CHAPTER 4

EUROPEAN RELATIONS TO 1929

RELEVANT PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

The principal problems and issues with which this chapter is concerned are:

- internationalism versus national sovereignty (whole chapter);
- unsolved problems of World War I (including French search for security); and
- interrelationship of internal and external policies (including Soviet foreign policy to 1929).

PRE-LOCARNO PERIOD: 1920–25

Chapter 1 explained that many of the problems which had preceded the war were left unsolved and that many more problems were created by the Peace Settlement. The map of Europe had undergone enormous changes. Four empires had disappeared: the Austro-Hungarian, Russian, Turkish and German Empires. Many new nations appeared, resting loosely on the principle of self-determination. (Figure 1.3 on page 7 illustrates the territorial arrangements.)

The early 1920s saw France at the peak of its power. France had been victorious, its army was admired and its enemies smashed, and it quickly secured a string of reliable allies. At the same time France became the implacable enemy of revisionism. France had become the 'Metternich' of the post-war era.

The Europe of the 1920s had a look of impermanancy or unreality about it. The USSR was recovering from civil war, and was still isolated—but would she remain weak and alone? Germany was crippled—but would this be Germany's long-term condition? France was the dominant power—but how long could this be maintained? Britain was very keen to disentangle itself from Europe so it could resume its traditional world role, while the US had already returned to its traditional isolationism. A vacuum of power existed in central and eastern Europe, kept as volatile as ever by a host of new disputes.

Three issues tended to dominate the early 1920s:

- the French search for security;
- reparations; and
- the deterioration in Anglo-French relations.

FRENCH SEARCH FOR SECURITY

Carr: 'The most important and persistent factor in European affairs in the years following 1919 was the French demand for security.'

Churchill: 'The mortal need (for France) was security at all costs and by all methods, however stern or even harsh.'

France feared Germany's economic strength and population. It was well aware of its inferiority to Germany in terms of its population and economy and thus sought to allay its fears by
means of a system of guarantees and a system of alliances.

- France wanted the Rhineland. Marshall Foch in 1919 had demanded that France be given control of the Rhine bridgeheads to prevent the possibility of a future attack, but a French annexation of the Rhineland was strongly resisted by Britain and the US. They saw an Alsace-Lorraine in reverse being created.
- To answer French concerns, an Anglo-American guarantee of assistance in case of a German attack was offered, but by 1920 the US had rejected the Peace Settlement and thus also the guarantee. Britain claimed that the US move relieved it of its obligations.
- In January 1922 Britain made a vague offer of a guarantee but Poincaré wanted it turned into a military convention. Britain said no. France was once again alone, its sense of insecurity heightened.
- Aware of the limitations of the League, France sought alliances. In September 1920 an alliance was signed with Belgium.
- In February 1921 France signed an alliance with Poland. Poland, with its population of 30 million, almost had a claim to great power status but by the early 1920s it had already managed to get on bad terms with all its neighbours: Russia due to its recent war, Germany over Danzig and the Corridor, Lithuania over Vilna and Czechoslovakia over Teschen. The French offer of an alliance was thus readily accepted.
- A military convention was signed and France agreed to supply Poland with war materials. Franco-Polish co-operation was such that Carr says they were 'hand-in-glove in every private negotiation and spoke and voted together in every public debate'.
- From 1921 France became the patron of the 'Little Entente'. This was the term used to describe the series of bilateral agreements between Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia. The 'Little Entente' was formed as a common protection against Hungary, the only nation mentioned in the alliance, although for Yugoslavia Italy was the target. Italy had taken Slav territory after the war and wanted more, leading to long-term Yugoslav-Italian enmity.
- France concluded formal treaties with the entente partners later but was clearly part of the set-up before this, having signed informal military agreements and having supplied military goods.
- Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia became faithful French satellites but France had now committed itself to the whole Peace Settlement, not just to the Versailles Treaty.

'So began the central feature of European relations for the next two decades—the diplomatic and military overburdening of France as the chief mainstay of the peace settlement.'

**ANGLO-FRENCH RELATIONS TO 1925**

The key issue of this period was reparations. This issue was to be one of several factors that would hurt Anglo-French relations and ultimately destroy hopes for post-war harmony in Europe.

- Britain and France fell out over the issue of Germany. In British eyes, Germany had been smashed in war and punished. It was now time to get back to normal. Britain's interests lay outside Europe in India, the Middle East and Africa. It sought to avoid European commitments. Germany was a key trading partner whose economic revival was seen as vital to Britain's prosperity. Carr refers to 'time-honoured British conceptions of fair play and chivalry to a beaten foe' while Gathorne-Hardy talks about Britain's 'forgive and forget attitude' to explain this apparent magnanimity toward Germany.
- For France the war was not over. The French demanded that the fruits of victory must not be snatched from them. France had suffered enormously during the war and still feared Germany. Thus, it sought to make its domination of Germany permanent.

Anglo-French differences manifested themselves over several issues.

- French occupation of the Rhineland was firm and occasionally brutal. British soldiers, on the other hand, got on well with the inhabitants and built up good relations.
- The French used coloured troops during the Rhineland occupation period. This spurred a racist outburst in Germany. British and German opinion on this occasion coincided as the 'black shame' was condemned.
- The French encouraged a separatist movement in the Rhineland and even went as far as recognising a separatist government. Britain
stood firm against this and the idea died in 1924.
• The two powers also clashed over the Saar. The British questioned whether keeping a French garrison in the region was consistent with the treaty and also protested at the French treatment of striking coal miners in 1923.

**QUESTIONS**

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<td>What was the fundamental reason for the poor state of Anglo-French relations?</td>
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<td>Where did Britain and France stand on the Rhineland separatist movement?</td>
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**REPARATIONS AND THE RUHR**

But the major clash between Britain and France came over reparations. In January 1921 a figure of £11 billion was agreed upon. Germany protested that it could not possibly meet this amount and so the French threatened to occupy Dusseldorf and other German towns. A further meeting in May 1921 arrived at the figure of £6.6 billion. Britain was to receive twenty per cent, the Dominions two and a half per cent, France fifty-two per cent; the rest would go to the minor powers. This agreement would have Germany paying until 1963. The agreement was a disaster for Europe: Germany could not believe it, Britain was sorry and the French remained committed to forcing Germany to pay up the maximum amount!

• Germany’s first payment was made in 1921, as a result of a loan from London. The first payment was to be divided between Britain (for the cost of its Rhine army) and Belgium, whom it was agreed would get priority in reparations. The French were not happy about receiving nothing.
• Towards the end of 1922 Germany announced it could not make its next payment. By this time the German economy was in chaos with inflation set to reach unbelievable heights. The Germans failed to deliver a consignment of timber and so France decided to occupy the Ruhr to make Germany ‘meet their obligations’.
• On 11 January 1923 French and Belgian troops entered the Ruhr. Britain refused to take any part in the occupation. Chancellor Cuno ordered passive resistance as the German economy collapsed and hyper-inflation set off. Violence flared in the occupied areas as the French tried to extract payment.

**DAWES PLAN**

• The British Prime Minister Baldwin asked the US to intervene and investigate how Germany might pay. General C. G. Dawes was sent to Paris and between January and April 1924, the Dawes Plan began to take shape.
• Dawes’s philosophy was ‘business not politics’. He saw Germany’s need for its own resources, a stable currency and a balanced budget.
  —A two-year moratorium on reparations was imposed.
  —Payments would then rise from £50 million to £125 million over five years.
  —A foreign loan of $800 million was granted to Germany.
• The Dawes Plan had certain benefits.
  —It separated the question of payment from the question of transfer.
  —It ended the uncertainty of payments.
  —Reparations became a commercial rather than a political question.
• The Plan also contained flaws, however.
  —No final amount had been settled upon and France still hoped for £6.6 billion.
  —There was little incentive for Germany to save as its payments would increase.
  —As loans began to flow into Germany it would later become apparent that German solvency floated on a sea of credit.

**ALLIED WAR DEBTS**

The issues of reparations and Allied war debts were very closely entwined. The US had lent millions to Britain during the war, as had Britain
Study the cartoon in Figure 4.1 and answer the questions that follow.

'Perhaps it would go-up better if we let it touch earth'

Fig. 4.1 Unlimited indemnity

7. (a) What is the cartoonist's view of the level of reparations?
(b) The two characters represent France and Britain. Which is which? Justify your answer.

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to its allies. An isolationist America whose 1920s slogan was ‘the business of America is business’ had no intention of cancelling the debts.

- The war debt issue helped to poison the international atmosphere early in the decade. The Allies knew that if the winners had to pay war debts, public opinion would never allow the losers to avoid paying reparations.
- The US view was that if the Allies were going to squeeze the Germans then the Allies, too, should honour their war debts.
- As US loans flowed into Germany, an absurd circular flow of money began to take hold of international finance as Figure 4.2 illustrates.

- The British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Balfour, managed to antagonise the US in 1922 with the ‘Balfour Note’: Britain announced it would expect its European debtors to pay back to them only what the US demanded of Britain. The Americans did not react as Balfour had hoped. President Coolidge’s comment was: ‘They hired the money didn’t they?’
- In 1923 a war debts agreement was reached whereby Britain would pay the US until 1965.

THE EUROPEAN SCENE BRIGHTENS

Despite the tension and strained relations of the early 1920s, there were definite hopeful signs of an improvement in European relations as 1925 opened:

- In Germany Stresemann had called off passive resistance in 1923. He worked hard to secure the Dawes Plan and the evacuation of Belgian and French troops from the Ruhr. This he
achieved in November 1924. As Foreign Minister, Stresemann set about restoring Germany's place in the family of nations.

- The hardline French Prime Minister Poincaré was voted out of office in May 1924, to be replaced by the more liberal Herriot. Herriot sought accommodation rather than confrontation with Britain and Germany.
- Ramsey MacDonald's term as British prime minister similarly added to the mood of international co-operation.

The brief optimistic era of Locarno was dawning.

EASTERN EUROPE AND TURKEY

As the western powers struggled over the issues of war debts and reparations, eastern and south-eastern Europe were still in ferment. The new nations frequently clashed over their territorial ambitions (see Chapter 1). Poland had a brief war with Russia which culminated in the Treaty of Riga (1921) and saw Poland's eastern frontier moved well beyond the Curzon Line. Bolshevism was still feared, but it was not Russian armies that were feared, as Russia would take many years to get over the civil war; rather, it was ideas that were feared. Germany was not considered as a bulwark against the spread of the 'red disease' and so the newly independent states of eastern Europe were strengthened to provide a cordon sanitaire against the Russians. It was France who was most closely connected to these states (see page 29). Meanwhile Russia sought to end its isolation, an aim that was achieved at Rapallo in 1922 (see page 39).

The situation in Turkey was still unsettled:

- The Sultan, Mohammed VI, had accepted the Treaty of Sèvres (see page 4) but this was strongly opposed inside the country by the supporters of the nationalist leader Mustapha Kemal, who was particularly angered by proposals for the partition of Anatolia.
- Kemal whipped up nationalist feeling and in January 1920 his party dominated the country, with the Sultan's government holding on thanks only to the presence of Allied forces. In March the Allies dissolved the parliament.
- Kemal moved to Ankara and now openly fought against the Sultan and the Allies.
- In 1922 Kemal managed to push occupying Greek forces out of the country following their attempt to keep hold of Smyrna. The Allies did not oppose this move as changes in the Greek government saw the recall to the throne of the pro-German King Constantine.
- The Allies left Constantinople, although not before a major military confrontation between Britain and Turkey nearly exploded near the Straits of Chanak. In 1923 an agreement was reached with Kemal at Lausanne. The Treaty of Lausanne included none of the severity of Sèvres.
- The Treaty of Lausanne included the following terms:
  - Turkey surrendered all territory that was not inhabited by Turks.
  - Britain gained a protectorate over Egypt.
  - The League organised mandates for Turkey's Middle East provinces: Syria and Lebanon to France; and Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq to Britain.
  - There were to be no reparations and no limitations placed on Turkey's military.
  - Turkey regained Constantinople and eastern Thrace.
  - The Straits were demilitarised.

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<td>8. What reparations figure was finally agreed on for Germany?</td>
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<td>9. Why did France invade the Ruhr?</td>
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<td>10. How did Britain assist in the invasion?</td>
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<td>11. How was the reparations matter settled?</td>
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<td>12. What was the US attitude to Allied war debts?</td>
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<td>13. What was the Balfour Note?</td>
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<td>14. Why had the European scene brightened by 1925?</td>
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<td>15. Who was Turkey's nationalist leader after World War I?</td>
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<td>16. What treaty did Turkey eventually accept?</td>
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LOCARNO HONEYMOON

Between 1924 and 1929 a strong spirit of optimism pervaded Europe, and international relations seemed to have improved more than
anyone had dared hope after the events since 1919. Economic recovery was well under way and there was evidence of genuine economic growth.

International diplomacy was dominated by men who sincerely sought reconciliation: this made possible the Locarno Pact and Germany’s entry into the League of Nations. The second half of the 1920s was the heyday of the League.

But beneath the surface there were strong reasons for concern: economic recovery, though real, was fragile; by the late 1920s democracy in Europe had been virtually eclipsed; and the reliance on personalities for successful diplomacy begged the question—what would happen once those men left the scene? Even the Locarno Pact, championed by one and all, was fatally flawed.

**LOCARNO PACT**

In October 1925 the foreign ministers of Britain, Germany, France and Italy met in the Swiss resort of Locarno to work out a series of agreements guaranteeing the post-war frontiers of Europe. The Locarno Pact was eventually signed in London on 1 December 1925. The pact was received with overwhelming optimism at the time. It contained:

- a treaty of mutual guarantee of the Franco-German and Belgian-German frontiers between Germany, Belgium, France, Britain and Italy;
- treaties of arbitration between Germany and Belgium, Germany and France, Germany and Poland, and Germany and Czechoslovakia;
- a Franco-Polish and a Franco-Czech treaty for assistance in case of German aggression;
- a guarantee extended to the demilitarised Rhineland;
- arrangements for Germany’s entry into the League of Nations.

France certainly would have liked more but Locarno was the best security agreement it could get at the time. Britain’s Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, said at the time that Locarno marked ‘the real dividing line between the years of war and the years of peace’.9

- Gathorne-Hardy argues that for Locarno to be effective, British intervention had to be feared and that in this sense it seemed a most ‘effective and formidable looking scarecrow’.10
- Taylor’s conclusion is: ‘Its (Locarno’s) signature ended the First World War; its repudiation eleven years later marked the prelude to the second.’11

Did the Locarno Pact deserve all the praise and adulation that it received? The history of the 1930s would prove it was not worth the paper it was printed on. Indeed Locarno can be seen to be flawed even before Hitler arrived to tear it up. Germany had not suddenly decided to accept the post-war settlement; revisionism had not been buried. Furthermore, the agreement itself was fatally contradictory.

- The Locarno Pact only just made it through the Reichstag. It took President Hindenburg’s backing to have it accepted.
- Stresemann was feted as the new breed of German leader but, as Taylor points out, Stresemann was as ‘determined as the most extreme nationalist to get rid of the whole treaty lock, stock and barrel’.12 Like Bismarck, Stresemann saw peace as being in Germany’s interest. He believed that German power must revive before the treaty could be revised, not vice versa.

**LOCARNO PACT’S FLAWS AND CONTRADICTIONS**

The agreement itself contained basic flaws which could not be overlooked, regardless of the German position.

- It became clear that some frontiers were considered more ‘sacrosanct’ than others. This was certainly the Anglo-German view of western European frontiers compared to those of the east.
- Britain’s refusal to guarantee the east clearly undermined the whole Versailles Treaty, but was consistent with her traditional view of foreign policy, that is, concern over the control of north-western Europe.
- France had overburdened itself by guaranteeing both eastern and western Europe.
- The general security of Europe also suffered now that states could be selective about which parts of the settlement they would underwrite.
- ‘In the long run the Locarno treaty was destructive both of the Versailles Treaty and the Covenant.’13
• The Versailles Treaty had to be reinforced with other agreements as governments would not act over borders in which they had no direct interest.

Even deeper flaws are revealed in the Locarno Pact when one considers the inherent contradictions contained in the agreement.

• How was Britain to fulfill its obligations? It had two possible allies and two possible enemies. It was doubtful whether Britain could get public opinion to support action against one rather than the other.

• As Britain did not know who its ally might be, it could not make any preparations to fulfill the guarantees contained in the Locarno Pact.

• Both Briand and Stresemann were sincere in their aims, but what they were telling their people was clearly contradictory:
  —Briand was telling the French that the Locarno Pact was the completion of the post-war settlement and that no concessions would be forthcoming.
  —Stresemann was telling the Germans that the Locarno Pact was just the start and that more concessions would be forthcoming.¹⁴

• If France was now treating Germany as an equal, how could the reparation and disarmament clauses of the Versailles Treaty be justified? On the other hand, if these clauses were dismantled, how could France stop Germany being the dominant power?

• Taylor also makes the point that the presence of the Italians at Locarno and Geneva was a worse problem than the absence of the US and the USSR. Fascism was a ‘fraud’. The Locarno Pact stood for high principle. How, Taylor argues, could the fascists be seriously expected to stick by the highmindedness of international agreements such as the Locarno Pact?¹⁵

• Indeed there were several areas of potential Franco-Italian tension even by the mid-1920s:
  —the Italian desire for revisionism;
  —rivalry in North Africa; and
  —differences over Italian hopes of dominating the Balkan–Danube region.

**QUESTIONS**

Study the cartoon in Figure 4.3 and answer the questions that follow.

17. (a) Who is on the left? Who is wearing the monocle? Who is in chains?
(b) What do the ball and chain represent?
(c) Which country produced this cartoon? Give reasons for your answer.

GERMANY JOINS THE LEAGUE

Germany joined the League of Nations in 1926 and became a permanent member of the Council. Briand spoke in moving terms on Germany’s accession: ‘Peace for Germany. Peace for France. That means we have done with the long series of terrible and bloody conflicts which have stained the pages of history.’¹⁶

Germany’s entry into the League certainly helped the cause of peace but, as was shown in Chapter 2 (see page 16), even this was accompanied by some international acrimony.
**QUESTIONS**

18. Who were the three principal participants at Locarno?
19. What did the Locarno Pact guarantee?
20. How was the Locarno Pact greeted at the time?
21. What was the principal weakness of the Locarno Pact?
22. How was Britain’s position affected by the Locarno Pact?
23. When did Germany enter the League of Nations?

**UNDERLYING PROBLEMS**

Apart from the flaws contained in the Locarno Pact and other agreements, there were several other major factors which suggested that the apparent peace and optimism of the late 1920s were, at best, only superficial. These can be summarised as:

- underlying weakness in the world economy;
- the drift to authoritarian governments;
- the fundamental weakness of the League;
- ongoing international disputes; and
- the reliance on particular personalities.

Economic weakness

By 1928–9, there had been a real improvement in the state of the world economy. Britain’s trade position was improving, Germany had recovered from 1923, France was undergoing great industrialisation, the US was positively booming and in Italy even ‘the trains now ran on time’. Further examination, however, suggests that this recovery was not deep-rooted.

- Significant unemployment remained a feature of the 1920s. In Britain there were never fewer than 1 million people out of work. Even in the US unemployment was high.
- Income was unequally distributed both between countries and within countries. The effect of this combined with sustained high unemployment meant that the level of demand could not keep up with the level of output, itself greatly increased as a result of mechanisation and assembly-line techniques. The result was over-production. This development, and the increase in unemployment that it inevitably caused, were already apparent in the US economy long before the Wall Street crash.
- Individual countries had their own specific problems:
  - Britain suffered from unemployment and the depressed state of the staple industries (textiles, coal, iron and steel), which could not compete against the likes of Japan and the US.
  - Germany relied on short-term US loans which, if withdrawn, could end prosperity overnight.
  - Much of eastern Europe’s agricultural exports relied on a healthy German market.
  - France’s exports were uncompetitive and domestic purchasing power was low.

**OTHER AGREEMENTS**

Locarno was not the only attempt at international peacemaking in the second half of the 1920s. Other agreements followed, further symptoms of the apparent optimism of the time.

- Following a Finnish idea, in 1930 a Convention on Financial Assistance was introduced. This was aimed at giving an attacked state loans from fellow members at favourable rates. This remained no more than a good idea, however.
- Briand approached US Secretary of State Kellogg to sign a Franco-American non-aggression pact. Kellogg suggested they extend it to a general pact outlawing war. Thus in 1928 the Kellogg–Briand Pact was born. It was signed by sixty-five nations. The pact represented the ‘high-water mark of inter-war pacifism’.17
- Even the Kellogg–Briand Pact betrayed the current obsession with national sovereignty:
  - Wars of self-defence were permissible. This made the pact totally meaningless as even Hitler’s invasion of Poland could be construed in defensive terms. As Carr points out: ‘It was not an acceptance of the pacifist doctrine of non-resistance.’18
  - The US retained the right to preserve the Monroe Doctrine.
  - Britain said it held the right to ‘protect’ the empire.
- As each power that signed was to be the judge of its own actions, ‘national sovereignty was in no way impaired’.19
- Attempts at disarmament proceeded but no progress was made (see Chapter 6).
Economic nationalism was already evident in the 1920s, as can be seen in the high level of tariff protection. The end of the precarious prosperity of the decade and the onset of the Depression would fuel it further, and contribute to the rise of fascism and ultimately the outbreak of war.

Eclipse of democracy

Woodrow Wilson had claimed that democratic governments do not go to war with each other. If he were right, then there was reason to be concerned for European peace by the end of the 1920s. From Spain to Lithuania there had been a swing to right-wing governments, often of an authoritarian-nationalist flavour.

- Examples of this trend included: Italy—Musso- lini, Hungary—Horthy, Spain—Primo de Rivera, Portugal—Salazar, Poland—Pilsudski, Lithuania—Smetana, Austria—Ignaz-Seipel, and Yugoslavia—King Alexander.
- This trend was so widespread that Thomson concluded that ‘the eclipse of democracy in Europe clearly cannot be attributed to the world economic depression that only began at the end of 1929’.
- The reasons for this trend are many: an inability of democratic governments to deal with the enormous socio-economic problems left by the war; the ‘shallow roots of democracy’ and the failings of parliamentary politicians of the time.

The effect of the Depression was to intensify the trend towards authoritarianism and nationalism, leading to fascism and totalitarianism.

Weakness of the League; international disputes

Although the second half of the 1920s was the heyday of the League, it was still a fundamentally flawed organisation (see Chapter 2) and, as would be seen in the 1930s, totally unable to keep the peace (see Chapters 6 to 8). Europe was still bristling with conflicts, many of these born in 1919 (see Chapter 1).

Reliance on particular personalities

More significant was the role of personalities.
- The success of the Locarno Pact and the entry of Germany into the League relied very much on the leaders of the day. Briand, Austen Chamberlain and Stresemann all genuinely sought peace and reconciliation, and tried to work together.
- By 1929 they were all gone: Stresemann was dead, and Briand and Chamberlain were out of office. A year later the Depression was in full swing and the Nazi Party was the second largest party in the German Reichstag.

INTERNATIONALISM VERSUS NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

The Locarno honeymoon was indeed just that—a honeymoon. The reality of Europe in the 1920s was thus: underlying economic weakness accompanied by growing economic nationalism; a steady drift to right-wing, authoritarian nationalist governments at the expense of democracy; a League of Nations fatally flawed and incapable of maintaining peace; continuing conflicts across the continent from Vilna to Fiume, from the Rhineland to Teschen, all with the potential of erupting into violence; the failure of disarmament; and a reliance on particular individuals for international co-operation. Even the agreements which were achieved in the 1920s were contradictory and betrayed the contemporary obsession with the maintenance of national sovereignty. All this existed before the onset of the Great

QUESTIONS

24. Who was Kellogg?
25. What was the Kellogg-Briand Pact?
26. Did the pact impair national sovereignty?
27. How did the world economy seem to observers in the 1920s?
28. Give two factors that suggest that the world economy suffered severe underlying weaknesses.
29. What type of government became widespread in Europe by 1929?
30. What had happened to Stresemann, Briand and Chamberlain by 1929?
31. Had internationalism succeeded in the 1920s?
Depression, the rise of fascism (Italy apart) and totalitarianism; and the final destruction of collective security. The inescapable conclusion is thus that the forces of internationalism were totally unable to overcome those forces that worked towards the strengthening of national sovereignty.

**SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY TO 1929**

Churchill once described the USSR as ‘a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma’. Indeed when historians have tried to analyse Soviet foreign policy such a description is apt, particularly when one considers the West’s lack of access to official documents. At the beginning of the Soviet Union’s life, however, foreign policy aims were quite clear:

- peace; and
- survival.

**PEACE AND SURVIVAL**

- Immediately after seizing power, Lenin called the Second Congress of Soviets and issued the ‘Decree for Peace’ which called for a peace ‘without annexations and indemnities’.
- Bukharin urged the Bolsheviks to launch a revolutionary war, while Trotsky tried to bluff the Germans with his policy of ‘no war, no peace’. As Germany continued to advance, Lenin insisted on peace at any price.
- Russia signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918.
  —Russia surrendered Poland, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, parts of the Caucasus and the Ukraine.
  —Russia lost 3 367 000 square kilometres and 62 million people.
- By the summer of 1918, Russia was in the grip of civil war. The western Allies intervened, ostensibly to bring Russia back into the war with Germany, but stayed long after the Armistice to work with the ‘whites’ to bring down the Bolshevik regime. In 1920 newly independent Poland also moved against the infant Bolshevik regime.
- The combination of civil war, Allied intervention and war with Poland left the USSR greatly denuded of territory.
- Early Soviet foreign policy was thus dictated by the struggle to survive. On taking power, Lenin had declared: ‘What foreign affairs will we have now?’
- Trotsky was appointed Commissar for Foreign Affairs and stated: ‘I will issue a few revolutionary proclamations to the peoples of the world and then shut up shop.’
- At one stage the Bolsheviks were surrounded by the Western Allies: the British at Murmansk; British, Japanese, US, Italian and French forces in the Far East; the British and French in the Caucasus; and, for a while, the Germans in the Ukraine. This attempt by the west to strangle the new regime was never forgotten.
in Moscow and meant that east–west relations were to be characterised by mistrust and hostility for decades to come.

- Some Bolsheviks saw the war with Poland as a means of launching revolution in Europe. Indeed, as the Red Army pushed west, Poland looked in real danger. If Poland fell, Germany would be opened up. The French sent Weygand to rally the Poles and in August 1920, Warsaw was saved by the ‘miracle on the Vistula’ (Poland’s defeat of the Red Army just outside Warsaw).

- Peace came with the Treaty of Riga in 1921.
  —Poland’s eastern frontier was now 247 km east of the Allied proposed ‘Curzon Line’.
  —Poland gave up its claim to the Ukraine but gained part of White Russia.

Following Soviet Russia’s early conflict with the west, it is not surprising that Beloff can conclude: ‘The basic and inescapable relations of the Soviet state to other states was one of conflict’.

**AMBIGUITY IN SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY**

The Bolsheviks believed that revolution in the west was inevitable, therefore there was no point in conducting normal diplomatic relations. Indeed, Russia should in fact encourage the violent overthrow of the non-socialist states. Lenin summed up the Soviet position when addressing the Eighth Party Congress on 18 March 1919:

‘We are living not merely in a state but in a system of states and the existence of the Soviet republic side by side with imperialist states for a long time is unthinkable. One or the other must triumph in the end. And before this end supervenes, a series of frightful collisions between the Soviet republic and the bourgeois states will be inevitable.’

- To this end the Communist International (Comintern) was formed in 1919. Based in Moscow and nominally independent, the Comintern operated from Britain to Bulgaria to China in order to promote Soviet interests.
- The Soviets did not attend the Paris Peace Conference and were not invited to join the League of Nations. Russia in any case viewed the League as a cartel of capitalist states and so continually denigrated it.

- Unfortunately for the Soviets, however, capitalism did not die and apart from brief outbreaks in Hungary and Germany, the European revolution failed miserably. Consequently, it became necessary to conduct normal diplomatic relations with non-socialist states.
- Hence an ambiguity developed in Soviet foreign policy. Foreign Minister Chicherin sought to improve links with western states, while Zinoviev at the Comintern was trying to overthrow them.
- The activities of the Comintern, Russia’s repudiation of all pre-war debts, and the murder of the tsar and his family in 1918 all helped keep Soviet-western relations in a state of ‘deep freeze’.
- Relations with neighbours seemed to present few problems. The Bolsheviks had long given up any claims to the national republics formerly under tsarist control. As a result friendship treaties were signed with Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1920; and with Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan in 1921. Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan fared less well and were soon reincorporated into Russia.

**NORMALISATION OF RELATIONS**

It was the situation inside the USSR that would ultimately dictate Soviet foreign policy. As world revolution seemed but a distant hope, Soviet leaders made it a clear second priority to the development of the USSR. The civil war had left the country in a disastrous state and easy prey for the west. Famine was present in 1921. Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921 to try to deal with the situation.

By the end of the decade, Stalin had become the dominant figure in the USSR, declaring that ‘socialism in one country’ was now the aim of the regime. Trotsky’s demise and later exile saw the death of the notion of ‘permanent revolution’. World revolution would not be allowed to interfere with normal relations.

- In 1921 a commercial agreement was signed with Britain. Another with Italy soon followed.
- In 1922 the USSR was invited to an economic conference in Genoa. Lloyd George hoped to use Genoa to bring the USSR back into the mainstream of European relations, but France
and Belgium sabotaged his attempts by insisting on the USSR paying its pre-war debts. This had the effect of pushing the USSR towards Germany which culminated in the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo (see below).

- Relations between Britain and the USSR became something of a 'political football'.
  - Lloyd George’s 'soft approach' to the communists was a factor leading to his fall.
  - The new Conservative government took a tougher line.
  - The Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald (1923–4) established diplomatic relations in February 1924 and held talks on cancelling British claims for pre-war debts.
  - The 'Zinoviev Letter' of 1924 helped see Labour removed from office. Soviet support for the General Strike (1926) and a British government raid on the London offices of Arcos, a Soviet trade organisation, further strained relations. Diplomatic ties were broken in 1929.
- By the late 1920s all the great powers, except the US, recognised the USSR.
- The USSR even began to co-operate with the League, attending an Economic Conference and the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference in 1927.

- The result of these mutual needs was the Treaty of Rapallo, signed at the time of the 1922 Genoa Economic Conference. By the treaty:
  - all claims for reparations/compensation were cancelled (Article 1);
  - diplomatic relations were resumed (Article 3);
  - each granted the other 'most favoured nation status' (Article 4); and
  - each promised to 'co-operate in a spirit of goodwill to meet each nation's economic needs' (Article 5);
- Germany had broken its diplomatic isolation and 'It [Rapallo] secured for the Soviet Union its first official recognition by a great power.'
- The Rapallo Treaty was clearly a 'marriage of convenience' as socially, economically, politically and ideologically, Germany and the USSR were poles apart. Taylor's view is that: 'Rapallo gave a warning that it was easy for Russia and Germany to be friendly on negative terms whereas allies would have to pay a high price for friendship of either.'

**QUESTIONS**

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<td>43. What was the USSR's principal gain from its relations with Germany?</td>
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**SOVIET-GERMAN RELATIONS**

Moscow's principal diplomatic success in the 1920s was the state of its relations with Germany. Despite their mutual distrust, Germany and the USSR had much in common: dislike of Versailles, scorn for the League, hatred of Poland, and diplomatic isolation.

- German businessmen sought trade with Russia. Germany had helped Russia during the famine of 1921. Both countries wanted a cancellation of international debts, that is, reparations and pre-war claims on tsarist debts.
- Germany's army leader, Hans von Seeckt, set up an 'office' to make arms in Russia, a move encouraged by Trotsky. Thus, even before the Treaty of Rapallo, the Reichswehr was operating in the USSR, producing military goods banned by the Versailles Treaty, exercising and training Soviet forces.
• Thomson sees the Rapallo Treaty as the embryo of the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact.\textsuperscript{26}

• But it would be wrong to play up the significance of Rapallo too much. Taylor refers to Soviet-German relations as “trivialities”\textsuperscript{27} while Golo Mann says Germany would have had to throw itself into the arms of communism for anything meaningful to eventuate.\textsuperscript{28}

• The immediate effect of the Rapallo Treaty was to end the imminent likelihood of a united western front against the USSR.

• Soviet-German relations were hurt in 1923, following the abortive communist revolt of that year. The Soviets became more concerned as Stresemann moved towards an accommodation with the west with the Locarno Pact (see page 33) and Germany’s entry into the League of Nations. Soviet fears at this stage were, in reality, unfounded.

• Soviet-German relations developed further with a trade treaty in 1925 and a neutrality treaty in 1926. The USSR gained long-term credits and economic aid. Germany made gains in the Soviet market while its army’s General Staff had continued access to facilities not allowed under the Treaty of Versailles.

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\textbf{Year} & \textbf{Description} \\
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1917 November & Bolshevik take-over in Russia \\
1918 3 March & Treaty of Brest-Litovsk \\
1918–21 & Civil war \\
1918–22 & Allied intervention \\
1919 & Establishment of the Comintern \\
1920 & Friendship Treaty between Russia and Finland, and Russia and Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia \\
1920–1 & Russo-Polish War \\
1921 & Treaty of Riga \\
1922 & Treaty of Rapallo \\
1924 & Relations established with Britain (and then broken off in 1929) ‘Zinoviev Letter’ \\
1925 & Soviet-German trade treaty \\
1926 & Soviet-German neutrality treaty \\
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