarrels to add to old ones. Germany was in ruins and under occupation. Japan was occupied and militarily powerless, while China had never yet been a great power in modern times. The Americans and Soviets therefore enjoyed an immense superiority over all possible rivals. They were also the only real victors, in that they alone had made positive gains from the war. All the other victorious states had, at the most, won survival or resurrection. To the United States and USSR, the war brought new empires.

Though the empire of the Soviet Union had been won at huge cost, it now had greater strength than it had ever known under the tsars. Soviet armies dominated a vast European glacis, much of which was sovereign Soviet territory; the rest was organized in states which were by 1948 in every sense satellites, and one of them was East Germany, a major industrial entity. Beyond the glacis lay Yugoslavia and Albania, the only Communist states to emerge since the war without the help of Soviet occupation; in 1945 both seemed assured allies of Moscow. This advantageous Soviet position had been won by the fighting of the Red Army, but it also owed much to decisions taken by western governments and to their commander-in-chief in Europe during the closing stages of the war, when he had resisted pressure to get to Prague and Berlin before the Soviets. The resulting Soviet strategic predominance in central Europe was all the more important because the old traditional barriers to Russian power in 1914 – the Habsburg empire and a united Germany – were no more. An exhausted Great Britain and a slowly reviving France could not be expected

to stand up to the Soviet army, and no other conceivable counterweight on land existed if the Americans went home.

Soviet armies also stood in 1945 on the borders of Turkey and Greece – where a Communist rising was under way – and occupied northern Iran. In East Asia they had held much of Xinjiang, Mongolia, northern Korea and the naval base of Port Arthur as well as occupying the rest of Manchuria, though the only territory they actually took from Japan was the southern half of the island of Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. The rest of their gains had been effectively at China's expense. Yet in China there was already visible at the end of the war a reinvigorated Communist Party on the support of which Moscow could count for its diplomatic manoeuvres with regard to the Guomindang government. Stalin might still not have believed in an outright victory for the Chinese Communists – China was too backward for Communism, he thought – but he knew that he could have a direct influence on Chinese politics through them. On their side, the Chinese Communists could not hope for moral and material help from anyone but the Soviets. So it seemed that in Asia, too, Soviet influence was on the rise. There was no reason to think that the Soviet leadership had forgotten old Russia's ambitions to be a Pacific power.

The new world power of the United States rested much less on occupation of territory than that of the USSR. It, too, had at the end of the war a garrison in the heart of Europe, but American electors in 1945 wanted it brought home as soon as possible. American naval and air bases around much of the Eurasian land mass were another matter. Although the Soviet Union now was a greater Asian power than ever, the elimination of Japanese naval power, the acquisition of island airfields and technological changes which made huge fleet trains possible had together turned the Pacific Ocean into an American lake. Above all, the destruction of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had demonstrated the power of the new weapon which the United States alone possessed (albeit in very small numbers), the atomic bomb.

But the deepest roots of American empire lay in its economic strength. Together with the Red Army, the overwhelming industrial power of the United States had been decisive for the Allied victory, equipping not only its own huge forces but many of those of its allies. Moreover, by comparison with them, victory had cost it little. American casualties were fewer; even those of the United Kingdom were heavier and those of the USSR colossally so. The home base of the United States had been immune to enemy attack in any but a trivial sense and was undamaged; its fixed capital was intact, its resources greater than ever. Its citizens had seen their standard of living actually rise during the war; the armament programme ended a

depression which had not been mastered by Roosevelt's New Deal. America was a great creditor country, with capital to invest abroad in a world where no one else could supply it. Finally, its old commercial and political rivals were staggering under the troubles of recovery. Their economies drifted into the ambit of America because of their own lack of resources. The result was a worldwide surge of indirect American power, its beginnings visible even before the war ended.

Something of the future implicit in the great power polarization could dimly be seen before the fighting stopped in Europe. It was made clear, for example, that the Soviets would not be allowed to participate in the occupation of Italy or the dismantling of its colonial empire, and that the British and Americans could not hope for a Polish settlement other than one wanted by Stalin. Yet (in spite of their record in their own hemisphere) the Americans were not happy about explicit spheres of influence; the Soviets were readier to take them as a working basis. There is no need to read back into such divergences assumptions which became current a few years after the war, when conflict between the two powers was presumed to have been sought from the start by one or other of them.

Appearances can be deceptive. For all the power of the United States in 1945, there was little political will to use it; the first concern of the American military after victory was to achieve as rapid a demobilization as possible. Lend-Lease arrangements with her allies had already been cut off, even before the Japanese surrender. This further reduced America's indirect international leverage; indeed, it simply weakened friends it would soon need who now faced grave recovery problems. They could not provide a new security system to replace American strength. Nor could the use of atomic bombs be envisaged except in the last resort; they were too powerful.

It is much harder to be sure of what was going on in the Soviet Union. Its peoples had clearly suffered appallingly from the war, more, probably, than even the Germans. No one has been able to do more than provide estimates, but it seems likely that over 20 million Soviet citizens may have died. Stalin may well have been less aware of Soviet strength than of Soviet weakness when the war ended. True, his governmental methods relieved him of any need, such as faced western countries, to demobilize the huge land forces which gave him supremacy on the spot in Europe. But the USSR had no atomic bomb, nor a significant strategic bomber force, and Stalin's decision to develop nuclear weapons put a further grave strain on the Soviet economy at a time when general economic reconstruction was desperately needed. The years immediately after the war were to prove as grim as had been those of the industrialization race of the 1930s. Yet in

September 1949 an atomic explosion was achieved. In the following March it was officially announced that the USSR had an atomic weapon. By then much had changed.

Piecemeal, relations between the two major world powers had deteriorated very badly. This was largely the result of what happened in Europe, the area most in need of imaginative and co-ordinated reconstruction in 1945. The cost of the war's destruction there has never been accurately measured. Leaving out the Soviets, about 14¼ million Europeans were dead. In the most stricken countries those who survived lived amid ruins. One estimate is that about 7½ million dwellings were destroyed in Germany and the USSR. Factories and communications were shattered. There was nothing with which to pay for the imports Europe needed and currencies had collapsed; Allied occupation forces found that cigarettes and bully-beef were better means of exchange than money. Civilized society had given way not only under the horrors of Nazi warfare, but also because occupation had transformed lying, swindling, cheating and stealing into acts of virtue; they were not only necessary to survival, but they could be glorified as acts of 'resistance'. The struggles against German occupying forces had bred new divisions; as countries were liberated by the advancing Allied armies, the firing squads got to work in their wake and old scores were wiped out. It was said that in France more perished in the 'purification' of liberation than in the great Terror of 1793.

Above all, more emphatically than in 1918, the economic structure of Europe had disintegrated. The flywheel of much of European economic life had once been industrial Germany. But even if the communications and the productive capacity to restore the machine had been there, the Allies were at first bent on holding down German industrial production to prevent its recovery. Furthermore, Germany was divided. From the start the Soviets had carried off capital equipment as 'reparations' to repair their own ravaged lands – as well they might; the Germans had destroyed 39,000 miles of railway track alone in their retreat in Russia. The Soviet Union may have lost a quarter of its gross capital equipment.

A political division between eastern and western Europe was coming to be evident before the end of the war. The British, in particular, had been alarmed by what happened to Poland. It seemed to show that the Soviet Union would only tolerate governments in eastern Europe which were subservient. This was hardly what the Americans had envisaged as freedom for eastern Europeans to choose their own rulers, but until the war was over neither government nor public in the United States was much concerned or much doubted they could come to reasonable agreement with the Soviets. Broadly speaking, Roosevelt had been sure that America could get on with

the Soviet Union; they had common ground in resisting a revival of German power and undermining the old colonial empires. But since Roosevelt had died in April 1945, it is difficult to say how he would have acted when Stalin's solidifying of Soviet power in eastern Europe was stepped up a few months after the war in Europe ended.

Vice-President Harry S. Truman (a politician woefully unprepared for statesmanship when he had to succeed Roosevelt) and his advisers came to change American policies largely as a result of their experience in Poland and in Germany. The Soviets were punctilious in carrying out their agreement to admit British and American (and later French) armed forces to Berlin and share the administration of the city they had conquered. There is every indication that they wished Germany to be governed as a unit (as envisaged by the victors at Potsdam in July 1945), for this would give them a hand in controlling the Ruhr, potentially a treasure-house of reparations.

Yet the German economy soon bred friction between West and East. Soviet efforts to control its zone of occupation led to its increasing practical separation from those of the three other occupying powers. Probably this was at first intended to provide a solid and reliable (that is, Communist) core for a united Germany, but it contributed in the end to a solution by partition to the German problem which no one had envisaged. First, the western zones of occupation were for economic reasons integrated, without the eastern zone. Meanwhile Soviet occupation policy aroused increasing distrust. The entrenchment of Communism in eastern Germany seemed to repeat a pattern seen elsewhere. In 1945 there had been Communist majorities only in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, and in other east European countries the Communists only shared power in coalition governments. None the less, it increasingly looked as if those governments could, in fact, do little more than behave as Soviet puppets. Something like a bloc was already appearing in eastern Europe in 1946.

Stalin obviously feared any reunification of Germany that could lead to western control; while he claimed to hedge against future German revanchism, his real concern was with the power of the Americans in the here and now. As it became clear to the Soviets that the post-war period would not be one of rivalry between the main western powers, the United States and Britain (as Stalin had predicted), Moscow tried to avoid a direct clash with the power of the United States, now by far the most powerful country in the world. In order not to create a worldwide coalition set against the Soviet Union, Soviet policy now showed more flexibility in areas of less immediate concern to Moscow. While anxiously organizing eastern Germany on the Soviet side of a line slowly appearing across Europe, in China it was still officially supporting the Guomindang. In Iran, on the other

hand, there was an obvious reluctance to withdraw Soviet forces as had been agreed. Even when they finally departed they left behind a satellite Communist republic in Azerbaijan – to be later obliterated by the Iranians, to whom, by 1947, the Americans were giving military aid. In the Security Council the Soviet veto was more and more employed to frustrate its former allies and it was clear that the Communist parties of western Europe were manipulated in the Soviet interests. Yet Stalin's calculations remain in doubt; perhaps he was waiting, expecting or even relying upon economic collapse in the capitalist world.

There had been and still was much goodwill for the USSR among its former allies. When Winston Churchill drew attention in 1946 to the increasing division of Europe by an 'Iron Curtain' he by no means spoke either for all his countrymen or for his American audience; some condemned him. Yet although the British Labour Government elected in 1945 was at first hopeful that 'Left could speak to Left', it quickly became more sceptical. British and American policy began to converge during 1946, as it became clear that the British intervention in Greece had in fact made possible free elections, and as American officials had more experience of the tendency of Soviet policy. Nor did President Truman have any prejudices in favour of the USSR to shed. The British, moreover, were by now clearly going to leave India; that counted with American official opinion.

In February 1947 a communication from the British government reached Truman which, perhaps more than any other, conceded the long-resisted admission that Great Britain was no longer a world power. The British economy had been gravely damaged by the huge efforts made during the war; there was urgent need for investment at home. The first stages of decolonialization, too, were expensive. One outcome was that by 1947 the British balance of payments could only be maintained if forces were withdrawn from Greece.

President Truman decided at once that the United States must fill the gap. It was a momentous decision. Financial aid was to be given to Greece and Turkey, to enable their governments to survive the pressure they were under from the USSR. He deliberately drew attention to the implication; much more than propping up two countries was involved. Although only Turkey and Greece were to receive aid, he deliberately offered the 'free peoples' of the world American leadership to resist, with American support, 'attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures'. The fact that neither the Greek nor the Turkish population was particularly 'free' under their own regimes is less important than the colossal implications this had for future American foreign policy. Instead of an American withdrawal from Europe, Washington was now dedicated to remain there to contain

Soviet power. This was possibly the most important decision ever in American diplomacy. It was provoked by Soviet behaviour and the growing fears Stalin's policy had aroused over the previous eighteen months, as well as by British weakness. Ultimately, it was to lead to unrealistic assessments of the effective limits of American power, and, critics were to say, to a new American imperialism, as the policy was extended outside Europe, but this could not be seen at the time.

A few months later, the 'Truman Doctrine' was completed by another and more pondered step, an offer of American economic aid to European nations, who would come together to plan jointly their economic recovery. This was the Marshall Plan, named after the American secretary of state who announced it. Its aim was a non-military, unaggressive form of checking Communism. It surprised everyone. The British foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, was the first European statesman to grasp its implications. With the French, he pressed for the acceptance of the offer by western Europe. It was made, of course, to all European nations. But the Soviets would not participate, nor did they allow their satellites to do so. Instead, they bitterly attacked the plan. When the Czechoslovakian coalition government also declined to accept, that country, the only one in eastern Europe still without a fully Communist government and not regarded as a Russian satellite, was visibly regretful in having to toe the Soviet line. Any residual belief in Czechoslovakia's independence was removed by a Communist coup which replaced the government in February 1948. Another sign of Soviet intransigence was an old pre-war propaganda device, the Comintern, revived as the Cominform in September 1947. It at once began the denunciation of what it termed a 'frankly predatory and expansionist course . . . to establish the world supremacy of American imperialism'. Finally, when western Europe set up an Organization for European Economic Co-operation to handle the Marshall Plan, the Soviets replied by organizing their own half of Europe into 'Comecon', a Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, which was window-dressing for the Soviet integration of the command economies of the east.

The Cold War (as it came to be called) had begun. The first, brief, phase of post-war history was over. The next – a phase in global history, too – was to continue to the end of the 1980s, although with ever-changing shape and direction. In it two groups of states, one led by the United States and one by the Soviet Union, strove throughout a succession of crises to achieve their own security by all means short of war between the principal contenders. Much of what was said was put in ideological terms. In some countries of what came to be a western bloc, the Cold War therefore also appeared as civil war or near-war, and as moral debate about values such

as freedom, social justice and individualism. Some of it was fought in marginal theatres by propaganda and subversion or by guerrilla movements sponsored by the two great states. Fortunately, they always stopped short of the point at which they would have to fight with nuclear weapons, whose increasing power made the notion of a successful outcome more and more unrealistic. The Cold War was also an economic competition by example and by offers of aid to satellites and uncommitted nations. Inevitably, in the process much opportunism got mixed up with doctrinaire rigidity. Probably some form of rivalry was unavoidable, but the shape the Cold War took made it a blight which left little of the world untouched, and a seeping source of crime, corruption and suffering for almost fifty years.

In retrospect, for all the simple brutalities of the language it generated, the Cold War now looks somewhat like the complex struggles of religion in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, when ideology could provoke violence, passion, and even, at times, mobilize conviction, but could never wholly accommodate the complexities and cross-currents of the day. Above all, it could not contain those introduced by national or ethnic interest. Like the religious struggles of the past, too, though, there was soon every sign that although specific quarrels might die down and disaster be avoided, its rhetoric and mythology could go rolling on long after they ceased to reflect reality.

The first important complication to cut across the Cold War was the emergence of a growing number of new states which showed no firm commitment to one side or the other. Many new nations came into existence within a decade of 1945 as a result of decolonization. In some parts of the world this caused as much upheaval as the Cold War itself. The United Nations General Assembly mattered more as a platform for anti-colonial than for Cold War propaganda (though they were often confused). Short-lived though European empire had been as a spectacle of world history, its passing was an immensely complicated phenomenon. Every colony and every colonial power was a special case, for all the generalized rhetoric.

In some places – particularly in parts of sub-Saharan Africa – the processes of integration and modernization had barely been launched, and colonialism left behind little positive on which to build. In others – French North Africa was an outstanding instance – long-established white settler populations could not be ignored by the colonial government (and, indeed, Algeria was not technically a colony at all, being governed as a *department* of metropolitan France). In India, contrastingly, the British demographic presence was of little significance in managing the processes of granting independence.

The timing of those processes, too, varied greatly within the rough dis-

inction that European rule had in any significant measure disappeared in Asia by 1954, while Africa emerged from colonialism only in the next decade, the Portuguese hanging on to their colonies even into the 1970s. But Angola and Mozambique were exceptional in southern Africa in other ways, too; like Algeria and Indochina, for example, they were areas of bitter warfare between the colonial state and the indigenous peasantry, whereas in other African colonies there was a relatively peaceful transfer of power to the successor élites (which were of varying numerical strength and adequacy for the task of government). In some countries – India and Indochina were outstanding though very different examples – real nationalist sentiment and organization existed before the departure of the imperial rulers (and the British, unlike the French, had made important concessions to it), while in much of Africa nationalism was the creature and consequence of independence, rather than a cause.

For all the differences of circumstances, though, there was a sense in which the Asian colonial subjects of imperialism had been assured eventual success well before 1945. This was not merely a matter of concession before 1939, but was overwhelmingly a result of defeat in war; Japan had flattened the card castle of European imperialism in 1940 and 1941. It was not only a matter of the displacement of imperial power in specific colonies. The surrender of more than 60,000 British, Indian and Dominion soldiers at Singapore in 1942 was a signal that European empire in Asia was over. For the British, it was far worse than Yorktown and, like that surrender, it was irretrievable. Against that background it hardly mattered that the Japanese sometimes squandered advantages by behaving badly in their new conquests. Even their worst brutalities did not alienate all of their new subjects, and they found numerous collaborators, among them nationalist politicians. The Allies' parachute drops of arms to those they thought might resist the Japanese only made it likely that they would be used to resist their own return. Furthermore, by comparison with the upheavals in Europe, which were brought about by bombing, conscription for labour, starvation, fighting and disease, in many Asian villages and in much of the countryside, life went on under Japanese rule almost undisturbed. By 1945 the potential for change in Asia was immense.

Imperialism was doomed, too, because the two dominant world powers were against it, at least in the form of other people's empires. For very different reasons, the United States and the USSR were committed to undermining colonialism. Long before 1939, Moscow had offered refuge and support to its opponents. The Americans had understood in a very specific sense the Atlantic Charter's declaration of the rights of nations to choose their own governments, and it was only a few months after its

signature that an American undersecretary of state announced that the 'age of imperialism is over'. Soviet and United States representatives found no difficulty in together subscribing to the United Nations Charter's affirmation of the ultimate goal of independence for colonial territories. Yet great power relationships do not remain unchanged. Although they were clearly enough demarcated between the Soviet Union and the United States in 1948 to remain almost unaltered for forty years, the diplomatic shape of East Asia nonetheless was to be in doubt for much longer, partly because of the emergence of new great powers, and partly because of uncertainties introduced by the disappearance of imperial rule.

Some had always thought India would become a dominant Asian power once she was self-governing. When, before 1939, the timetable and replacement of British rule was being discussed in general terms, there were many among those Englishmen who favoured Indian independence who hoped to keep a new India linked to the British Commonwealth of Nations; this was the name officially given to the empire after the Imperial Conference of 1926. That conference had also produced the first official definition of 'Dominion Status', as independent association with the Commonwealth in allegiance to the Crown, with complete independent control of internal and external affairs. This was a conceivable goal for India, many thought, though not one a British government conceded as an immediate aim until 1940. Yet though unevenly, some progress was made before this and it in part explains the absence in India of so complete a revulsion and anti-foreign feeling as had occurred in China.

Indian politicians had been deeply disappointed after the First World War. They had for the most part rallied loyally to the Crown; India had made big contributions of men and money to the imperial war effort, and Gandhi, later to be seen as the father of the Indian nation, had been one of those who had worked for it in the belief that this would bring a due reward. In 1917, the British government had announced that it favoured a policy of steady progress towards responsible government for India within the empire – Home Rule, as it were – though this was short of what some Indians were beginning to ask for. Reforms introduced in 1918 were none the less very disappointing, though they satisfied some moderates, and even such limited success as they had was soon dissipated. Economics came into play as international trading conditions worsened. In the 1920s the Indian government was already supporting Indian demands to put an end to commercial and financial arrangements favouring the United Kingdom, and soon insisted on the imperial government paying a proper share of India's contribution to imperial defence. Once into the world slump, it became clear that London could no longer be allowed to settle Indian tariff policy

so as to suit British industry. Whereas in 1914, Indian textile manufacture had met only a quarter of the country's needs, in 1930 that figure had become half.

One factor then still hindering progress was the continuing isolation of the British community in India. Convinced that Indian nationalism was a matter of a few ambitious intellectuals, it pressed for strong measures against conspiracy. This also appealed to some administrators confronted with the consequences of the Bolshevik revolution (though the Indian Communist Party was not founded until 1923). The result, against the wishes of all the Indian members of the legislative council, was the suspension of normal legal safeguards for suspects. This provoked Gandhi's first campaign of strikes and pacifist civil disobedience. In spite of his efforts to avoid violence there were riots. At Amritsar in 1919, after some Englishmen had been killed and others attacked, a British general viciously and foolishly decided, as an example of his countrymen's determination, to order his soldiers to fire at an unarmed crowd of Indian protesters. When the firing stopped, nearly 400 Indians had been killed and over a thousand wounded. An irreparable blow to British prestige was made worse when British residents in India and some members of parliament loudly applauded the crime.

A period of boycott and civil disturbance followed, in which Gandhi's programme was adopted by the Indian National Congress. Although Gandhi himself emphasized that his campaign was non-violent there was nevertheless much disorder and he was arrested and imprisoned for the first time in 1922 (and was soon released because of the danger that he might die in prison). This was the end of significant agitation in India for the next few years. In 1927 British policy began to move slowly forward again. A commission was sent to India to look into the working of the last series of constitutional changes (though this caused more trouble because no Indians had been included in it). Much of the enthusiasm which had sustained unity among the nationalists had by now evaporated and there was a danger of a rift, bridged only by Gandhi's efforts and prestige, between those who stuck to the demand for complete independence and those who wanted to work for Dominion status. Congress was, in any case, not so solid a structure as its rhetoric suggested. It was less a political party with deep roots in the masses than a coalition of local bigwigs and interests. Finally, a more grievous division still was deepening between Hindu and Muslim. In the 1920s there had been communal rioting and bloodshed. By 1930 the president of the Muslim political league was proposing that the future constitutional development of India should include the establishment of a separate Muslim state in the north-west.

That year was a violent one. The British viceroy had announced that a conference was to take place with the aim of achieving Dominion status, but this undertaking was made meaningless by opposition in Great Britain. Gandhi would not take part, therefore. Civil disobedience was resumed and intensified as distress deepened with the world economic depression. The rural masses were now more ready for mobilization by nationalist appeals; as the Congress movement changed to take account of mass interests, it made Gandhi the first politician to be able to claim an India-wide following.

The wheels of the India Office were by now beginning to turn as they absorbed the lessons of the discussions and the 1927 commission. A real devolution of power and patronage came in 1935, when a Government of India Act was passed which took still further the establishment of representative and responsible government, leaving in the viceroy's sole control only such matters as defence and foreign affairs. Though the transfer of national power proposed in the Act was never wholly implemented, this was the culmination of legislation by the British. They had by now created the framework for a national politics. It was increasingly clear that at all levels the decisive struggles between Indians would be fought out within the Congress Party. The 1935 Act once more affirmed the principle of separate communal representation and almost immediately its working provoked further hostility between Hindu and Muslim. Congress was by now to all intents and purposes a Hindu organization (though it refused to concede that the Muslim League should therefore be the sole representative of Muslims). But Congress had its internal problems, too. Some members still wished to press forward to independence while others – some of them beginning to be alarmed by Japanese aggressiveness – were willing to work the new institutions in co-operation with the imperial government. The evidence that the British were in fact devolving power was bound to be divisive; different interests began to seek to insure themselves against an uncertain future.

The tide was thus running fast by 1941. Nearly two decades of representative institutions in local government and the progressive Indianization of the higher civil service had produced a country which could not be governed except with the substantial consent of its élites and one which had undergone a considerable preparatory education in self-government, if not democracy. Though the approach of war made the British increasingly aware of their need of the Indian army, they had already given up trying to make India pay for it and were by 1941 bearing the cost of its modernization. Then the Japanese attack forced the hand of the British government. It offered the nationalists autonomy after the war and a right of secession

from the Commonwealth, but this was too late; they now demanded immediate independence. Their leaders were arrested and the British Raj continued. A rebellion in 1942 was crushed much more rapidly than had been the Mutiny nearly a century earlier, but the sands of time were running out if the British wanted to go peacefully. One new factor was pressure from the United States. President Roosevelt discussed confidentially with Stalin the need to prepare for Indian independence (as well as that of other parts of Asia, including French Indochina); the involvement of the United States implied revolutionary change in other people's affairs just as it had in 1917.

In 1945 the Labour Party, which had long had the independence of India and Burma as part of its programme, came to power at Westminster. On 14 March 1946, while India was torn with Hindu–Muslim rioting and its politicians were squabbling over the future, the British government offered full independence. Nearly a year later, it put a pistol to the head of the Indians by announcing that it would hand over power not later than June 1948. This was a certain recipe for further communal confrontation. Many Indian politicians, especially on the Muslim side, now moved towards the setting up of a Muslim state on parts of Indian territory. The unity of India, which had – at least at first – been imposed by the British, was coming to an end. On 15 August 1947 two new Dominions appeared within it, Pakistan and India. The first was Muslim and was itself divided into two slabs of land at the extremities of northern India; the second was secular but overwhelmingly Hindu in composition and inspiration.

Partition was in no way inevitable. It was a product of short-sighted Indian politicians – Hindu and Muslim – and of the British rush to get out of a subcontinent they had ruled for 200 years. But it is also true that India had never been ruled as one entity, even by the British, and Hindu and Muslim had been increasingly divided since the Mutiny. The costs of partition were vast. The psychological wound to many nationalists was symbolized when Gandhi was murdered by a Hindu fanatic for his attempts at preventing further communal violence. Huge massacres occurred in areas where there were minorities. Something like 14 million people fled to where their co-religionists were in control, even though a large number of Muslims preferred to stay in India (there are today almost as many Muslims in India as in Pakistan). The new states were born in tragedy, and even if the administration, infrastructure and educational system left over from the colonial power served them well, at least at first, further instability was unavoidable, especially in Pakistan, an artificially created religious state in two parts with more than a thousand miles separating them.

The concentration on building new states – and the constant enmity

between them – did little to help the massive poverty and social divisions that both countries suffered from. In some regions, food production could not keep up with population increase, and the new governments were as incapable of effective relief as the Raj had been in its worst moments. The steady rise in population had begun under British rule. Sometimes it was briefly challenged by Malthusian disasters like the great influenza epidemic at the end of the First World War (which struck down 5 million Indians) or a famine in Bengal during the Second World War which carried off millions more. But in 1951 there was famine again in India, and in 1953 in Pakistan. The spectre of it lingered into the 1970s.

The subcontinent's industrialization, although it had made important strides in the twentieth century (notably in the Second World War), did not offset this danger. It could not provide new jobs and earnings fast enough for a growing population. Though the new India had most of what industry there was, her problems were graver in this respect than those of Pakistan. Outside her huge cities, most Indians were landless peasants, living in villages where, for all the egalitarian aspirations of some of the leaders of the new republic, inequality remained as great as ever. The landlords who provided the funds for the ruling Congress Party and dominated its councils stood in the way of any land reform which could have dealt with this. In many ways, the past lay heavy on a new state proclaiming the European ideals of democracy, nationalism, secularism and material progress, and it was to encumber the road of reform and development.

China had for a long time been engaged in fighting off a different imperialism. Success against the Japanese and completion of its long revolution was made possible by the Second World War. The political phase of this transformation began in 1941, when the Sino-Japanese War merged in a world conflict. This gave China powerful allies and a new international standing. Significantly, the last vestiges of the 'unequal treaties' with Great Britain, France and the United States were then swept away. This was more important than the military help the Allies could give; for a long time they were too busy extricating themselves from the disasters of early 1942 to do much for China. A Chinese army, indeed, came instead to help to defend Burma and the land route to China from the Japanese. Still hemmed in to the west, though supported by American aircraft, the Chinese had for a long time to hold out as best they could, in touch with their allies only by air or the Burma Road. None the less a decisive change had begun.

China had at first responded to Japanese attacks with a sense of national unity long desired but never hitherto forthcoming except, perhaps, in the May 4th Movement in 1919. In spite of friction between the Communists

and the Nationalists, sometimes breaking out into open conflict, this unity survived, broadly speaking, from 1937 until 1941. Thereafter increasing Japanese military pressure, as well as increased jockeying for position between the Guomindang government and the Communists, led to new examples of civil strife. From 1944, when it was clear that Japan was losing the war in the Pacific, rivalries between the two Chinese parties intensified. But, still, most Chinese believed that some form of coalition government would be possible after the war, if only the new great powers in Asia – the United States and the Soviet Union – would be able to agree.

It was the first stirrings of the Cold War in Asia that broke the uneasy truce between the Guomindang and the Communists in China. The rapidity of the collapse of the Japanese empire in August 1945, after the American use of atomic bombs and the Soviet invasion of Manchuria, also put pressure on any kind of negotiations. By the summer of 1946 it became clear that Chiang Kai-shek was set on resolving his Communist problem by force, and the Americans were unwilling to hold him back, in spite of their earlier attempts at mediation. The Chinese Communists, meanwhile, had reason to hope that the Soviet presence in north-eastern China would be to their advantage. Neither side was willing to return to negotiations, making civil war a certainty.

To begin with nearly all the advantages were on the government's side. It had international recognition, American assistance and control of all the richest parts of China. Its army was much larger and better equipped than that of the Communists. Moreover, Stalin at first held back on support for the Communists, believing that they could not prevail. But the Nationalists soon squandered both their material advantages and the support from the people they had gained during the war against Japan. In spite of Chiang's many exhortations, his party soon showed a lethargy, self-seeking and corruption that drove people away from it. It alienated the intellectuals. Its soldiers, sometimes badly officered and undisciplined, terrorized the peasants as much as the Japanese had done. Within the first year of the civil war it seemed as if the government had become good at only one thing: making enemies of its own people.

Meanwhile the Communists were gradually building their own strength. Building on the goodwill they had earned during the war against Japan, they deliberately moved away from the sect-like behaviour they had showed during their first twenty years of existence – executing landlords and burning temples – to a much more moderate outlook, at least for public consumption. They became almost as good at making friends as Chiang's regime was at making enemies (even though some of the Communists' 'friends' were to regret their choice later). Most importantly, the

Communists were able to survive the early onslaught of the superior Guomintang forces. By 1948 the tables were beginning to turn.

The suddenness of victory was the most surprising aspect of the Chinese Communist revolution. In order to understand it, one has to look at these developments in a longer perspective. The Guomintang's hold on power in China had always been precarious, and large parts of the country were only nominally under their rule. In spite of its significant achievements during its decade in power before the all-out war with Japan began, it had never been able to organize its finances or streamline its administration. The Communists, who had been reduced to political insignificance in the early 1930s, had begun to learn from their mistakes. They had a strongly centralized organization with a charismatic leader in Mao Zedong, a man some of their peasant adherents believed in like a god. They also focused on the country's main political problems: the inequity of landholdings in many rural areas and the increasing number of absentee landlords with no roots in local communities. On other matters the Communists generally promised all things to all men, and got away with it because attention was on what the government did or did not do.

Albeit unwittingly, the Japanese, by launching their all-out attack on the Guomintang regime in 1937, had in the end brought about the very triumph of the Chinese revolution they had long striven to avoid. It is at least possible that if the Guomintang had been undistracted by foreign invasion and had not suffered the crippling damage it inflicted, they might have been able to solidify their rule as many post-colonial élites in the developing world were to do. In 1937 the Guomintang could still draw heavily on patriotic goodwill; many Chinese believed that it was the authentic carrier of the revolution and the focus of opposition to foreign rule. The war destroyed the chance of exploiting this, not because the Guomintang did not fight, but because it fought inefficiently and at great cost to itself. It also pioneered the misconduct against its own population – mostly out of desperation – that would win it so many enemies in the civil war that followed. Meanwhile, the Communists could concentrate on building their forces and prepare for a stronger position after the war. Mao was right when he later said that the Japanese were the midwives of his revolution.

The United States became increasingly disillusioned by the revealed inadequacy and corruption of Chiang Kai-shek's government. In 1947 American forces were withdrawn from China, and the United States abandoned all efforts to mediate in the civil war. In the following year, with most of the north in Communist hands, the Americans began to cut down the amount of financial and military aid given to the Guomintang. From this time on, the nationalist government ran militarily and politically downhill; as this

became obvious, more and more employees of the government and local authorities sought to make terms with the Communists while they might still do so. The conviction spread that a new era was dawning. By the beginning of December, no important Guomindang military force remained intact on the mainland and Chiang withdrew to Taiwan. The Americans cut off their aid while this withdrawal was under way and publicly blamed the inadequacies of Chiang's regime for the debacle. Meanwhile, on 1 October 1949, the People's Republic of China was officially inaugurated at Beijing and the most populous Communist state in the world had come into existence. Once again, the Mandate of Heaven had passed, but this time to a group of men who abhorred much of Chinese tradition and who would do their best to destroy it in the name of rapid modernization.

In South-East Asia the Second World War was as decisive as elsewhere in ending colonial rule, although the pace was bloodier and faster in Dutch and French colonies than British. The grant of some representative institutions by the Dutch in Indonesia before 1939 had not checked the growth of a nationalist party, and a flourishing Communist movement had appeared by then, too. Some nationalist leaders, among them Sukarno, collaborated with the Japanese when they occupied the islands in 1942. They were in a favourable position to seize power when the Japanese surrendered, and proclaimed an independent Indonesian republic before the Dutch could return, but British troops eventually restored the colonial order.

Fighting and negotiation followed for nearly two years until agreement was reached for an Indonesian republic still under the Dutch Crown; this did not work. Fighting broke out again, the Dutch pressing forward vainly with their 'police operations' in one of the first campaigns by a former colonial power to attract the full blast of Communist and anti-colonial stricture at the United Nations. Both India and Australia (which had concluded that the Dutch would be wise to conciliate the independent Indonesia which must eventually emerge) took the matter to the Security Council, and the Americans gave tacit support to the cause. Finally the Dutch gave in. The story begun by the East India Company of Amsterdam three and a half centuries before thus came to an end in 1949 with the creation of the United States of Indonesia, a mixture of more than a hundred million people scattered over thousands of islands, of hundreds of ethnic groups and many religions. A vague union with the Netherlands under the Dutch Crown survived, but was dissolved five years later. Three hundred thousand Dutch citizens, Europeans and Asians, arrived in the Netherlands from Indonesia in the early 1950s.

For a time the French in Indochina seemed to be holding on better than the Dutch. That area's wartime history had been somewhat different from

that of Malaya or Indonesia, because although the Japanese had exercised complete military control there since 1941, French sovereignty was not formally displaced until March 1945. The Japanese then amalgamated Annam, Cochin-China and Tonkin to form a new state of Vietnam under the emperor of Annam. As soon as the Japanese surrendered, though, the chief of the local Communist-led front, the Viet Minh, installed himself in the government palace at Hanoi and proclaimed the Vietnam republic. This was Ho Chi Minh, a man with long experience in the Communist party and also in Europe. He had already received some American aid and support in fighting the Japanese and believed he had the backing of the Chinese government, too. The revolutionary movement quickly spread while Chinese forces entered north Vietnam and British were sent to the south. It was soon evident that if the French wished to re-establish themselves it would not be easy. The British co-operated with them, but the Chinese did not, and dragged their feet over re-imposing French authority. A large expeditionary force was sent to Indochina and a concession was made in that the French recognized the republic of Vietnam as an autonomous state within the French Union. But now there arose the question of giving Cochin, a major rice-producing area, separate status and on this all attempts to agree broke down. Meanwhile, French soldiers were sniped at and their convoys were attacked. At the end of 1946 there was an attack on residents in Hanoi and many deaths. Hanoi was bombarded (6,000 were killed) and reoccupied by French troops and Ho Chi Minh's government fled.

Thus began a war which was to last thirty years, in which the Communists were to struggle essentially for the nationalist aim of a united country, while the French tried to retain a diminished Vietnam which, with the other Indochinese states, would remain inside the French Union. By 1949 they had come round to including Cochin-China in Vietnam and recognizing Cambodia and Laos as 'associate states'. But new outsiders were now becoming interested and the Cold War had come to Indochina. The government of Ho Chi Minh was recognized in Moscow and Beijing, that of the Annamese emperor, whom the French supported, by the British and Americans.

Thus in Asia decolonization quickly burst out of the simplicities Roosevelt had envisaged. As the British began to liquidate their recovered heritage, this further complicated things. Burma and Ceylon became independent in 1947. In the following year, Communist-supported guerrilla war began in Malaya; though it was to be unsuccessful and not to impede steady development towards independence in 1957, it was one of the first of the many post-colonial problems which were to torment American policy. Growing antagonism with the Communist world soon cut across visceral anti-colonialism.

Only in the Middle East did things go on seeming clear-cut. In May 1948, a new state, Israel, came into existence in Palestine. This marked the end of forty years during which only two great powers had needed to agree in order to manage the area. France and Great Britain had not found this too difficult. In 1939 the French still held League of Nations' mandates in Syria and the Lebanon (their original mandate had been divided into two), and the British retained theirs in Palestine. Elsewhere in the Arab lands the British exercised varying degrees of influence or power over the new Arab rulers of individual states. The most important of these were Iraq, where a small British force, mainly of air force units, was maintained, and Egypt, where a substantial garrison still protected the Suez Canal. The latter had become more and more important in the 1930s as Italy showed increasing hostility to Great Britain.

The war of 1939 was to release change in the Middle East as elsewhere, though this was not at first clear. After Italy's entry to the war, the Suez Canal zone became one of the most vital areas of British strategy and Egypt suddenly found herself with a battlefield for a western border. She remained neutral almost to the end, but was in effect a British base and little else. The war also made it essential to assure the supply of oil from the Persian Gulf and especially from Iraq. This led to intervention when Iraq threatened to move in a pro-German direction after another nationalist coup in 1941. A British and Free French invasion of Syria to keep it out of German hands led in 1941 to an independent Syria. Soon afterwards the Lebanon proclaimed its independence. The French tried to re-establish their authority at the end of the war, but unsuccessfully, and during 1946 these two countries saw the last foreign garrisons leave. The French also had difficulties further west, where fighting broke out in Algeria in 1945. Nationalists there were at that moment asking only for autonomy in federation with France and the French went some way in this direction in 1947, but this was far from the end of the story.

Where British influence was paramount, anti-British sentiment was still a good rallying-cry. In both Egypt and Iraq there was much hostility to British occupation forces in the post-war years. In 1946 the British announced that they were prepared to withdraw from Egypt, but negotiations on the basis of a new treaty broke down so badly that Egypt referred the matter (unsuccessfully) to the United Nations. By this time the whole question of the future of the Arab lands had been diverted by the Jewish decision to establish a national state in Palestine by force.

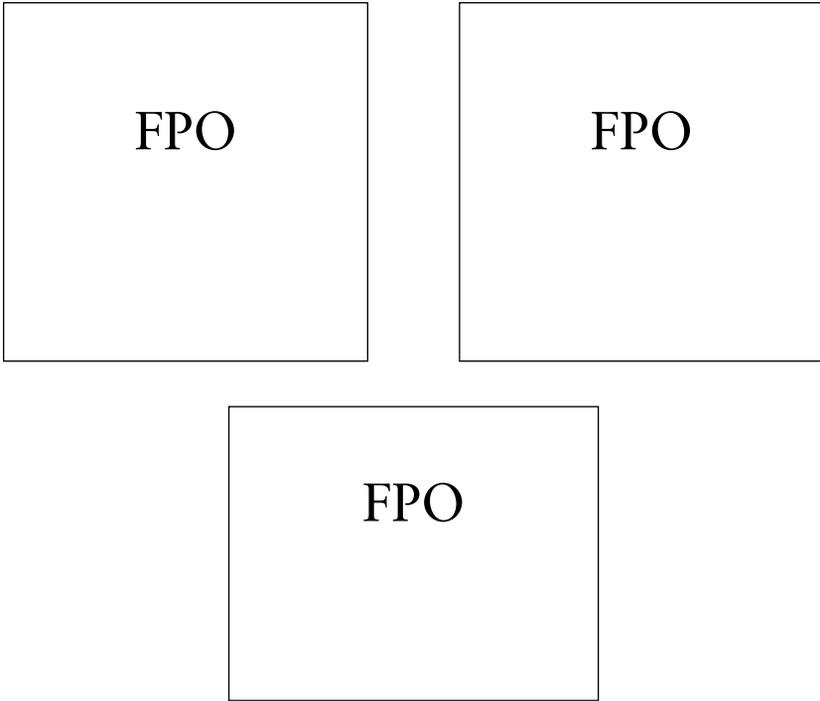
The Palestine question has been with us ever since. Its catalyst had been the rise of the Nazis in Germany. At the time of the Balfour Declaration in 1917, 600,000 Arabs had lived in Palestine beside 80,000 Jews – a number

already felt by Arabs to be threateningly large. In some years after this, though, Jewish emigration actually exceeded immigration and there was ground for hope that the problem of reconciling the promise of a 'national home' for Jews with respect for 'the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine' (as the Balfour Declaration had put it) might be resolved. Hitler changed this.

From the beginning of the Nazi persecution the numbers of Jews who wished to settle in Palestine rose. As the extermination policies began to unroll in the war years, they made nonsense of British attempts to restrict immigration, which was the side of British policy unacceptable to the Jews; the other side – the partitioning of Palestine – was rejected by the Arabs. The issue was dramatized as soon as the war was over by a World Zionist Congress demand that a million Jews should be admitted to Palestine at once. Other new factors now began to operate. The British in 1945 had looked benevolently on the formation of an 'Arab League' of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the Yemen and Jordan. There had always been in British policy a strand of illusion – that pan-Arabism might prove the way in which the Middle East could be persuaded to settle down after post-Ottoman confusion, and that the co-ordination of the policies of Arab states would open the way to the solution of its problems. In fact the Arab League was soon preoccupied with Palestine to the virtual exclusion of anything else.

The other novelty was the Cold War. In the immediate post-war era, Stalin took the view that Britain and the United States would rival each other for world dominance, and that the Soviets would be served by stirring the pot. Verbal attacks on British positions and influence therefore followed, and in the Middle East this, of course, coincided with traditional interests. Pressure was brought to bear on Turkey at the Straits, and ostentatious Soviet support was given to Zionism, the most disruptive element in the situation. It did not need extraordinary political insight to recognize the implications of a resumption of Soviet interest in the area of the Ottoman legacy. The Americans struggled with making out their position. There was major public support in the United States for Zionist views, fuelled by the terrible revelations that were coming out of the Nazis' death-camps. Also, in 1946 mid-term congressional elections were held and Jewish votes were important. Since the Roosevelt revolution in domestic politics, a Democratic president could hardly envisage an anti-Zionist position.

Thus beset, the British sought to disentangle themselves from the Holy Land. From 1945 they faced both Jewish and Arab terrorism and guerrilla warfare in Palestine. Unhappy Arab, Jewish and British policemen struggled to hold the ring while the British government still strove to find a way



acceptable to both sides of bringing the mandate to an end. American help was sought, but to no avail; Truman wanted a pro-Zionist solution. In the end the British took the matter to the United Nations. It recommended partition, but this was still a non-starter for the Arabs. Fighting between the two communities grew fiercer and the British decided to withdraw without more ado.

On the day that they did so, 14 May 1948, the state of Israel was proclaimed. It was immediately recognized by the United States (sixteen minutes after the foundation act) and the USSR; they were to agree about little else in the Middle East for the next quarter of a century.

Israel was attacked almost at once by Egypt, whose armies invaded a part of Palestine which the United Nations proposal had awarded to Jews. Jordanian and Iraqi forces supported Palestinian Arabs in the territory proposed for them. But Israel fought off her enemies, and a truce, supervised by the United Nations, followed (during which a Zionist terrorist murdered the United Nations mediator). In 1949 the Israeli government moved to Jerusalem, a Jewish national capital again for the first time since the days of imperial Rome. Half of the city was still held by Jordanian forces, but this was almost the least of the problems left to the future. With American

and Soviet diplomatic support and American private money, Jewish energy and initiative had successfully established a new national state where no basis for one had existed twenty-five years before.

Yet the cost was long to go on being paid. The disappointment and humiliation of the Arab states assured their continuing hostility to the new state and therefore opportunities for great power intervention in the future. Moreover, the action of Zionist extremists and Israeli forces in 1948–9 led to an exodus of Arab refugees. Soon there were 750,000 of them in camps in Egypt and Jordan, a social and economic problem, a burden on the world's conscience, and a potential military and diplomatic weapon for Arab nationalists. It would hardly be surprising were it true (as some students believe) that the first president of Israel quickly encouraged his country's scientists to work on a nuclear energy programme – by the late 1960s Israel had its own nuclear weapons' arsenal.

Thus, many currents flowed together in a curious, ironical way to swirl in confusion in an area which had always been a focus of world history. Victims for centuries, the Jews were in their turn now seen by Arabs as persecutors. The problems with which the peoples of the area had to grapple were poisoned by forces flowing from the dissolution of centuries of Ottoman power, from the rivalries of successor imperialisms (and in particular from the rise of two new world powers, which dwarfed these in their turn), from the interplay of nineteenth-century European nationalism and ancient religion, and from the first effects of a new dependence of developed nations on oil. There are few moments in the twentieth century so soaked in history as the establishment of Israel. It is a good point at which to pause before turning to the story of the next sixty-five years.