

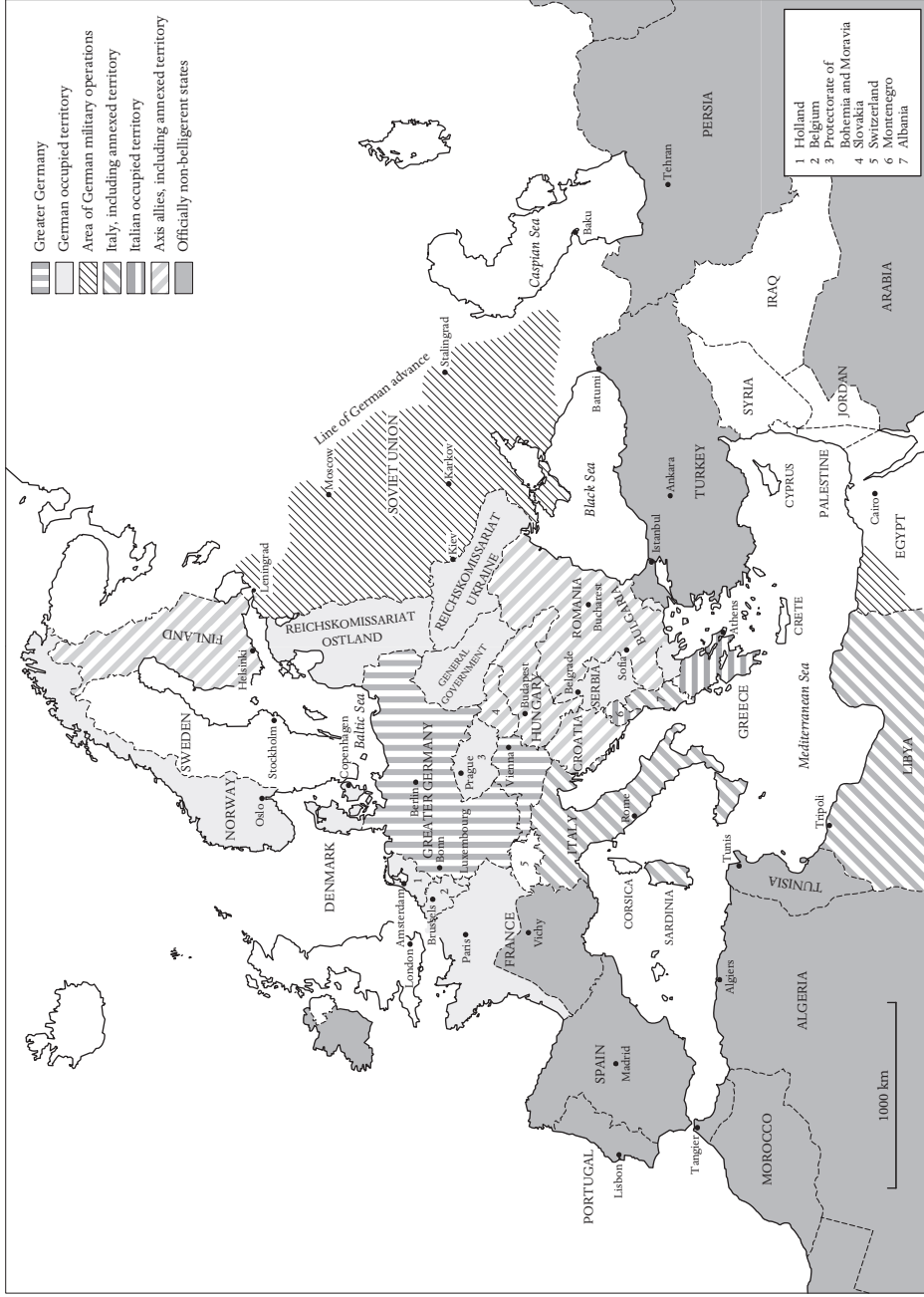


# The War and its Legacy

## Conquest and Occupation

Between 1939 and 1942 most of Europe was united under German domination. At its greatest extent the territory occupied by Germany and its allies stretched from the Caucasus to the Atlantic coast of France, and from Greece to Norway (see Map 1.1). In addition to Britain and the USSR, only a small number of neutral states retained some degree of independence. Having rapidly overrun Poland and western Europe in 1939–40, Hitler took his greatest gamble by invading the Soviet Union in June 1941 (“Operation Barbarossa”) while leaving an undefeated Britain in the rear. Although the Soviet resistance stiffened as German troops approached Moscow, vast tracts of territory and more than 3 million Red Army soldiers were lost in the first six months of combat on the Eastern Front. By September 1942, after a further successful campaigning summer, German forces stood on the Volga at Stalingrad, some 2,000 kilometers from Berlin.

What was the nature of this new German empire? According to Nazi rhetoric this was a “New Order,” a hierarchy within which non-Germans would have their designated part to play. The “Germanic” peoples, such as the Dutch and Norwegians, might eventually be absorbed into the Reich, whereas the fate of the Slavs of eastern Europe would be resettlement and enslavement. Yet while there were those in the more privileged groups eager to collaborate on such terms (see below), Hitler had no intention of sharing power with them. The New Order enshrined Germany’s domination of Europe, and its true nature was one of economic exploitation, political oppression, and increasingly severe racial persecution. The German war economy required immense amounts of labor, food, raw materials, and bullion which, apart from that which could be supplied by the neutral states, had to come from the conquered territories. The trade of



**Map 1.1** The Nazi empire, autumn 1942.

Source: Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, *Nazism, 1919–1945*, vol. 3, *Foreign policy, war and racial extermination*, pp. 642–3 (Exeter University Press, Exeter, 2001 edn.). Used with permission.

occupied Europe was reoriented towards Germany with some, often unforeseen, success. For instance, contrary to Nazi ambitions for the economic exploitation of the east, France provided as much food as, and more industrial material than, all of the occupied Soviet territory.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Germany took 30–40 percent of the wartime national product of France, the Netherlands, and Norway. The Nazis also made up their labor shortages with foreign workers, initially volunteers from allied and satellite states and latterly those drafted from occupied territory, as well as prisoners of war and concentration camp inmates. By 1945 forced and foreign labor constituted 25 percent of industrial employment in Germany and 20 percent of the civilian labor force.<sup>2</sup>

The nature of Nazi occupation varied greatly. This was no uniform, monolithic empire, but rather one that reflected the inconsistencies and varied power structures of Nazi Germany. Some territory (such as western Poland, Alsace-Lorraine, and Slovenia) was incorporated directly into Germany. The Czech lands (Bohemia and Moravia) had already been absorbed into the Reich, in March 1939, but as a quasi-autonomous “Protectorate.” Elsewhere, there was an immense diversity of forms of government. The Nazis occasionally entrusted power to indigenous fascists, such as Vidkun Quisling in Norway, but they soon became a focus for popular hatred and resistance. The leading Belgian fascist Léon Degrelle was, by contrast, kept at arm’s length by the German military authorities and eventually volunteered to fight on the Eastern Front. In occupied Denmark the prewar government was allowed to remain in office until 1943, while in the Netherlands a German civilian authority supervised the work of the local administration (although this was increasingly staffed by members of Anton Mussert’s Dutch Nazi Party). France was divided into a zone of military occupation in the north and west (with some 67 percent of the population, 66 percent of cultivated land, and 75 percent of mining and industry) and a “free” zone under the collaborationist regime of Marshal Pétain, based in the spa town of Vichy. The whole of France was eventually occupied in November 1942 as fears grew of an Allied invasion. In eastern Europe, meanwhile, different agencies vied for control, and grandiose titles did not always carry great power. Alfred Rosenberg, minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, and Hans Frank, Governor General of occupied Poland, saw their own authority dwindle as the war progressed, while that of Heinrich Himmler and the SS – charged with carrying through the extermination of the Jews – increased.

These conquests, which brought large Jewish populations under German rule, both encouraged and facilitated a murderous radicalization in Nazi racial policy. Although Hitler had prophesied in his Reichstag speech of January 30, 1939 that a new world war would result in the “destruction of the Jewish race in Europe,”<sup>3</sup> the thrust of Nazi policy in the late 1930s had been to encourage Jewish emigration. This changed with the invasion of Poland and, more significantly, with Operation Barbarossa, when SS special commandos (*Einsatzgruppen*) were detailed to murder Nazism’s supposed ideological and racial enemies

behind the front line. These units shot as many as 2 million men, women, and children in cold blood, often with the willing help of local populations. At the same time, senior Nazis began to speak of a “complete solution of the Jewish question within the German sphere of influence in Europe.”<sup>4</sup> Further emigration was blocked and steps taken to organize the deportation of the Jews to occupied Poland. This policy was systematized at the Wannsee Conference of January 20, 1942, under the chairmanship of Reinhard Heydrich, where the organizational arrangements were made for Europe to be “combed through from west to east.”<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this deportation was mass industrialized murder, initially pioneered at a number of smaller camps in Poland where Jews were killed by mobile gas vans. Most western Jews were sent to Auschwitz, a sprawling industrial and extermination complex where those deemed unfit to work (80–90 percent) were murdered in gas chambers on arrival. Those Jews selected to work for IG-Farben’s synthetic rubber plant could only expect to live for three to four months – only one month if set to work in the associated coal mine.<sup>6</sup>

The “final solution” reflected the sense of power and boundless ambition felt by Nazi officials at the height of their supremacy within Europe. By late 1941 the Soviet Union seemed close to collapse and Britain was engaged in its own struggle for survival against the German U-boats in the Atlantic. Even the entry of the United States into the war following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941) made little initial difference as it would take almost a year for US servicemen to be deployed in action, and even then in North Africa rather than Europe. Moreover, war with Japan further stretched British resources and some 70,000 British and imperial troops capitulated at Singapore in February 1942. There were, however, also causes for concern on the German side, notably the very limited support that Germany received from its allies, and even from its Axis partner Italy. For all Mussolini’s martial bluster, it soon became clear that Italy was ill prepared, both militarily and economically, for modern warfare. The Italian army suffered humiliating setbacks at the hands of the Greeks (October 1940) and the British in North Africa, while newly colonized Abyssinia was liberated in 1941. Half of Italy’s modern and expensive battleship fleet was severely damaged at anchor in Taranto by British torpedo bombers. The war economy was inefficient, slow to expand, and crippled by a lack of energy resources which forced Italy into dependence on Germany. By 1942 Italy had sent 290,000 workers to Germany in exchange for supplies of coal and steel. Hitler’s other allies, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, were largely agrarian states. Their prewar authoritarian governments were already locked into economic dependence on Germany, and mainly concerned with rectifying their own territorial grievances. Alongside Finland, which joined the war on Germany’s side to take revenge for the Soviet aggression directed against it in the winter of 1939/40, these allies were, at best, able to play an auxiliary military role on the Eastern Front.

## Collaboration

Many in occupied Europe chose to collaborate with Nazi Germany, for a range of personal, ideological, and ethnic reasons. Collaboration was a far more complex phenomenon than its best-known image – of shaven-headed women humiliated after the liberation of France for sleeping with German soldiers – would suggest. In fact, collaboration represented a gradient down which all occupied populations might travel to some degree, and which might well go no further than the quite proper relations of local authorities with an occupying power. In cases of economic relations it was often difficult to tell where “business as usual” and an eye for profit elided into unacceptable levels of support for the German war effort. In France, for instance, contracts placed by the German authorities were not easily refused and, in any case, provided otherwise unobtainable employment for as many as 3 million workers. Yet their labor produced aircraft, shells, and uniforms, while French construction companies built the “Atlantic Wall” and a giant submarine base at Saint-Nazaire.<sup>7</sup> At the individual level, too, there were many gray areas. For instance, François Mitterrand, the future French president, slipped easily between working for the collaborationist Vichy regime and the resistance. In such cases, many would argue subsequently that they collaborated out of a sense of duty to protect their countrymen from the worst of the occupation. Some governments or heads of state opted to remain in post rather than seek exile, while Pétain famously described himself as the “shield” of France. Many lower-ranking officials and members of the police also continued in office, and some would undoubtedly have shared the Nazis’ anti-communism and anti-Semitism. In all these cases, of course, the supreme test came when Nazi demands, notably for the deportation of the Jews, placed their own compatriots in danger.

Collaboration requires a context, as the occupiers must be willing to work with the occupied. This was far less likely to be the case in eastern Europe where the prime Nazi objective was to create *Lebensraum* (“living space”) for the expansion of the German race and to crush the indigenous Slavic population. In Poland, for instance, where Nazi (and, indeed, Soviet) policy was to destroy the prewar elites, collaboration was barely an option. Conversely, the Czechs, who were deemed to be semi-Germanic, enjoyed a relatively privileged status in their “Protectorate,” retaining their own president and civil service. Here, collaboration was both possible and actively pursued, encouraged by the iron hand of Protector Heydrich in 1941–2. One major failing of Nazi rule was in the occupied Soviet territories, where resentment at Stalin’s policies in the 1930s plus local anti-Semitism had created a reservoir of potential support. This was particularly strong in the Baltic states and eastern Poland, which had only been seized by the USSR in 1939–40. The Nazis encouraged the Balts, Belorussians, and Ukrainians to play an active role in the extermination of the Jews, and thousands of Ukrainian and Russian “Hiwi” auxiliaries served in the Wehrmacht. However, Nazi policy towards the region was

blinkered by notions of racial superiority, and many opportunities were missed. Andrei Vlasov, a Red Army general captured in 1942 who turned against Stalin, was not allowed to form his “Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia” until September 1944, too late to influence events on the Eastern Front. Tellingly, German occupation policy was far more successful in the Caucasus, where the Wehrmacht was in charge and where local religious and cultural identities were respected.

Amongst those who wholeheartedly chose political collaboration, small minorities identified fully with Nazism and sought to integrate into the “New Order.” For instance, some 50,000 Dutch, 40,000 Belgian, and 20,000 French volunteers served with the Waffen SS on the Eastern Front, alongside smaller numbers of Scandinavians. Such ideologically motivated collaborators tended to be prewar fascists who saw the Nazis as leading an international crusade against communism (and were greatly relieved when the Nazi–Soviet Pact was shattered by the German assault on the Soviet Union). There was, however, no automatic correlation between prewar and wartime political positions. Many conservative nationalists (such as Charles de Gaulle, who was often denounced as a “fascist” during his career) were above all patriots who detested the German occupation. Likewise, not all collaborators came from the right. A number were former socialists, such as Henri De Man in Belgium and Marcel Déat in France, who felt that the events of 1940 proved the failure of capitalism and parliamentary democracy. For them, to collaborate was to side – not necessarily in an opportunistic manner – with the new and enduring reality in Europe.

Other collaborators might not share Nazi goals or ideals but still saw the German victory as a chance to promote their own agenda for radical political change. For instance, Pétain had initially appeared as a reassuring figure amidst the chaos of July 1940. He enjoyed public support in negotiating an armistice and abolishing the Third French Republic (which was overwhelmingly approved in parliament by 569 votes to 80). However, Pétain’s attempt to create a more traditionalist, Catholic, and xenophobic France under the trinity of “work, family, fatherland” alienated many who might have supported a more politically neutral regime. Instead, Vichy’s assault on republican values and its ultra-conservative policies served to galvanize resistance. This was compounded from 1942 by the failure to protect the French people from the Nazi labor draft and the rounding up of the Jews (in which the French police played a crucial role). By this stage Pétain had lost control of his two principal assets which had given him some leverage with Berlin: control over the French fleet and the colonial empire. In 1942–4 Vichy’s collaboration became increasingly overt under the premiership of Pierre Laval, and its paramilitary police force, the Milice, was effectively engaged in a civil war with the resistance.

Collaboration also offered opportunities to ethnic groups who welcomed German aggression as an opportunity to break up existing states and to assert their own cultural and political independence. Before the outbreak of war Germany had encouraged Slovak separatists to secede from the rump Czecho-Slovakia in

March 1939, and Slovakia became a German satellite state under the Catholic priest Joseph Tiso. Other examples included the fascist Ustasha in Croatia, some Flemish nationalists in Belgium, Breton autonomists in France, and Irish Republicans. Such groups might act as useful auxiliaries to Nazi rule, and as a means further to divide and rule the conquered, but if given too much authority their role could well prove counterproductive. For instance, once in power the Ustasha embarked on a murderous pogrom of Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies. Their intention was to create an ethnically homogenous greater Croatia, but their brutality generated considerable support for Tito's Partisans.

The legacy of collaboration was extremely influential in postwar Europe, and nothing, apart from the defeat of Nazi Germany itself, did more to discredit interwar fascist ideology. The punishment of collaborators (see below) eliminated a whole tier of politicians and ideologues either through execution, imprisonment, removal of political rights, or simple popular disapproval. The attraction of fascism had hardly been destroyed, but it had been driven to disguise itself for decades to come. The specter of the "quisling" also hung over the Soviet domination of postwar eastern Europe and guaranteed a certain degree of autonomy for Soviet allies in the satellite states. Moreover, collaboration – alongside the resistance – sponsored a postwar political realignment as many who had formerly identified with the authoritarian right, such as Catholics, now came to see that their values could be enshrined in the democratic politics emerging from the war. In the process, a veil was drawn over the realities and complexities of collaboration that was not lifted until the subject was critically reexamined by historians and film-makers in the early 1970s.<sup>8</sup> It should also be remembered that, while the memory of collaboration remained generally negative, in parts of central and eastern Europe a more positive connotation survived. For instance, with the fall of communism in 1989/90 the Ustasha and Tiso regimes were often seen in Croatia and Slovakia as a brave first essay at independence.

## Resistance

On August 25, 1944, General de Gaulle, leader of the Free French, arrived in Paris and proclaimed that it was a city "liberated by herself, by her own people, with the help of the armies of France."<sup>9</sup> Despite such rhetoric, no occupied country was in fact in a position to liberate itself during the war. Even though large resistance armies developed in some countries, notably Yugoslavia, Poland, Greece, and Albania, their success was ultimately dependent on the ability of the Allied armies to drive out the Germans. The case was made, tragically, in Poland where the advancing Soviet forces encouraged the Polish resistance to launch the Warsaw uprising (August 1944) and then held back while it was brutally crushed by the Germans. By October, some 15,000 Polish fighters and 200,000 civilians had died.

The extensive Slovak uprising of November 1944 was also defeated, and attempts by the French Maquis to confront German forces directly in the Vercors massif (July 1944) resulted in heavy losses. This is not to imply that the resistance movements were militarily irrelevant, as they played a significant role in disrupting communications, collecting intelligence, and assisting the escape of Allied airmen and prisoners. However, the resistance was as much to do with the future as with the present. Few countries conquered by the Nazis witnessed a simple restoration of the old order after the liberation, and the new politics was – to a degree at least – forged within the resistance.

Defeat was so complete and so disorienting in 1939–41 that there were very few resisters “of the first hour.” In the case of France it was Pétain after all who embodied constitutional legitimacy, while de Gaulle – who claimed to speak in France’s name from London – was merely a deserter supporting an apparently lost cause. In western Europe, unless one was the member of particular persecuted groups, it was generally possible to play a waiting game in a war that appeared to be almost over. In the absence of the communists, who did not explicitly support the resistance until June 1941, there was no coherent political leadership, and initially resistance was the somewhat eccentric choice of isolated individuals. As the war progressed, however, the context changed. Above all, the tightening of Nazi occupation policy propelled many into resistance – for instance, those fleeing compulsory labor service or Jewish deportation orders often formed the basis of the French Maquis in the hills. The changing tide of the war and the growing unpopularity of collaborators gave resistance a new legitimacy, despite the increasingly savage Nazi reprisals against civilian populations. In eastern Europe the situation was far starker. Here resistance – in the case of the Polish Home Army (AK), the Serb Chetniks, and later on the Russian Partisans – was from the outset a question of national survival in the face of the genocidal assaults of the Nazis and their allies. In Poland, the resistance was not only an armed movement, but also represented a remarkable attempt to sustain Polish culture and politics underground. For the Chetniks, resistance represented not only opposition to occupation but also a struggle to ensure that the Serbs maintained their dominant role if and when the kingdom of Yugoslavia was restored.

The development of the resistance was hugely influenced by the policies of Hitler’s opponents. Churchill saw the potential benefits from an early stage, and in the summer of 1940 directed the new Special Operations Executive (SOE) to “set Europe aflame.” More realistically, it would build up small intelligence networks which might eventually be capable of more sophisticated military operations. (SOE was later joined by the American Office of Strategic Services – OSS – the forerunner of the CIA.) The Western Allies came to play a decisive role as the main source of military and political support – witness Churchill’s pragmatic decision in 1943 to favor the communist-led Partisans (now a quarter of a million strong) over the royalist Chetniks in Yugoslavia. Likewise, Churchill and Roosevelt eventually overcame their suspicions and decided to back de Gaulle even though, following

the capture of Algeria, they initially saw more practical value in working with former Vichyites such as Admiral Darlan and General Giraud. However, while the resistance may have been a morale-raising myth in the dark days of 1940–1 and later a military asset, it was increasingly a political embarrassment given the prominence of communists in its ranks. The supreme allied commander Eisenhower claimed that it was worth five or six divisions at D-Day, but thereafter saw it as a politically divisive and “dissident” force in the rear of his advancing armies.<sup>10</sup>

For the communists, the decisive moment was the German invasion of the Soviet Union. This greatly simplified matters as most communists had been ardent anti-fascists during the 1930s and the Nazi–Soviet pact had made immense demands on their political discipline. Now, for the first time, a substantial political force that was used to operating in clandestinity joined the resistance. The Yugoslav Communist Party had, for example, been illegal for much of the inter-war period, and many leading Yugoslav communists had been involved with the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. In most countries the communists soon emerged as the largest resistance movement, sometimes, as in Greece and Yugoslavia, in bitter competition with other political forces. The success of the communist resistance in the Balkans was a source of mounting concern to the Allies as it heralded the formation of communist regimes at the end of the war in Yugoslavia, Albania and (very nearly) in Greece. At the same time, it should be noted that – at least until the advance of the Red Army into eastern Europe reduced the problems of communication – its independence was also a concern to Moscow. These political tensions were less overt in western Europe, where cooperation was more common. For instance, a broad-based French National Council of the Resistance (CNR) was established in May 1943 following the intercession of de Gaulle’s emissary Jean Moulin, and a committee for the liberation of occupied northern Italy was forged in January 1944.

Like collaboration, resistance was a highly complex phenomenon that often belied its straightforwardly heroic image. The German bomb plotters, responsible for the unsuccessful July 1944 attempt to kill Hitler, contained many whose politics were profoundly authoritarian and nationalistic. The Polish resistance was equally heroic, but seemed unable to empathize with the plight of the Jews. The commander of the Polish Home Army reported to London in September 1941 that “the overwhelming majority of the country is anti-Semitic.”<sup>11</sup> Many in the resistance movements were engaged just as much in civil wars – with collaborators and rival resistance groups – to determine the political future as they were in the struggle against the occupation. Moreover, the morality and political value of resistance violence was often questionable given the inevitability of reprisal. In March 1944, 335 Italian prisoners were killed in the Ardeatine caves in retaliation for the death of 33 German soldiers in a Partisan bomb attack in Rome. Although the German perpetrators were later brought to justice, some of the victims’ families believed that the Partisans should also be punished for violating Rome’s status as an “open city.” Likewise, the assassination of Heydrich by Czech SOE

agents in 1942 provoked harsh reprisals against the civilian population (including 173 slain in the village of Lidice).

In western Europe the influence of the resistance was immense, but its exact political character was surprisingly elusive. It proved too incoherent to determine the postwar political order, as many of its members had wished, and no single party was able to capture and channel its energies. The resistance had for the first time thrown together representatives of a wide range of political, religious, and social groups, enabling them to see beyond the rigid ideological positions of the 1930s. A character in Alberto Moravia's novel *Two Women* nicely captures this sense of stripped humanity prevalent in the latter stages of the war when he observes that "you and I are two human beings, and what we are, we are because of what we do and not because of any honours or degrees."<sup>12</sup> Thus, the resistance came to embody certain values – humanist, egalitarian, anti-fascist, and patriotic – that appealed across the somewhat constrained spectrum of postwar politics. None would turn the myth of the resistance to their advantage better than de Gaulle, draped in the cross of Lorraine and surrounded by a loyal coterie largely forged in exile. Yet in the 1970s the resistance would also be used to legitimize causes as varied as an anti-tax movement in Denmark and the violence of the Italian Red Brigade terrorists.

## Liberation, 1943–1945

The course of the war hinged around the events of late 1942 and early 1943, with the German defeats in North Africa, and, above all, the great Soviet victory at Stalingrad in January 1943. Here, an entire army was destroyed and the myth of German military invincibility was shattered irretrievably. Although thereafter Germany was still capable of mounting powerful offensives, notably at Kursk (July 1943) and in the Ardennes (December 1944), the tide of war had clearly changed in the Allies' favor. On the Eastern Front a relentless series of Soviet offensives in the year after Kursk evicted the invaders from Soviet soil and brought the Red Army into Poland and the Balkans. Now Hitler's allies were steadily transformed into enemies, starting with the Allied invasion of Sicily which precipitated the overthrow of Mussolini on July 25, 1943. King Victor Emmanuel eventually led Italy into the Allied camp on September 8, 1943, although the "45 days" of confusion had allowed German troops to occupy the peninsula as well as the Italian zone of occupation in the Balkans and the Greek islands. Mussolini was rescued by German commandos and restored to lead the puppet "Republic of Salò" in the north. Hungary, too, was occupied in March 1944 when its ruler Admiral Horthy sought to withdraw from the war, and a government of the fascist Arrow Cross movement was imposed in October. However, Romania did successfully change sides in August 1944, and 110,000 Romanians died in



**Figure 1.1** The liberation of Paris, August 25, 1944: surrender of German troops.  
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this new war alongside the 300,000 lost on the Eastern Front. Bulgaria and Finland followed suit in September.

Meanwhile, the D-Day landings (June 6, 1944) by British, American, and Canadian troops had opened the long-awaited “Second Front” in western Europe. After desperate fighting in Normandy, in August the Allies broke out across northern France and into Belgium (see Figure 1.1). By early 1945 German resistance was being squeezed between Allied armies advancing through the Rhineland, Poland, the Balkans, and Italy. In the west an Allied army, now – unlike at D-Day – predominantly composed of American troops, swept across the Rhine in March 1945. The Wehrmacht was rapidly collapsing, and more than 300,000 prisoners were taken in the Ruhr pocket alone. Allied troops now fanned out to the east and south, encountering the advancing Soviet forces south of Berlin. In central Europe the Red Army had been delayed by stubborn resistance in Budapest (October 1944–February 1945), but it advanced more swiftly through Poland and Prussia. In mid-April Marshal Zhukov opened his assault on Berlin, and some 78,000 Soviet troops died amongst the ruins before the Red Flag was raised over the Reichstag building. Hitler, having appointed Admiral Dönitz as his successor, killed himself on April 30. Dönitz offered Germany’s formal surrender on May 7 and delivered up the German garrisons in Bohemia, Holland, Denmark, and Norway to the

Allies. He and his government were then unceremoniously arrested on May 23 by the Allied military authorities who were now Germany's true rulers.

Underpinning the military victory of the Allies was a fundamental shift in the balance of resources available to the two sides. In many respects, this outcome was implicit in Hitler's decision to go to war with both the USSR and the USA in 1941. If Hitler failed to win a swift victory in the east, and if a lasting alliance could be brokered between such ideologically disparate enemies, it was probable that a combination of Soviet manpower and US productive capacity would ultimately prevail. By the latter stages of the war, although the Allies could not always match the quality of the German equipment – notably in armored vehicles – they held a decisive advantage in sheer quantity. This imbalance was exacerbated for Germany by the distortions imposed by Nazi policy in the final stages of the war. Despite the success of Albert Speer, Hitler's Minister for War Production from 1942, in increasing production in the face of Allied strategic bombing, vital resources were diverted into the production of technologically advanced but unproven new weapons as well as, of course, into the extermination of the Jews (the "Holocaust"). The Nazis were fearful of alienating public support and slow to admit that Germany was involved in a "total war." Moreover, they were constrained by their own ideology. Female labor, for instance, was mobilized reluctantly and inefficiently, even though 13 million men were under arms. By contrast, the Allies approached the final phase of the war with single-minded lucidity. Difficult questions were postponed in the interest of maintaining the alliance (given that Soviet assistance was also thought to be needed in the defeat of Japan). The United States sustained the war efforts of both its principal Allies through the food, raw materials, and other resources made available under the lend-lease arrangements. The greater mobility of the Soviet forces, and their rapid advance in 1944, was greatly facilitated by American supplies, including 375,883 lorries, 380,135 field telephones, and a mountain of spam.<sup>13</sup> For Britain, US aid meant that extraordinary levels of resources could be directed into the war: 5 million men and women were in uniform and a further 5 million worked in the munitions industry.

In western Europe – and far more problematically in the east – Allied forces arrived as liberators. However, they were also the dominant presence in liberated Europe, with views on the new political structures that were emerging. At the most basic level there was still a war to be won and the Allies wanted to find local leaderships with which they could cooperate in preventing disorder. Prominent collaborators were removed from office, but there was considerable continuity amongst the police and bureaucracies (even though they may have been institutionally complicit in Nazi crimes). This generally meant the strengthening of local elites and the dashing of hopes that the liberation would immediately bring greater social justice: for instance, there was widespread social unrest by late 1943 in rural Sicily. Allied policy was also geared to prevent communist takeovers. In November 1944 Allied forces in Belgium protected the returned Pierlot government from pro-resistance demonstrators, while in Greece British troops found themselves

engaged in conflict with the communist ELAS (National People's Liberation Army) forces in December 1944. Many members of the anti-communist Greek security battalions, set up under the pro-Nazi Rallis government, enrolled in the British sponsored National Guard (see Chapter 3). In Italy, however, where the influential Communist Party gave a pragmatic lead, an agreement that the resistance would rapidly surrender control of captured territory to Allied authorities and disarm was honored. On the Eastern Front, meanwhile, the Red Army imposed sympathetic governments in its wake and sought to reduce all opposition to Soviet control. In Poland, Soviet forces immediately came into conflict with the Polish Home Army.

In the short term, political power largely lay in the hands of those returning from exile. In some cases, such as Norway and the Netherlands, their legitimacy was such that the war could be treated as a mere parenthesis. Elsewhere, matters of sovereignty were more complicated. King Leopold III of Belgium, who had opted to remain in May 1940 while his government went into exile, had been spirited away by the retreating Nazis. His return in May 1945 opened the highly divisive "Royal Question" that was only resolved with his abdication in 1950. In France, de Gaulle was the man of the moment, but he had no authority beyond that granted him by the Allies and that derived from his own courage and vision during the war. His first task, therefore, was to assert his political supremacy over the resistance and throughout France. The situation was even more difficult for exiles in the Balkans and eastern Europe unless, as in the case of Greece, the Allies were willing to assist their return by force. Edvard Beneš, president of Czechoslovakia until he resigned after the 1938 Munich agreement, was able to return to power, but only by making a Faustian pact with Stalin. The exiled Polish government in London watched with mounting unease as the Soviets, on entering Polish territory in July 1944, created a puppet government in Lublin that was a rival to its own authority.

Although there was no immediate social revolution at the liberation, it was soon clear that the war years had greatly altered the balance of power within European societies. Europe was divided between winners and losers in a manner that transcended politics. War weakened the bonds of social class and reduced people's horizons to the level of the family and the locality. In a struggle for survival in the devastated landscape of Poland, even family and generational bonds were loosened as it was a tremendous advantage to be young and in good health. Some groups, above all farmers, had greatly benefited from wartime conditions and the opportunity for profit. As one British observer in northern Europe commented, any peasant farmer who had failed to clear his mortgage in 1940–1945 "was an exception."<sup>14</sup> Many businessmen had also prospered, even if they now required nimble footwork to avoid allegations of collaboration. Conversely, industrial workers had been greatly weakened as a collective force by the banning of trade unions and Nazi labor service, compounding the prewar impact of the Depression. Intimations of a leftward shift in European politics at the end of the war should

therefore be qualified, as the underlying trend was in favor of the conservative blend of capitalism and welfare that came to be embodied in postwar Christian Democracy.<sup>15</sup>

## Neutral Europe

A number of neutral countries – the Irish Free State, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey – were able to stay out of the war. Neutrality itself offered no security, as the Nazi conquest of Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway demonstrated. Nor, despite the Swiss army's threat of a fight to the death in its mountain fastness (*réduit*), was this a victory of military deterrence. With the exception of Ireland, the neutrals remained independent because the limited inconvenience of overrunning them was outweighed by the benefits that they could bring to the Nazi war effort. In any case, the threat of invasion was largely irrelevant by mid-1940 when German troops either surrounded (in the case of Switzerland) or were well placed to intimidate the continental neutrals. They, in turn, were cut off from trade with or military assistance from the Allies and had little choice but to reorient their economies to the New Order.

There was little common political ground amongst the neutral states. General Franco's dictatorship had come to power with the military assistance of the Axis powers in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–9, and Franco had every expectation of joining the war on their side when he judged the conditions to be right. His fellow Iberian dictator, President Salazar of Portugal, conversely, led a country that was Britain's oldest ally and which had vital overseas imperial interests to protect. In Sweden, which had a Social Democrat-led coalition government, opinion was also largely pro-Allied and there was a lively anti-fascist exiled community. In Switzerland the country's somewhat apolitical traditions supported the pragmatism of Foreign Minister Marcel Pilet-Golaz who, on June 25, 1940, called on his countrymen to play their part in a Europe "very different from before."<sup>16</sup> Neutrality was unavoidable for Éamon de Valéra's Fianna Fáil government, given the history of Irish nationalism and the 1919–21 war of independence from Britain. This did not, however, prevent at least 40,000 southern Irish men and women from volunteering to serve in Britain's armed forces (while thousands more worked in its war industries).<sup>17</sup>

Neutral states assisted Germany both militarily and economically. Sweden agreed to allow unarmed German troops and supplies access to bases in northern Norway by rail, and after the June 1941 "midsummer crisis" permitted a German division to cross its territory to join the attack on the Soviet Union. Switzerland also allowed rail transit for the supply of German forces in Italy and engaged in a lucrative arms trade with Germany. Spain failed to enter the war, primarily because the price that Franco demanded (control of French North Africa

and massive economic and military assistance) was too high. However, he did send some 45,000 volunteers to fight in the Blue Division on the Eastern Front, and provided the Germans with supply facilities for submarines as well as intelligence on British shipping in the Straits of Gibraltar. The neutrals were particularly valuable to the German war economy for the supply of metals such as high-quality iron ore (from Sweden) and steel-hardening tungsten and chromites from Spain, Portugal, and Turkey.<sup>18</sup> These three became the focus of desperate economic warfare as the Allies sought to buy up as much of the production as possible, while the rulers of these otherwise poor countries attempted to maintain the inflated prices. Most notoriously, Switzerland provided banking facilities that allowed the Nazis to utilize their plundered gold and other assets in international trade.<sup>19</sup> However, the Allies also received support from the neutrals. In August 1943 Portugal allowed Britain access to strategically valuable bases in the Azores, while Ireland shared intelligence and repatriated Allied personnel on its territory (while interning those from the Axis). For both sides, Lisbon was a center of intelligence-gathering and intrigue.

The neutrals gained few plaudits for their role in the war. Churchill criticized the Swedes' "calculated selfishness" and compared the policy of the Irish Free State highly unfavorably to that of Northern Ireland.<sup>20</sup> Franco, who avoided the fate of Hitler and Mussolini more by luck than judgment, faced a very difficult postwar struggle for the survival of his regime. Turkey overcame doubts about its vacillating role by declaring war on Germany – albeit late in the day – in February 1945. In all cases, the war conditioned the neutrals' postwar experience. For instance, Turkey and Portugal, although one-party states, emerged as pillars of postwar Western security while Franco's Spain was never wholly acceptable to west European opinion. For southern Ireland, too, the wartime "Emergency" heightened isolationist tendencies (it did not join the United Nations until 1955) and greatly reduced the prospects of Irish reunification. The Swedish and Swiss economies grew considerably during the war (GDP rose by 28 percent in the case of Sweden) and this contributed to their postwar prosperity. In both cases, however, their wartime collaboration cast a pall that was never wholly dispelled. Indeed, the question of restitution by Swiss banks, above all for the Jewish victims of Nazi plunder, was reignited in the 1990s.

## The Human and Physical Cost

The extreme destructiveness of World War II was without precedent. The conflict was far less contained geographically than World War I, and this time the casualties were not borne primarily by the armed forces. Even Britain, the only European combatant not to face warfare on its own territory, suffered severe damage from aerial attack. At its worst, in central and eastern Europe, the war represented a

murderous assault by the Nazis on those least able to protect themselves: Jews and other ethnic minorities, civilians, and Soviet prisoners of war. By such standards, the German atrocities on the Western Front, such as the massacre of 80 captured US soldiers at Malmédy, the execution of Allied commandos, and even bloody reprisals such as the murder of 642 French civilians at Oradour-sur-Glane in June 1944, were of a quite different order of magnitude.

By the end of the war some 6 million European Jews (some 67 percent of the prewar population) had been killed, either massacred by the *Einsatzgruppen* on the Eastern Front or deported to the camps where they were gassed or worked to death. Some 1 million Jews died at Auschwitz alone. The severest losses fell on the substantial Jewish communities of eastern Europe under Nazi control. Three million of the Jews in Poland perished (90 percent), as did 1 million (48 percent) of those in the Soviet Union. In western Europe, the fate of the Jews often depended on the collaborationist zeal of the local authorities. Seventy five percent of Dutch Jews were killed, and the French police often willingly assisted in the rounding up of Jews for deportation from France. The last regular rail shipment from Drancy (Paris) to the camps was on July 31, 1944, well after D-Day. However, the 8,000 Danish Jews were transported to safety in Sweden in October 1943, while some satellite regimes – such as that of Admiral Horthy in Hungary – also attempted to protect their Jewish populations. Quite apart from the loss of innocent life and the shattering of families, the social and cultural impact of the destruction of the Jewish populations on Europe was incalculable. Historic communities had been erased and the ethnic map of Europe redrawn. The Polish population, for instance, became far more homogenous as a result (as well as because of the expulsion of the Germans at the war's end). By 1945 Poland was 95 percent Catholic, as opposed to 68 percent in 1921.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, under the Nazi-imposed diaspora many Jews sought new and permanent homes in Palestine and the USA.

The Jews were the greatest – but by no means the only – victims of Nazi fanaticism. Up to half a million Gypsies were also killed, as well as 72,000 mentally handicapped Germans, systematically murdered in the “euthanasia” campaign of 1941. Many other groups were targeted, such as homosexuals, communists, and other political opponents. Nazi treatment of the 5.75 million Soviet prisoners of war was so brutal, including forced labor under inhuman conditions, that as few as 1 million survived their captivity.<sup>22</sup> Such inhumanity was by no means the preserve of the Nazis. In Bosnia, the epicenter of the struggle within Yugoslavia, the Croatian Ustasha embarked on a vicious campaign to “kill a third, convert a third and deport a third” of the Serb population. Meanwhile, both Serb and Croat nationalists directed violence against the Bosnian Muslims. In all, 1.5 million Yugoslavs – mainly civilians – died in the course of the war. The Soviet authorities also committed atrocities, notably following the annexation of eastern Poland and the Baltic states in 1939–40. Thousands of Polish officers were secretly murdered in the Katyn forest on Stalin's orders, a crime that was exposed by German forces in 1943.

Among the Allied states, the losses of the Soviet Union were by far the most severe, and almost beyond comprehension. In the winter of 1941/2 more citizens of Leningrad starved to death each month than the total number of Britons killed by bombs in the entire war.<sup>23</sup> It now appears that as many as 27 to 28 million perished in all (although Stalin, unwilling to reveal the USSR's weakness, only admitted to 7 million). These included 8.7 million Red Army soldiers and 19 million civilians (perhaps 1 million in Leningrad alone).<sup>24</sup> Some of these losses were, however, self-inflicted, such as the 13,500 soldiers executed for alleged cowardice during the battle of Stalingrad. More than a quarter of the 393,000 Chechens and 91,000 Ingush deported from their homes in the Caucasus to the deserts of Kazakhstan in early 1944, under suspicion of collaboration, eventually died.<sup>25</sup> Most of the survivors were unable to return home until the late 1950s. The USSR's physical loss was also immense: thousands of towns and villages were destroyed and vast amounts of industrial and agricultural assets removed to Germany. In the face of such appalling setbacks, the war represented a triumph for the organizational and motivational powers of the Communist Party, but also for Russian patriotism and initiative. The Red Army's victory over Nazism in the "Great Patriotic War" created a new legitimacy for the Soviet Union, and a symbolism more enduringly popular than that associated with the October Revolution of 1917.

Britain's wartime losses were dwarfed by comparison: some 264,000 soldiers and 90,000 civilians had died. Even so, Britain had made many sacrifices in its, for a time, solitary struggle against the Axis powers. The Luftwaffe's bombs in 1940–1, and later the V-1 and V-2 missile attacks in 1944, had caused considerable damage to economic infrastructure and housing stock. In all, some 110,000 buildings had been completely destroyed and 2 million more had suffered some damage.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the British merchant marine had suffered grievous losses from German submarines. Above all, Britain had been forced to expend its national wealth to finance a global war effort. Overseas assets worth \$21 billion had been turned into a \$2 billion deficit. Britain, therefore, ended the war a bankrupt victor, in the shadow of the United States.

France had also suffered severely during the war: 250,000 were killed in the armed forces (while 1.5 million prisoners were forced to spend the war unproductively in Germany) and 300,000–400,000 civilians also died. However, the impact of the war was also physical and moral. If the swiftness of its collapse in 1940 spared France much material damage, the liberation proved slower and far more costly. For instance, the town of Caen was obliterated by Allied bombing during the battle of Normandy, although Hitler's vindictive order for the destruction of Paris was thankfully not implemented. In all, some 290,000 residential buildings were destroyed and the transport infrastructure lay shattered. By 1944 real GDP was only a half of the prewar level. Such losses could, however, be made good. Far harder to restore was a sense of French pride after the humiliation of occupation, and many aspects of postwar policy – such as the dogged defense of the empire and the pursuit of an independent world role – would reflect this.

Elsewhere in occupied Europe civilian casualties far exceeded those of the military. Six million citizens of prewar Poland died (including thousands under the Soviet occupation of 1939–41), of whom 150,000 fell in combat. The destruction was immense: Warsaw, for instance, was razed to the ground as a result of the 1944 uprising. Another peril of Nazi occupation was famine. The Red Cross estimated that 250,000 Greeks died between 1941 and 1943 as a result of food shortages caused by German requisitions and the dislocation of food production and supply.<sup>27</sup> Some 16,000 Dutch men and women also perished in the terrible winter of 1944/5 following the failure of the Allied thrust across the lower Rhine. Italy's losses were relatively light, given that it had been a major belligerent. Indeed, the Italian casualties, 291,000 in the armed forces and 180,000 civilians, were considerably lower than those suffered in World War I. Italy had exerted itself the least of all of the major powers and ended the war with a considerably enhanced engineering industry, allowing a relatively swift recovery after 1945.

By 1945 Germany appeared utterly devastated and transformed. The communist leader Walter Ulbricht wrote of his arrival in Berlin in May 1945 that "we could barely find our way through the rubble because of the smoke."<sup>28</sup> Up to 50 percent of the fabric of most larger cities had been destroyed, mainly in the Allied strategic bombing offensive, and 131 towns and cities had suffered more than 75 percent destruction.<sup>29</sup> The abiding image of the immediate postwar urban landscape was that of the *Trummerfrauen* ("women of the rubble") clearing the debris. Although estimates vary, as many as 7 million Germans had perished in the war, including 3.2 million civilians (many in the Allied bombing) and 85 percent of Germany's 125,000 Jews. In addition, in the closing stages of the war, German populations in the east were victims of the officially sanctioned vengeance of the advancing Red Army, driving them into flight. Between 6,000 and 9,000 civilians and wounded soldiers died with the sinking of the liner *Wilhelm Gustloff* in the Baltic on January 30, 1945. The final Soviet offensive was accompanied by the widespread rape of German women by Red Army soldiers, a danger that persisted well into the subsequent occupation.<sup>30</sup> In some respects, however, the image of abject defeat was deceptive. Allied bombing had flattened the cities and disrupted the railways, but had caused surprisingly little damage to the German war industry. Only 6.5 percent of machine tools had been destroyed in the war and, given the size of the Nazi investment program, the postwar capital stock in western Germany still exceeded the prewar level by one fifth.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, since 1942 Speer's armaments ministry had achieved enduring advances in productivity by imposing techniques of mass production (war production expanded threefold between 1942 and 1944). Accordingly, while Germany ended the war facing acute problems of economic, moral, and political reconstruction, its industrial potential remained huge (and was, indeed, realized in the 1950s). As we shall see, the fear that Germany would once more recover to endanger the peace of Europe remained a powerful force in the postwar era.

The end of the war was accompanied by the mass movement of populations.<sup>32</sup> Between 1945 and 1948 some 10 million Germans, including 3.5 million from the

Czech Sudetenland, were expelled from central and eastern Europe with the approval of the Allied powers. By 1951 more than a fifth of the West German population was composed of refugees. Polish and Czech peasants – some themselves victims of the Soviet seizure of the eastern borderlands – flocked to settle in former German farms and cities in one of the most sudden and profound ethnic transformations witnessed in Europe. Three million Germans remained as prisoners of war within the Soviet Union, the final 10,000 only returning after Adenauer's visit to Moscow in 1955. Elsewhere, some 11 million former forced laborers and prisoners of the Nazis were on the move. The successful return of many of them to their homes by the end of 1945 was a significant achievement for the Allied authorities, offset by the cynical forced repatriation, in line with Stalin's wishes, of Soviet refugees, exiles and anti-communist combatants. By September 1945, 2,272,000 had been handed over, many to a certain death, although some 500,000 remained in western Europe when the policy was relaxed in late 1945. Others, such as the 112,000 Spanish republican victims of an earlier conflict still in southern France in 1951, found themselves unable to return or, like many Jews, preferred emigration to a return to native countries made inhospitable or changed beyond recognition. The death of 42 Polish Jews in the Kielce pogrom of July 1946 was a savage reminder of the persistence of violent anti-Semitism in Europe after the Holocaust.

## Judgment

In addition to imposing unconditional surrender on Germany and depriving it of its sovereignty, the Allied powers also criminalized their defeated enemies. This course of action was, needless to say, fraught with difficulty as no jurisdiction currently existed for trying war crimes and any trial was bound to smack of "victors' justice" – possibly turning the accused into martyrs. Moreover, many Germans were convinced that the Allied bombing was itself a war crime, and the Soviets had themselves been guilty of massacres and deportations in eastern Poland and the Baltic states between 1939 and 1941. Scrupulous care was therefore taken in prosecuting the surviving Nazi leaders and members of the German high command available for trial. (Some, such as Himmler and Goebbels, had joined Hitler in committing suicide, while others, such as Adolf Eichmann, had managed to flee.) The International Military Tribunal (with judges and prosecutors from the USA, USSR, Britain, and France) sat at Nuremberg for almost a year, and presented a huge volume of documentary evidence, as well as many eyewitnesses, of Nazi aggression and "crimes against humanity." Eventually, 11 of the 21 men in the dock were condemned to death, although Hermann Goering, the most defiant of the accused, succeeded in taking his own life first. Others were given lengthy prison sentences. Speer, who presented himself as a mere technocrat, received

20 years and was lucky to escape with his life. Alongside the prosecution of these individuals a number of organizations, notably the Nazi Party and the SS, were also tried and declared to be criminal, facilitating future trials. For all its flaws, Nuremberg served a very important function in cataloguing and providing irrefutable evidence (both documentary and visual) of the Nazis' crimes. It also created an important precedent by ruling against the defense that the accused were "obeying orders" and emphasizing, instead, personal responsibility. The precedent of Nuremberg also informed the establishment of the 1993 tribunal by the United Nations to investigate alleged war crimes in the former Yugoslavia.

By the time that the Nuremberg judgments were delivered on October 1, 1946, the Cold War had already begun to erode Allied unity, and future high-profile *international* trials – including a proposed one of businessmen – did not materialize. Nazi war crimes were thenceforth prosecuted at a national level in the countries where the atrocities had occurred, and eventually in Germany itself. For example, Karl Hermann Frank, the author of the Lidice massacre, was executed in Prague in May 1946, and 66 members of the Waffen SS were tried for the atrocity at Oradour in 1953 in Bordeaux. After the initial spate of prosecutions, trials punctuated the peace of postwar Europe less regularly but aroused ever more interest. Eichmann, the only major architect of the final solution still at large, was kidnapped from Argentina by Israeli agents, and tried and hung in May 1962. Between 1963 and 1965 there was a trial of former SS Auschwitz guards at Frankfurt, and, despite a majority of Germans opposing any further prosecutions, the statute of limitation for genocide was abolished in 1969. From the 1980s there was a new round of high-profile prosecutions of those complicit in Nazi war crimes, some of whom had previously been sheltered by their political or religious associates. These included the trials of Klaus Barbie (the murderer of Jean Moulin) in 1987, of the collaborator Paul Touvier in 1992, and of Maurice Papon, a Vichy police chief responsible for the arrest and deportation of 1,560 Jews, in 1997–8. As late as 1991 Britain introduced special war crimes legislation to allow the reopening of cases against those who had settled – in comfortable obscurity – after the war in the UK.

Alongside the quest for justice lay the larger question of the "de-Nazification" of German society, which had been agreed on as a goal by the Allied leaders at Yalta in February 1945. There was, however, a substantial difference of interpretation between the Western view – that this was a matter of individual screening to establish degrees of guilt – and the Soviet belief that de-Nazification would flow from the fundamental reform of the capitalist structures of German society. There were further differences within the Western powers as the United States favored a harsher process of de-Nazification prior to the intended withdrawal of US forces within two years of the war's end, while the British consistently favored a more pragmatic approach that would prioritize the rehabilitation of German society. Although policies and outcomes differed across the different occupation zones, the sheer scale of the task, combined with the need to revive the German economy and the pressures of the Cold War, tended to support the British view. From 1946

responsibility was devolved to German-run tribunals, and attempts were made to deal with the lesser cases by large-scale amnesties. By 1950 the tribunals had dealt with more than 6 million cases, of which a mere 1,700 were placed in the most serious category of offender, while two-thirds were immediately amnestied.<sup>33</sup> The new West German government brought the whole process to a close in October 1950. In many respects, the Allies had created the worst of all worlds: de-Nazification had been sufficiently intrusive to reinforce a sense of German grievance, yet it was easily circumvented and its real impact on German society had been very limited. Indeed, by the early 1950s at least 50 percent of West German civil servants were former Nazis. The British High Commissioner Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick recalled that in the early 1950s he constantly encountered “the ghosts of Hitler’s Reich ... taking jobs in banks, commerce and industry.”<sup>34</sup>

Very similar issues applied to the aftermath of collaboration, as governments were torn between the popular desire for national catharsis and the need to avoid social and economic upheaval. Such debates pitted the authority of the restored governments and the Allies, who sought to contain the purges and to protect business and administrative elites, against the desire of the resistance to broaden them as the basis for wholesale social change. These problems were first confronted in France where there were some 9,000 summary executions. Once the legal process had been initiated there were a further 767 executions, as well as some 26,289 prison sentences, 13,211 sentences of forced labor, and 40,249 punishments of “national degradation.”<sup>35</sup> De Gaulle exercised clemency in two-thirds of the death sentences that he examined, refusing to pardon Pierre Laval but allowing Pétain to live his final years in prison (where he died in 1951).<sup>36</sup> There was less summary justice in Belgium, where the liberation occurred swiftly, although there were outbreaks of spontaneous violence against collaborators following the German surrender in May 1945. Of the 2,940 death sentences that were eventually passed only 242 were carried out.<sup>37</sup> As many as 12,000–15,000 people were killed in the confusion that enveloped the liberation of northern Italy, and Mussolini was captured and shot while fleeing dressed in a German uniform. His body was hung on display alongside that of his mistress in the Piazza Loreto, Milan. Thereafter, however, a remarkably restrained and short-lived legal purge was instituted, concerned far more with punishing active wartime collaboration than with any attempt to come to terms with two decades of Italian fascist rule.

In eastern Europe, where governments were under great pressure from both the USSR and local communist parties, postwar justice was far more overtly political. Often, the victors took the opportunity to crush their political opponents under the auspices of anti-fascism. For instance, Tito’s resistance rival Mihailovic was tried and executed in 1946, and Archbishop Stepinac of Zagreb was imprisoned for collaboration. Perhaps 100,000 former Ustasha, Chetniks, and others were killed in Yugoslavia between 1945 and 1946.<sup>38</sup> The trial and execution of Monsignor Tiso, the former leader of Slovakia, was exploited by Czechs and communists as a weapon against both Slovak independence and the political power of the Catholic

Church in a reunited Czechoslovakia. Postwar trials and purges were also intended to facilitate rapid social change by stripping out the prewar elites. Across eastern Europe thousands of civil servants were dismissed either for collaboration with the Nazis or for their service under – legally constituted – authoritarian regimes. In the Soviet zone of Germany the fact that 75 percent of academic staff had fled or been purged from the six main universities eased a transition to a Marxist curriculum. There was also collective punishment of entire ethnic groups, such as the Germans of Poland and Czechoslovakia, who were forced to flee and whose lands were confiscated and redistributed.

Postwar “justice” was often ugly and sometimes unjust. Arbitrary distinctions were drawn between shades of collaboration or complicity with Nazism that varied from country to country and between zones of occupation. However, albeit more so in western Europe than the east, legal norms had been observed and the Nazis treated with greater fairness than they themselves had practiced or deserved. Above all, this was a process driven by the need to punish and to draw a line rather than to provide justice for the victims. The mood of the immediate postwar years was hard and uncompassionate. Too much had been seen and too much lost: the priority now was to construct a new social and political order rather than to dwell on the past. The amnesties introduced in France in 1950 and 1953, emptying the jails of all but the most serious collaborators, were symptomatic of the speed with which the war receded.

## Conclusion

The defeat of Nazi Germany was only achieved at immense human and physical cost, and required the unprecedented alliance of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain. However, despite the remarkable initial victories of the German armed forces, the Nazi leadership contributed to their own defeat. The New Order was highly exploitative and did little to encourage active collaboration, while the German war effort was not fully mobilized until 1942. Moreover, the Nazis increasingly diverted resources into a racial and ideological war of extermination against their perceived enemies. The impact of the war on Europe was profound and long-lasting. Extreme right-wing ideologies were discredited, as were those prewar elites tainted with collaboration. In many countries the resistance (in which communist parties had often played a leading role) was poised to take power after the end of the war, or at least to form part of a new postwar political elite. Those countries which succeeded in remaining neutral profited from the economic assistance that they were able to provide, mainly to Germany. Following the liberation of 1944–5, the fate of Europe passed into the hands of the Great Powers. American and Soviet troops had been introduced into the heart of Europe: it could not have been predicted that they would not leave until the 1990s.