# THE END OF HISTORY OR THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA: RECENT GEOPOLITICAL EVENTS IN PERSPECTIVE

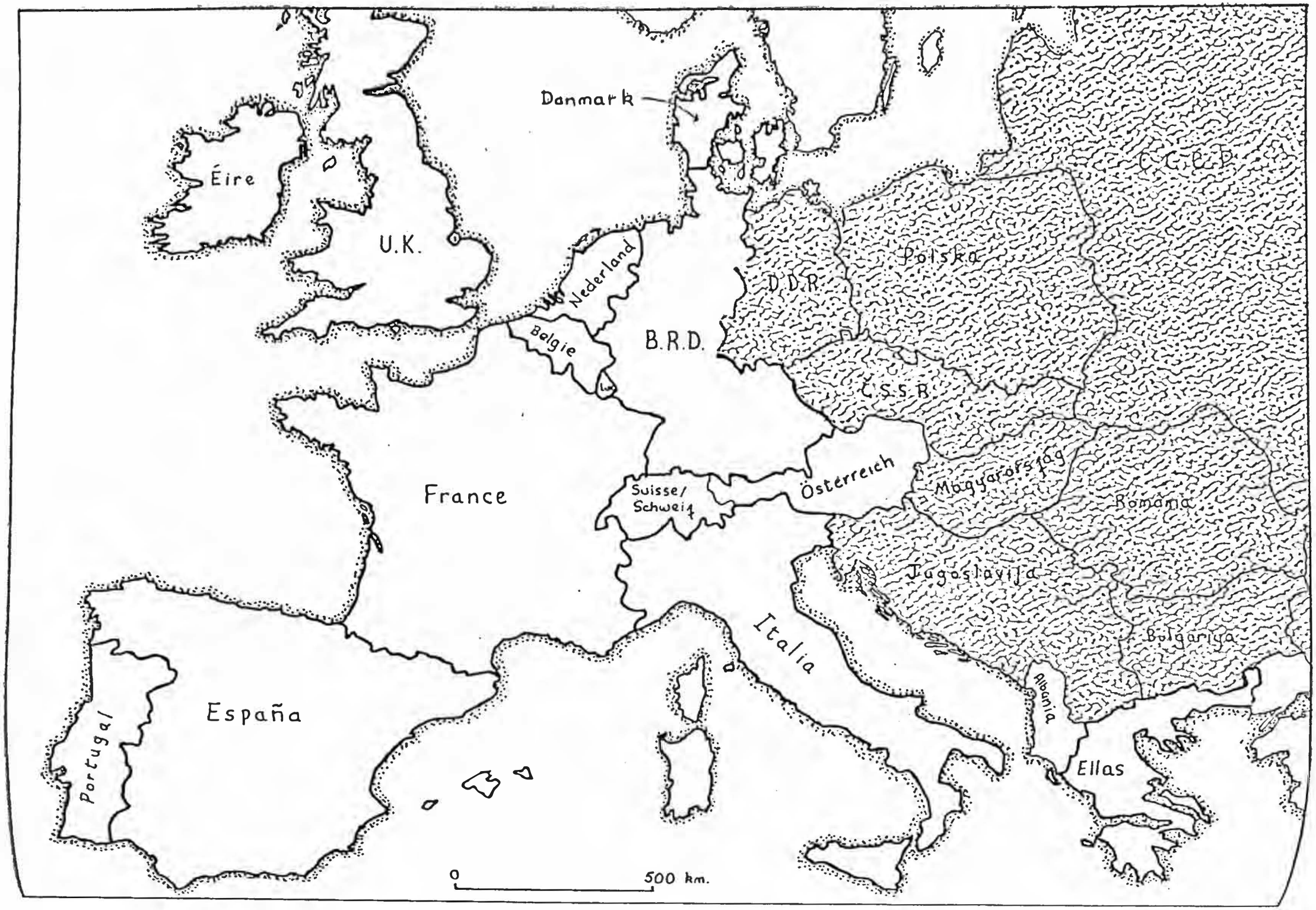
Pat Leahy

A senior figure in the American State Department wrote in an article in Foreign Affairs in September 1989, that we were witnessing the end of history. Such a view was being put forward as the governments of the various communist countries were being challenged not only in Eastern Europe but also in East Asia. His belief was that the view of the individual as enshrined within the ideal of the liberal democratic capitalist system had been victorious over the communal beliefs which were thought to inspire the communist system. The article argued for the end of history on the basis that after some centuries of dispute both armed and intellectual, that the world is uniformly evolving towards a system of liberal capitalist democracy. That such a belief may exist within some of the ruling circles of the United States is clear evidence that the actions of 1989 in Eastern Europe and East Asia have forced a reformulation of the beliefs which have sustained some generations of Eastern and Western policy makers and strategists.

This article aims to examine changes that have occurred throughout Eastern Europe up to 1989. It argues that what we are witnessing today is not essentially new to the entire history of Eastern Europe, but is new to the understanding of past and present generations. What 1989 has managed to achieve is to arbitrarily remove the stability achieved as a result of the second world war and expose the world to the problems it failed to satisfy in 1945. The roots of the present crisis are much deeper than 1945 and stretch into the nineteenth century. Much of the history of Eastern Europe in a broad sense is the result of conflicts aimed at determining domination over Europe.

By 1815 Europe had suffered nearly fifteen years of continual warfare. The final defeat of the French under Napoleon quelled French hopes of dominating the continent. The victors, chiefly Russia and Britain, but also Austro-Hungary and Prussia sought to restore stability to the European scene at the 1815 Congress of Vienna under the guidance of Metternich, the Austro-Hungarian Prime

# P OF E ROPE HIGHLIGHTING RECENT GEOPOLITICAL CHANGE



Minister whose dream of restoring the Ancien Regime was in many ways successful. The international agreement signed at Vienna brought peace to Europe until the Crimean War of 1854. The 1848 revolutions feared by many aristocratic rulers proved only a slight irritant, and did not result in any long-term repercussions. The development of a new system of economic growth, industrial capitalism, and its subsequent spread from Britain to France helped these two nations dominate Europe after the Congress of Vienna. This relatively stable international situation changed in the 1860s with the unification of the various German states by 1870. The arrival of the German Reich on the international scene, was announced by its defeat of Austro-Hungary in 1866 followed by France in 1870. Bismarck's Germany destroyed Imperial France, and began a legacy of Franco-German enmity which would survive into the 1950s. The emergence of the German Reich was an issue of major concern to the other Great Powers for a number of reasons. Firstly, Germany had decisive economic and military strength, proven in its successful military actions. Secondly, the German Reich had acquired the legacy of Prussian militarism, a force that had been instrumental in organising the German state. Thirdly and finally, German acquisition of influence and power within the European scene would imply a loss in position for other continental nations. Fearing Germany and alarmed by its expansionist potential during the period from 1870 to 1914, the major powers in Europe split into armed camps. France and Russia agreed to military intervention if Germany became aggressive, while Austro-Hungary became a German ally. Bismarck, who formulated much of the political initiative to unify Germany, sought by any diplomatic means to avoid a two-front war, and tried to isolate France. German attempts to isolate France proved inadequate and the country found itself fighting on two fronts in 1914. This situation proved disastrous to the German war effort, since the necessity of placing troops on the Eastern Front deprived Germany of the essential divisions it required to defeat the French in 1914.

The end of the war in November 1918 saw Britain and France victorious. Anxious to assure their victory, they imposed the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles on the Germans, conditions that would be used in future years as an excuse for German military development in the 1930s. 1919 also saw the territorial collapse of

the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. The collapse of these empires created a variety of new states. For many of these states, it was their first time in existence. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's aim of self-determination for small nations was echoed successfully in their creation, though there were many ethnic groups and minorities who were dissatisfied with the outcome in Eastern Europe. The major power in Eastern Europe, Russia, had succumbed to revolution, and civil war with the CPSU and the Red Army emerging victorious in 1922. The revolution and the civil war had destabilised the old Russian Empire, with decrees of independence by areas in the south, namely Georgia and Armenia. Only vigorous action by the Red Army prevented the dissolution of what was to become the USSR. On an international level an attempt was made to internationalise state conduct, with the establishment of the League of Nations. The influence of the new organisation was severely weakened by the failure of the United States to join and its adoption of an 'isolationist' stance in foreign policy in 1920-21.

Fascist regimes arose in nations such as Spain, Italy and Germany during the 1920s and 1930s. The weakness of any democratic tradition, the continuance of a militarist ethos and the 1929 world economic crisis, all contributed to this development. Similar developments in Eastern Europe and the use of nationalism meant that the 1930s saw an element of belligerence emerging on the international scene. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 set the tone for the decade. The failure of international action to combat this, sustained the belief that such methods were not only acceptable, but could be achieved with little diplomatic problems. This in turn saw the Italian incursion into Ethiopia (1935-36) and the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in 1936. If anything, the 1930s illustrated the failure of international action. Without American support neither France or Britain would commit the substantial military forces required to combat those acts. Domestically it would have been unpopular and economically, it might not have been possible, given the previous economic conditions of both countries at this period. These facts in some way help to explain neutrality in the Spanish Civil War and the Munich agreement of 1938. The argument is often made that had Chamberlain and Dalidier threatened war in 1938, that Germany would not have conquered the Sudetanland or Czechoslovakia. Such beliefs ignored

the nature of the German regime, which regarded war as inevitable, a necessity for survival. By 1939 the British realised that they would have to act again to control German imperial ambitions in Europe.

Although the Germans had failed to prevent a two-front campaign in World War I, they successfully achieved this objective early in the second. By virtue of the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939, Poland was to be divided but there was to be no conflict between the two powers. Stalin and the Communist Party system had been isolated from Europe due to general suspicions about the nature of his regime and the communist system of government. His provision of Russian troops and supplies in the Spanish Civil War was in some ways an attempt to create a rapprochement between the USSR and France and Britain. Such overtures were ignored, because many in France and Britain saw the Fascist regimes as bulwarks of anti-Bolshevism. German conquest of Eastern Europe began with the conquest of Poland in 1939, while the subsequent invasion of the Soviet Union in May 1941 made unwilling allies of the United States, Britain and the USSR. Once again the Russians proved decisive in the war, destroying large German armies and preventing an overall German victory. Once the United States joined the war officially against Germany in 1943, German defeat was in some way inevitable. The enormous productive power of the United States, Roosevelt's 'Arsenal of Democracy', produced much of the material which would decisively win the war. The early 1940s saw the arrival of the United States on the international scene after thirty years of isolation. The emergence of the United States and its international presence dominated the post-war era. The U.S. was the major world power by 1945, opposed only by the USSR. The Americans were dominant, however, with two-thirds of the world economy, a large industrial and military infrastructure and atomic weapons, which only they possessed until 1949. The mutual suspicion which marred pre-war relations began to emerge between the United States and the Soviet Union. Despite earlier conferences in Tehran in 1943 and Yalta and Potsdam in 1945 there was no resolution of territorial problems in Eastern Europe. Russian and American intentions over the future of Europe and Germany were varied. The Russians saw Eastern Europe as a strategic buffer to prevent future German aggression. Thus, they worked to impose pro-Russian communist-orientated governments in

much of the Eastern European countries, either blocking other parties or coalescing them into arrangements with the Communists. The Americans for their part, viewed such actions with suspicion wishing to see the development of pro-Western democratic systems. The former allies also disagreed over the nature of Germany and the solution of its militarist tendencies. Hence, there was an increasing failure to agree on the nature of Europe, and this division is reflected in Churchill's Fulton, Missouri speech in 1946, when he indicated that an 'Iron Curtain' was descending on Europe. In 1948 the Berlin Air-Lift virtually sealed the animosity between the two powers, and with the division of Germany in 1949, the Cold War was official. American attitudes towards the Soviet Union dominate mainstream contemporary political attitudes. The Americans were anti-communist in orientation. While they cooperated with the Soviet Union in their work to defeat Fascism, they were hostile to the Soviet system. They saw in communism an aggressive force which sought to dominate and expand. Soviet territorial gains in the war had been substantial. They had taken eastern Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and part of eastern Romania. Pro-Soviet regimes had been installed in the majority of Eastern European countries. Only Yugoslavia and Albania escaped Russian domination, but they too had become communist states. A Greek civil war had been in existence between communists and non-communists since 1944, and there were substantial communist parties in France and Italy.

Had the United States not acted in the period 1945-1950, how different might the European political scene be today? In 1947 an article appeared in Foreign Affairs under the pseudonym X. This article aimed to produce a new element in American political thinking, the Policy of Containment. The author, later revealed as George F. Kennan (a senior official), argued that the roots of Soviet behaviour went much too deep to be much influenced by either enticements or threats from the West and that the best course of action was to contain Soviet expansion while awaiting its internal change. Kennan's proposal became foundation stone for the official NSC-48 report and for the 'Truman Doctrine' which sought to contain communism wherever it emerged. Under the Truman doctrine American intervention occurred at all strategic levels. Politically, funds were seconded to reliable non-communist parties ensuring their

electoral victory. In the Italian general election of 1948 the 'reliable' Christian Democrats received U.S. funds to support their campaign, against the communist party. Christian Democrats in Italian election in 1948. Economic assistance under the Marshall Plan revitalised European industry, increased prosperity and provided a market for American goods. Military aid to Greece helped to resolove the outcome of its civil war in favour of the pro-Western government. Finally, the effort to contain Communism was enshrined by the NATO military alliance which committed the United States forces to Western Europe in the event of a Soviet attack. Europe was probably the only region in the arena of American influence which received such lavish treatment. Military alliances were also used elsewhere, namely CENTO in the Middle East and SEATO in South East Asia; but were never as successful as NATO. The formation of NATO in Western Europe was complemented by a Soviet initiative, the Warsaw Pact, thereby dividing Europe into political, economic and military blocs.

The concept of Containment underwent drastic changes in the 1950s. This was influenced in part by the successful conclusion of the Chinese Civil War in favour of the Communists. In the United States the success of the Communists in China led to a 'witchhunt' for Communist sympathisers within the State Department. Combined with the leaking of atomic secrets to the Soviet Union, this 'witchhunt' allowed a relatively unknown senator, Joseph McCarthy to initiate a climate of devout anti-communist rhetoric. Through his unAmerican Activities Committee, McCarthy and others managed to create a climate of fear and distrust. Experienced foreign policy officials at the State Department were forced out of office to be replaced by those more willing to adopt the anti-communist line. The new anti-communism went beyond containment. It was no longer sufficient to block the Soviet Union, but essential to block all forms of what was perceived as communism, irrespective of source. Actions in this area were no longer strategic but were more ideologically based. This view led to the Korean War, support for the ill-fated French actions in Indo-China, and American incursions in Vietnam. It would lead to similar actions in Central America in the 1980s. The Vietnam War was not necessarily a major conflict in military terms, and though expensive financially it was relatively

small in terms of American casualties. The war divided American society on the nature of its foreign policy. It had fought, and what was inconceivable to many, had lost a war for no particular reason. For the United States the 1970s was a time of confusion. The country was losing its world-wide post-war influence. Economically, it was under threat from the Japanese and Europeans. Internationally America had lost direction, and this situation was demonstrated by the humiliating Iranian hostage crisis in 1979-1980. At home the Republicans sought political advantage from the country's disarray and Ronald Reagan emerged victorious from the presidential elections in 1980.

In Europe the period from the late 1940s until 1990 had distinctly different forms. Two diverse blocs developed. In Eastern Europe the period was marked by a series of rebellions: East Germany 1953, Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, Poland 1981 and their destruction or quelling by Soviet forces or by indigenous forces allied to the Soviet Union. In Western Europe, the 1950s heralded the beginning of a Franco-German rapprochement and the gradual appearance of broad based European institutions. The development of the ECSC, followed by the Treaty of Rome in 1957 marked the beginning of the emerging EC superpower that exists today. Early European unity was a tenuous thing and might not have existed without the then division of Europe. While Europe developed its economies, it was able to restrict military expenditure because of the protection afforded it by the American conventional and nuclear umbrella. It is no surprise to find that of the twelve states presently in the EC, eleven states are members of NATO. The EC developed throughout the 1960s as an economic entity. With the booming economic climate of the period it used economic growth as a means of integrating the Western European space economy. Political union remained an implicit objective but one which was not overtly mentioned, given the strong beliefs in national sovereignty which remained in Europe. The oil crisis in the 1970s and the subsequent slow down in economic growth forced a reassessment of community aims. The slow down revealed hitherto hidden weaknesses in the Community structure and the ambitious proposals for economic and monetary union were shelved. For many the EC was dying as an ideal and it was symptomatic that the early years of the 1980s would see internecine squabbles over budgets. Despite the problems, however,

a momentum was being generated within the Community which would give it direction and revitalise the ideals of Schumann and Monnet. What was essentially proposed was an integrated economic and political union. To this end the Single European Act emerged in 1986 and the 1992 integration programme was proposed. If one accepts that the overall aim of the Community was to integrate into a superpower, a subsidiary role was its ability to contain Germany. Increased political and economic integration would bind the Federal Republic to a European Community based upon collective rather than unilateral decision making. Thus increased integration would result in heightened German awareness of its European dimension.

While Europe was engaged in the process of integration, the Soviet Union was passing from Stalin to Khruschev. Under Khrushev there had been some liberalisation and Stalin was denounced in his famous speech to the XX Communist Party Congress in 1956. International tension was somewhat reduced between the powers for a period until the American discovery of missiles in Cuba in 1961. This crisis undermined Khrushev's credibility and led to his resignation in October 1964. Brezhnev replaced him as First Secretary. The crisis and the continuing hostility between the US and the Soviet Union led to an escalation of the arms race. Internally the Brezhnev era was dominated by a lack of reform, and a continuation of the old ways. No major initiatives were taken to improve the economy of the Soviet Union which was in a gradual state of decline. On the international scene Soviet foreign policy aimed at Detente with the United States, recognising the need to acquire grain and advanced technology.

By the 1960s the USSR had achieved nuclear parity with the United States. Although it was the beginning of the era of Detente, the Vietnam war was the main barrier to better US-Soviet relations. The SALT I and SALT II nuclear disarmament treaties of 1979, the ignominious American withdrawal from Vietnam and Soviet foreign adventures in Africa annoyed many Americans, who believed that the Soviets were achieving the most out of Detente. In Eastern Europe Brezhnev is best known for his espousal of the Brezhnev doctrine, that the socialist commonwealth was duty bound to intervene whenever socialism was under threat in a member country, which asserted pursuit of the Brezhnev doctrine led to the invasion (albeit reluctant) of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the destruction of

Dubchek's 'Prague Spring'. The invasion transformed Czech attitudes towards the Soviets, soured relations with the outside world and undermined the possibility for political and economic reform, both in Eastern Europe and the USSR.

In the United States the eight-year presidential term of Ronald Reagan saw the development of the second cold war. Humiliated externally by Vietnam and Iran, Reagan and his associates saw the need to increase American power and prestige abroad and to develop the economy at home, faced as it was with other powerful world economies. To this end he provided a solution of tax cuts, and increased expenditure particularly on defence. An increased military posture was designed to combat what was seen as potential Soviet aggression. American expenditure saw all branches of the armed forces increase in strength to combat expanded Soviet military capabilities. The expansion of the Pentagon's budget was camouflaged by the rhetoric of anti-communism. It was a McCarthyist rhetoric in many ways. American attitudes in the 1980s towards the revolution in Nicaragua were similar to the reaction towards the post-war Soviet Union. An unyielding anti-communist idea sought to keep communism out of Latin America and intervention has cost many thousands of lives and millions of dollars. The Americans seemed unable to comprehend Third World situations and adopted a static military response to problems which required more complex arrangements. The Americans also demonstrated a greater willingness to intervene militarily as is shown by their actions in Libya, Grenada and the Persian Gulf. Reagan's actions which essentially were responses to problems at home and abroad, were domestically popular. The tax cuts and increased expenditure created an economic boom, which satisfied domestic opinion and America was seen by many to have regained its geopolitical position in the world.

The Soviet Union is essential for an understanding of the events of 1989 and 1990. The terms 'Perestroika and 'Glasnost' have become well known internationally since Mikhail Gorbachev introduced them to the world in 1987. Gorbachev succeeded Andropov and Cherynenko as First Secretary of the CPSU. With his arrival a new domestic and international policy was implemented. Gorbachev's 'Perestroika' and 'Glasnost' were aimed at reviving the Soviet economy and society. Essential economic reforms had not been introduced and the Soviets had failed to upgrade domestic industrial

and agricultural activity. Likewise, with the political stalemate after Brezhnev's death, no decisions were taken. Yet this new political process which has been hailed as Gorbachev's major contribution to international politics, has its origins in the past. The critical decisions as regards 'Perestroika' and 'Glasnost' were taken in late 1986 when the separate developments of internal and external reform became truly independent. By mid 1986 Gorbachev had realised that economic 'Perestroika' would fail without the help of the Soviet people, and he argued for the need for democratisation. By mid 1987 Gorbachev had set the ship of state in a new direction, which required internal stability and external help. It would also require quitting Afghanistan in a short period, which was adequately and relatively painlessly achieved in early 1989. International help would require the assistance of the United States, something scantily existing in their post-war relationship. The Soviets were anxious to ensure a calm international environment and to obtain American assistance in the restructuring of the Soviet economy. Such beliefs by the USSR were at odds with the then thinking of the Reagan Administration. It was essential to go beyond the 'hawkish philosophy' in the United States and aim at those who could agree that in the nuclear age there was no such thing as national security, only international security and that such security was a political not a military task. The Soviet Union would have to remove the reasons for which the Truman Doctrine had been initiated in 1947, and this meant removing the potential threat to the West. This combined with a reduction or elimination of the arms-build-up, would provide international and national breathing space to redevelop the economy and reformulate the Soviet world position. A prerequisite for both these measures was the planning assumption that world war would and could be averted by political means.

For forty years Soviet military requirements had been shaped by the possibility of a world war. The technology and resources of such a war had changed, though its enduring nature remained; in the Soviet plan for a land offensive. This strategy required the Soviets to deny America a bridgehead in the event of war, defeating NATO in Europe and evicting US forces from the continent. Such a plan implied military superiority in Europe. This Soviet superiority had always been the root problem since the war. It loomed large in Western threat perceptions and stymied negotiations

on conventional force reductions, where massive cuts were needed to alleviate the Soviet defence burden. This military superiority was at the basis of the United States' refusal to negotiate a halt to arms in space, halting it on earth and ending the existence of nuclear weapons altogether. This idea of non-nuclear defence was supported by Gorbachev and the Soviet High Command. Their strategy in the 1980s sought to avoid escalation by retaining low numbers of nuclear weapons, but increasing conventional forces. This strategy evoked a NATO response of increasing conventional and nuclear weapons, to reduce the Soviet chances of victory. The cost of operating at global level had become prohibitive and such costs could only be avoided by redefining Soviet military requirements in terms of a less demanding objective such as maintaining control within the Soviet bloc, a retreat from world power to regional power status. Henceforth the Soviet armed forces would adopt a defensive doctrine. There would be no offensive westwards and no need for conventional superiority over NATO. Unilateral Soviet defence acts would force the West to recognise that it no longer needed theatre nuclear weapons to balance Soviet conventional superiority and US strategic systems to deter aggression in Europe.

This was an audacious policy which captured the essence of Gorbachev's new political thinking about security in the nuclear age. The implications of assuming 'no world war' were far-reaching, affecting all branches of the military and all strategic issues. The greatest impact was on the Soviet forces facing Europe, and Soviet strategic interests in Eastern Europe. This area had always been seen as a defensive point, a buffer against attack initially, but in the 1970s Eastern Europe had become the springboard for a blitzkreg offensive in the event of war, and all members of the Warsaw Pact had their part to play. The assumption of 'no world war' changed this, removing the area's strategic necessity either as a buffer or as a jump-off point, since this assumed a world war. Afghanistan had shown that Eastern Europe's effectiveness as a political buffer was hindered rather than helped by the presence of Soviet forces. The idea of an ideological or economic empire in the area was also clearly defunct, given this admission of reduced Soviet abilities. It was this political/military concept of no world war and reduced regional status that heralded the changes in Eastern Europe in 1989.

Major political changes occurred in all the Communist led nations of Eastern Europe during 1989 with the sole exception of isolationist Albania. The stimuli and reasoning behind these changes varied from one country to the next. The one similar feature linking these states was the opportunity for change provided by Gorbachev's 'Sinatra Doctrine' which allowed the allies of the Soviet Union to 'go their own way'. This new Soviet foreign policy statement replaced and turned the previous Brezhnev doctrine on its head. The new doctrine and the twin rallying calls of 'Perestroika' and 'Glasnost' allowed political change to develop within Eastern Europe. This political change occurred in different ways and for different reasons in each of the countries in question; and often these developments gained a momentum of their own and the results have been quite different from what existed since 1945. Multi-party liberal democratic forces have become strong in both Czechoslovakia and Hungary; German reunification is a strong possibility and nationalism is proving to be a strong and unknown force in places as varied as Yugoslavia and the Baltic states. Only in the remaining nations of Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria have the once all-powerful Communist parties retained a role in their respective societies albeit through such oblique means as Romania's Committee of National Salvation which contains many former communist leaders.

The divergent pathways of the former Soviet satellites are important for both Europe and indeed the whole world. For the first time in 45 years these nations are reasonably free to choose their own political destinies and aspirations. Feelings covered up by blanket support for the Soviet Union in a bipolar geopolitical world from 1945 to 1990 may now come to the fore in these countries' political agendas. One of the most powerful of these feelings is Nationalism. The development of this and its growth within Europe may well signal a return to the nineteenth century geopolitical European situation. Alternatives to an increased nationalism and any potential 'Lebanonization' of Europe, as recently seen by events in Armenia/Azerbaijan; must involve the EC. The role of the Community may first involve economic and moral support, or may go much further towards expansion of the EC eastwards This scenario has two possibilities: the development of EC spheres of interest in Eastern Europe by use of economic/trading ties; or increasing the membership of the Community to the newly emerging nations. The

latter seems to be a distinct possibility in the new future as can be seen by moves to accommodate a reunified Germany within the EC and applications by Czechoslovakia and Hungary for full membership.

The events of 1989 managed to destroy the two bloc systems imposed after the war. This situation has forced the economically superior western countries to re-examine their positions both individually and as part of the EC. Above all, the collapse of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe may give essential breathing space to allow for the formation of an EC superpower. These events have also proven the essential transitory nature of what are seen as permanent settlements and as such have opened up the problems unresolved since German unification in 1870. Europe's boundary questions have once again emerged as a focus of discontent in virtually every country. The role of Germany both within the EC and its relations with both its eastern and western neighbours have become a focus of concern. Internationally, the post 1989 period may see the demise of the USSR as a superpower as it slips into internal chaos and conflict, with the possibility of losing territory gained by the Tsars in the nineteenth century and Stalin in the twentieth. Finally, the United States is reassessing its role in the world. It is seeking to reformulate its relations with the EC by means of a treaty, and is re-examining its role in NATO. A recent 'Time' article indicated that the US had spent $9.6 trillion on defence related matters since the 1950s to contain what was now seen as a paper tiger. This reflects a belief that the US may be favouring isolationism or at least withdrawing from its role. Despite Ronald Reagan's efforts to project America abroad, his successor living with fiscal reality appears to have embarked on a programme of retrenchment. This is not the end of history, instead we are seeing continuity and change which has been mirrored in world political events for some centuries.